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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Influential factors of pro-environmental behaviors among franchisees in the fast-food sector

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## Abstract

In spite of the increasing attention on environmental sustainability, there is a dearth of knowledge about franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors. This study aims to understand the factors that influence the extent to which franchisees engage in pro-environmental behaviors in the fast-food sector. The research is based on in-depth interviews with franchisees operating restaurants in the fast-food sector in France. The empirical evidence in this qualitative study shows how franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors can be explained as a result of organizational and personal factors, thereby extending the theory of planned behavior, norm-activation-model and organizational support theory within the franchising context. This study offers avenues for more research on green practices in franchising, as well as in the hospitality sector and other sectors such as retailing. It provides important implications for franchise practitioners in the fast-food sector on how to create a more environmentally sustainable business model. The findings offer the first known model of pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees.

## KEYWORDS

fast food, franchising, norm-activation-model, organizational support theory, pro-environmental behaviors, theory of planned behavior

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The research attention and government policies devoted to promoting environmental sustainability over the years have led to an emergence of the research field of pro-environmental behaviors, which focuses on investigating factors that have an impact on environmentally sustainable behaviors and how these behaviors can be enhanced (Blok et al., 2015). While much of this research focuses on pro-environmental behaviors within household or individual consumption contexts, a stream of literature has also emerged which considers pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace. Workplace or employee pro-environmental behaviors are generally voluntary and diverse

activities (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka & Tutko, 2021) and have been defined as “a broad set of environmentally responsible activities such as learning more about the environment, developing and applying ideas for reducing the company's environmental impact, developing green processes and products, recycling and reusing, and questioning practices that hurt the environment” (Graves et al., 2013, p. 81). Terminologies, such as environmentally friendly behavior, green behavior, and pro-environmental behavior, have been used interchangeably within the literature (Manika et al., 2015). Prior studies indicate that human activity within organizations is a major cause of ecological degradation and, therefore, research on pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace has the potential to provide important implications for environmental protection (Inoue & Alfaro-Barrantes, 2015; Lülfs & Hahn, 2013). Although a number of studies have examined the

**Abbreviations:** CSR, Corporate social responsibility; TV, Television.

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predictors of pro-environmental behaviors in the workplace, in terms of both individual and organizational-level influences (Peng & Lee, 2019; Shah et al., 2021), the drivers of these behaviors in specific organizational contexts, such as franchise chains, remain unclear.

Franchise chains provide an interesting context to explore workplace pro-environmental behaviors given the widespread global usage of franchising as a strategy for business growth, especially in the fast-food sector, where franchise businesses are also seen as a primary contributor to environmental degradation. More specifically, we focus here on the fast-food sector, given that, as Kim and Thapa (2018) note, franchise firms in this sector are perceived as having a negative impact on the environment because they generate excessive waste and often use non-recyclable packaging materials for delivery services or take-out. On a global scale, Morales-Caselles et al. (2021) found that take-out food and beverages are the leading sources of plastic pollution in aquatic environments with their associated bags, bottles, containers, cutlery, caps, lids, cups, and wrappers all being found in the ocean. Such waste was found to account for 50% to 88% of marine waste. Similarly, Schweitzer et al. (2018) found that the waste most commonly found on European beaches was from takeaway food. Since the fast-food sector is particularly structured using franchise chains, and research has shown that in franchise chains, franchisees have the greatest stakeholder power in terms of environmental practices (Perrigot et al., 2021), this study aims to understand the factors that influence the extent to which franchisees engage in pro-environmental behaviors in the fast-food sector.

While responsibility for the environmental footprint of the chain and the development of new environmental practices falls primarily to the franchisor (Sun, 2021), franchisees, as partners, may develop their own environmental responses. Generally, franchisors have a central role in developing standards for the system in the hope that all franchisees will conform (Kim & Min, 2023). Thus, while the high degree of standardization in the franchise network can allow for large-scale implementation of environmentally friendly initiatives (Sun, 2021), the fact that franchisees can deviate from franchisor set standards indicate that there may be greater complexities in striving to maintain uniform environmental practices in franchise chains. In this regard, although the environmental leadership offered by the franchisor's top management may have considerable impact on the green orientation and green activities of their franchisees (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2018), the influential factors of franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors may differ at their local levels. Therefore, the limited knowledge on environmentally sustainable practices in franchising necessitates developing an understanding of how franchisees are driven towards pro-environmental behaviors in their franchised units.

The subject of how individuals become environmentally concerned, and consequently encouraged to behave in an environmentally responsible manner, is a vital issue (Fransson & Gärling, 1999). Understanding the determinants of pro-environmental behaviors is crucial to addressing environmental challenges (Lades et al., 2021) since the patterns of human behavior have a strong influence on the quality of the environment (Steg & Vlek, 2009). However, based on a systematic review of the literature, Kim et al. (2017, p. 235) reveal

that “a pro-environment motivation for implementing green practices is not evident in the hospitality context.” Rather, the authors highlight that in the hospitality industry, implementation of green practices has mainly been a result of business interests rather than due to an aspiration to protect the environment. Furthermore, in a study on the managerial approaches to food waste mitigation in the UK coffee shop sector, Filimonau et al. (2019) emphasize that although there is managerial concern about food waste, it was not seen as a managerial priority. Yet, waste management in hospitality operations is viewed as “mediocre” and has the tendency to undermine the environmental sustainability of global hospitality services (Filimonau, 2021). Thus, it is crucial to advance knowledge on how to promote pro-environmental behaviors in the hospitality industry.

Prior studies often indicate two types of pro-environmental behaviors within the workplace: task-related (i.e., pro-environmental behaviors that coincide with employees' required job duties) and voluntary (i.e., pro-environmental behaviors that are discretionary) (Nisar et al., 2021; Robertson & Carleton, 2018). This study considers both voluntary and task-related pro-environmental behaviors given that the franchisor's influence on franchisee pro-environmental behaviors may be both direct (task-related) and indirect (motivating franchisees to voluntarily engage in pro-environmental behaviors). For the purpose of this study, pro-environmental behaviors are therefore defined as undertaking both voluntary and task-related organizational practices that reduce damage to the environment. Although in franchise chains there is an expectation for franchisees to operate according to the franchisors' business template, franchise chains vary in the extent to which processes are standardized, and indeed in the extent to which franchisees are given voice in (green) strategy development. Therefore, franchisors may encourage or inhibit pro-environmental behaviors through both direct or indirect means. In either case, little is understood about how pro-environmental behaviors are driven in franchise chains.

Based on a qualitative study, involving in-depth interviews with 24 franchisees representing 19 different chains, this paper provides some contributions to the literature on green behaviors and environmental sustainability. First, it offers a unique model of franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors, based on an adaptation of Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) model of voluntary pro-environmental behavior of employees. In the present study, both organizational and personal factors were found to influence franchisees' intentions to perform pro-environmental behaviors, which in turn drive their subsequent enactment of the behaviors. Second, the empirical evidence extends the theory of planned behavior, norm-activation model, and organizational support theory by showing how both franchisor support and know-how offer contextual elements that encourage franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors. Additionally, this paper offers managerial implications on the facets of an environmentally sustainable business model for franchise operations in the fast-food sector, vital for franchise chains as these are key players in the hospitality industry.

In the next section, we review relevant research on pro-environmental behaviors. After this, we present the methodology and findings, before the discussion and concluding section.

## 2 | A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIORS

In this paper, we draw on the theory of planned behavior, norm-activation model, and organizational support theory to explain the pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees. In particular, we obtain insights from Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) study, which provides a conceptualization of the main drivers of voluntary pro-environmental behavior of employees in the workplace by integrating different theories—namely, the theory of planned behavior and the norm-activation model—with habitual and contextual determinants of voluntary pro-environmental behavior.

The theory of planned behavior, which has been widely applied in various behavioral domains, assumes that behavioral intention is the best predictor of future behavior (Harland et al., 1999). It further assumes that the determinants of this intention are (1) an individual's attitude towards the behavior, (2) subjective norm (i.e., perception of the social pressure to perform the behavior), and (3) perceived behavioral control (i.e., an individual's belief as to whether the skills and resources required to perform the behavior are available) (Harland et al., 1999). In order to explain and predict behavioral intentions when utilizing the theory of planned behavior, it is important to consider the antecedents of the foregoing three core theory of planned behavior constructs (i.e., attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) (Greaves et al., 2013; Lülfs & Hahn, 2013). As highlighted by Greaves et al. (2013), examining the beliefs that are antecedent to the foregoing constructs helps in understanding the process through which theory of planned behavior constructs are related to environmental behavioral intentions. In explaining these antecedents, according to Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) conceptualization, the determinants of voluntary pro-environmental behavior in the workplace comprise a set of distal predictors (i.e., organizational context, awareness, and social norm) that influence motivational determinants (i.e., perceived behavioral control, personal moral norm, and attitude), which in turn influence intention, while habit acts as a moderating factor for the relationship between intention and voluntary pro-environmental behavior.

Since most researchers agree that merging existing theories is a promising approach, Lülfs and Hahn (2013) argue that combining the norm-activation-model with the theory of planned behavior enables a better account for personal norms in the explanation of pro-environmental behavior. As the authors explain, the norm-activation-model assumes that personal norms account for moral behavior, and these norms require triggering during a preceding process of norm-activation. We are interested in both voluntary and task-related pro-environmental behaviors in this study given that even when mandated by law to impose waste sorting, it appears that franchise chains do not fully comply. Alzaidi and Iyanna (2022) emphasize the value of the Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) conceptual model in helping to guide thinking about a neglected form of behavior (i.e., voluntary pro-environmental behavior), pertinent for corporate greening. We therefore utilize the model as the underlying framework for this study, while augmenting it with organizational support theory given our

specific context of franchising. We further extend the model to include both voluntary and task-related behaviors, as within the context of franchising, we believe both forms of behavior are of interest, given the considerable variation in the degree of autonomy that franchisees may enjoy. Further, we propose franchisor know-how and support are likely to influence both voluntary and task-related pro-environmental behaviors. Therefore, we adapt and empirically validate the model by Lülfs and Hahn (2013), transposing it from employees to franchisees.

In studying what drives pro-environmental behaviors, and how these behaviors can be influenced, Ertz et al. (2016) stress the importance of incorporating contextual factors that may hinder or facilitate pro-environmental behaviors. Ertz et al. (2016) note that the contextual factors include objective factors such as monetary incentives, costs, regulations, public policy, or norms, as well as subjectively perceived factors, such as perceived resources available, perceived availability of time to act environmentally, and perceived power/capacity to enact a certain behavior. Within the setting of this study, that is, franchise chains, it is vital to understand how contextual factors may influence franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors because of the diverse geographical locations in which franchised units operate. Geographic regions may differ in the regulations and incentives that are provided to support pro-environmental behaviors, which may drive franchisees' engagement in such behaviors. Furthermore, since there is a contradiction between the autonomy available to franchisees and the standardized organizational form commonly adopted by franchise chains (Watson et al., 2019), it is important to study how contextual factors affect pro-environmental behaviors in franchised units. Due to the need to maintain a careful balance between franchisee autonomy and franchisor control, relationships within franchise chains are crucial (Watson et al., 2020). The uniqueness of the franchising context in itself, which requires franchisees to operate within the boundaries of the franchisor's business system, means that franchisee behaviors may be shaped by intra-organizational norms (Watson et al., 2020). These raise questions as to how contextual factors, especially those related to franchisor know-how and support, may influence franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors.

Cantor et al. (2012) argue that organizational support theory provides a basis for understanding how organizations can achieve more engagement from their employees in terms of environmental behaviors. Organizational support theory suggests that employees will act in the interest of the organization to the extent that the organization is perceived as willing and able to reciprocate with suitable leadership, training, and rewards (Cantor et al., 2012). Cordano and Frieze's (2000) findings suggest that there may be extensive communication barriers within organizations, which impede environmental performance. As highlighted in Wesseling et al. (2017), positive signals can be provided to employees as a means to help promote green behavior by showing environmental leadership and communicating green policies.

Although the franchisee is not an employee of the franchisor, organizational support theory can provide insights on how franchisors use their leadership position to encourage franchisees'

pro-environmental behaviors. In general, franchisor support offered to franchisees can take various forms such as training, operations manual, and onsite guidance (Nijmeijer et al., 2014). Even though many prospective franchisees get into the business partly as a result of the support provided by franchisors, anecdotal evidence suggests that franchisees frequently demand more support services than they currently receive (Grünhagen et al., 2008). Nyadzayo et al. (2015, pp. 1887–1888) argue that “the level of franchisor support engenders pro-organizational behavior in franchisees that in turn enriches the franchise brand image.” Therefore, it would be useful to develop knowledge on how franchisor support impacts pro-environmental behaviors in franchised units.

### 3 | METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 | Approach and context

To examine how franchisors drive pro-environmental behaviors among their franchisees, we used “qualitative, interpretive methods that can capture people's own understanding of their engagement and motives” (Williams & Schaefer, 2013, p. 177). This qualitative approach was based on in-depth interviews with franchisees operating their fast-food restaurants in the French territory. There has been an increase in the use of qualitative approaches in franchising studies (Altinay et al., 2013; Perrigot et al., 2021; Watson et al., 2020), as well as in green practices studies (Lin et al., 2019). France was selected as the research context for the following reasons. Firstly, the French government pays particular attention to the green practices of fast-food franchisors and franchisees, as well as their compliance (and often non-compliance) with recent laws. According to the French Agency for Ecological Transition (ADEME, 2021), the fast-food sector generated more than 220,000 tons of packaging in 2018 in France, primarily in the form of paper, cardboard, cartons, and plastic. Secondly, France is a leading franchising market, comprising 1927 franchisors, 78,032 franchised units, 63.88 billion euros of total sales, and 668,837 direct and indirect jobs (French Franchise Federation, 2021). Thirdly, franchising is a developed organizational form in France, commonly used in the fast-food sector by both domestic and international chains.

#### 3.2 | Data collection

Our research was based on interviews with 24 franchisees representing 19 different chains, selected via both purposive and snowball sampling, an approach that is commonly employed in franchise research (Altinay et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2020). These franchisees were diverse in terms of the food offerings in their restaurants (bagels, burgers, salads, sandwiches, sushi, etc.), location of their restaurants (various cities in different French regions), franchisee type (single-unit franchisee and multi-unit franchisee), length of time operating within

the chain, franchisee age, and gender. We ensured a broad spectrum of franchisees in order to minimize potential bias.

The interviews were semi-structured. In line with our adaptation of the Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) model, the interviews began by asking interviewees about their general thoughts concerning environmental issues to ascertain their sensitivity to environmental matters. Participants were asked questions designed to explore the types of green practices currently being undertaken in their restaurants (e.g., food waste and non-food waste), the role of their franchisors in establishing and implementing these green practices (e.g., transfer of know-how, the extent to which franchisees had autonomy over environmental processes/initiatives, and consistency across the chain), and the impact of these green practices (e.g., on their businesses). In terms of the green practices in particular, the interview questions focused on issues of waste types, generation, and sorting; types of packaging; and suppliers and delivery, since such areas were deemed relevant to the franchisees' businesses in the fast-food sector. From the responses, we observed that we have a mix of respondents, where some appear to be more concerned than others about green practices. About two thirds of the interviews were conducted by phone due to geographical distance, and all of them were audio-recorded. The interviews were conducted in French and later transcribed to English. The total duration of the interviews was 18 h 33 min, for an average of 46 min. Profiles of the interviewees are provided in Table 1.

#### 3.3 | Data analysis

A three-stage data analysis approach was utilized in this study, following Corley and Gioia (2004). The first stage involved open coding, where initial concepts were identified, and grouped into categories by employing descriptive coding, under the general themes of the interview questions. At this stage, we focused on identifying the pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees and the determinants of such behaviors. The data analysis at this stage was first undertaken in French and then translated into English. Additionally, a second coder reviewed the codes at this stage. In terms of the second stage (axial coding), we carried out a search for relationships between and among the categories in order to generate higher order themes by navigating between the data-driven codes and theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Similar to the first stage, the analysis at this stage was undertaken by the first coder in French, after which it was reviewed by a second coder, using the text translated to English. Finally, in the third stage (dimensional coding), themes were arranged within overarching dimensions. An example of this process is shown in Table 2. Having one author do the coding in French, with a second coder undertaking checks on the translated data, it meant that where there were disagreements we were able to resolve translation issues easily. A comparison of the coding done by the two coders found over 90% consistency. Where disagreements did exist, they were resolved by discussion between the coders.

**TABLE 1** Interviewee profile.

Interviewee	Franchisee type	Chain	Interviewee gender <sup>a</sup>	Interviewee age range (in years)
Interviewee #1	Multi-unit franchisee	Chain A	M	50–54
Interviewee #2	Single-unit franchisee	Chain R	M	45–49
Interviewee #3	Single-unit franchisee	Chain I	M	45–49
Interviewee #4	Single-unit franchisee	Chain M	F	40–44
Interviewee #5	Single-unit franchisee	Chain A	F	50–54
Interviewee #6	Single-unit franchisee	Chain R	F	50–54
Interviewee #7	Single-unit franchisee	Chain A	M	30–34
Interviewee #8	Multi-unit franchisee	Chain J	M	45–49
Interviewee #9	Single-unit franchisee	Chain P	M	45–49
Interviewee #10	Single-unit franchisee	Chain P	M	35–39
Interviewee #11	Single-unit franchisee	Chain D	M	45–49
Interviewee #12	Single-unit franchisee	Chain K	M	25–29
Interviewee #13	Single-unit franchisee	Chain B	M	40–44
Interviewee #14	Single-unit franchisee	Chain E	M	35–39
Interviewee #15	Multi-unit franchisee	Chain F	M	30–34
Interviewee #16	Single-unit franchisee	Chain Q	M	35–39
Interviewee #17	Single-unit franchisee	Chain E	F	35–39
Interviewee #18	Single-unit franchisee	Chain C	M	30–34
Interviewee #19	Single-unit franchisee	Chain S	M	50–54
Interviewee #20	Single-unit franchisee	Chain N	M	55–59
Interviewee #21	Single-unit franchisee	Chain H	M	35–39
Interviewee #22	Single-unit franchisee	Chain O	M	30–34
Interviewee #23	Single-unit franchisee	Chain L	F	35–39
Interviewee #24	Single-unit franchisee	Chain G	M	30–34

<sup>a</sup>M and F represent male and female, respectively.

## 4 | FINDINGS

We organize the results of this empirical study according to an adaptation of the model proposed by Lülfs and Hahn (2013), as shown in Figure 1. The figure reveals how the organizational context influences the perceived behavioral control. The franchisees' attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors is influenced by their personal moral norms and awareness of the costs and benefits of pro-environmental behaviors. Additionally, the franchisees' personal moral norms are activated by awareness of need and consequences, as well as social norm. The attitudes and perceived behavioral control in turn influence the franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors. Before exploring these processes in more detail, we first highlight the key types of pro-environmental behaviors franchisees engaged in.

### 4.1 | Pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees

The pro-environmental behaviors that franchisees undertook centered around food waste, non-food waste, energy consumption, carbon emission, and lobbying of franchisors to improve corporate

environmental practices. The extent to which these were task-related or voluntary pro-environmental behaviors differed across systems, such that behaviors that were task-related in one franchise system might be voluntary in another, due to differences in franchisor policy.

#### 4.1.1 | Food waste

Some franchisees sought to reduce food waste in a number of ways: (a) anticipating sales in a better manner; (b) reusing, recovering, and keeping some products, such as fruits and vegetables; (c) giving customers doggy bags to take their left over food home if they are unable to finish eating it in the restaurant, giving/donating prepared food to customers in need (such as poor students), as well as homeless people and associations, and giving waste products such as oil, coffee grounds, and organic waste to collecting companies for reuse; (d) creating partnerships for valorizing their unsold food with companies and associations (e.g., Too Good To Go); and (e) doing their best to sort their food waste well. For example, a franchisee explained that "... with the coffee grounds in particular, [...] we have a company that comes to collect [them]; the goal being



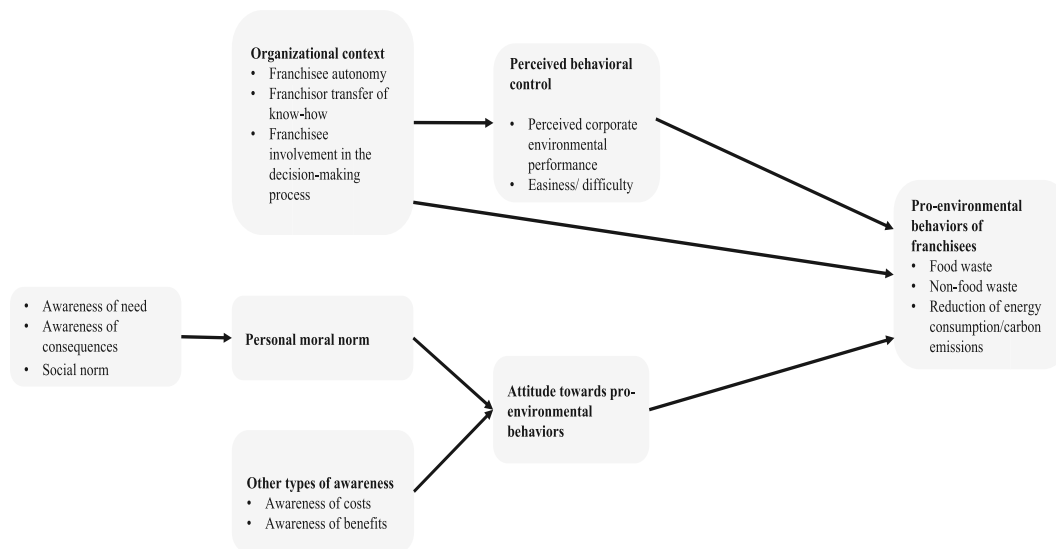
**TABLE 2** Example of analytical coding process with indicative quotes.

Descriptive theme	Indicative quotes	Axial code	Aggregate dimension
Statements about the extent to which franchisees had flexibility and freedom in the environmental practices they engaged with	<p>"I think we're all in the same boat [in terms of sorting], that's for sure. And we're all doing it the same way—we have the process—it is not the right one but it's the one that the network has brought us so far." (lack of autonomy)</p> <p>"In all honesty, as soon as the franchise says something we don't have a say." (lack of autonomy)</p> <p>"In fact, for us it's natural and we don't wait for instructions to act [...]"</p> <p>"I would say yes, I do have some freedom, although being located within a mall I have to follow the mall's regulations."</p>	Franchisee autonomy	Organizational context
Statements about how the franchisor supports environmental activities including training and communication	<p>"I think there's a lack of information and training [for waste sorting management]." (lack of franchisor transfer of know-how)</p> <p>"My network manager comes to see me every seven or eight weeks, to give me an update on the brand, my operating account, but also information on waste sorting."</p> <p>"We have one group meeting a year. [...] Afterwards, we exchange [on good practices related to the environment] by email, and we have a group WhatsApp where we exchange a lot."</p> <p>"We exchange quite regularly on this subject [waste management] on an internet network and we have an Intranet within the group."</p>	Franchisor transfer of know-how	
Statements about the opportunities franchisees were given to provide input into environmental strategy formation	<p>"Yeah, they're listening. And not just in relation to environmental practices. It's for everything. We have exchange discussions every month."</p> <p>"[...] with the feedback that we give on this topic [...] we are expecting to see improvements in this very, very soon."</p> <p>"We have regional meetings or the like where we are both informed but questioned about what we can do [with regard to environmental practices]. And then after we have seminars, it's more top-down information, less participative in fact." (lack of involvement)</p>	Franchisee involvement in the decision-making process	

to rework our coffee grounds in order to use them for fertilizer to grow vegetables" (Interviewee #16). In explaining how products are reused in the restaurant, a franchisee also stated: "The kiwi fruit [...], after a while, will soften. There will be some kiwis left over. What are we going to do [...]? We try to process [them] and make smoothies ... The hot ingredients, onions, potatoes, green beans, there'll be some left over. So, what do we do? Well, I'm making soups. The next day, I get the rest and I make vegetable soups" (Interviewee #3). Instances of food donations to the homeless were highlighted in the following excerpt: "... soup, for example, or salads, when it's a little bit messed up [...] we put them aside and we give them to the homeless all the time" (Interviewee #24).

#### 4.1.2 | Non-food waste

In addition to seeking to reduce food waste, there was evidence of franchisees seeking to reduce other sources of waste. These include franchisees reducing the bags, straws, napkins, and sachets of sugar given to customers, as well as replacing plastic bags, plastic straws, and similar items with green alternatives. For example, a franchisee stressed: "I don't make them [napkins] available ... [...] Otherwise they'll take 10 for a drink. What's the point of taking 10 napkins for one drink? For one drink I don't give ... If someone's having a muffin, yes, I'm giving. But I don't spontaneously give" (Interviewee #14). The findings further revealed that franchisees favor the use of re-usable/



**FIGURE 1** Pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees. Adapted from Lülfs and Hahn (2013).

sustainable materials for customer usage as well as for use within the restaurants (e.g., cleaning materials). A franchisee noted: “We have cornstarch cutlery. So, it's cutlery that is compostable” (Interviewee #22). Another franchisee highlighted that “All our cleaning products are eco-labeled” (Interviewee #18). In keeping with current waste regulations, franchisees also do their best to sort non-food waste correctly, using different sorting streams.

#### 4.1.3 | Reduction of energy consumption/carbon emissions

Franchisees revealed their engagement in other varied pro-environmental behaviors such as reduction of energy consumption and carbon emission. For example, “I work with the electronic scooter [for sushi delivery]. I don't work with gasoline” (Interviewee #21). Another franchisee stated: “In terms of ecological materials ... we have LED bulbs. We're trying to reduce our electricity and energy consumption a little bit” (Interviewee #16). The use of local sourcing was also emphasized: “We have products that come from France; it's produced here. We have a cook. It's produced every day. It's not imported. It's not frozen” (Interviewee #14).

### 4.2 | Organizational context

From our analysis, it was clear that a number of organizational factors influenced pro-environmental behaviors among franchisees. Franchisor transfer of know-how (in relation to environmental practices), as well as franchisee autonomy and involvement in the decision-making process (with regard to environmental practices), influenced both voluntary and task-related pro-environmental behaviors that were undertaken by franchisees.

#### 4.2.1 | Franchisee autonomy

Despite the well-known restrictive environment in which most franchisees generally operate, some interviewees explained that they have autonomy in relation to environmental practices, which means they can shape their pro-environmental behaviors directly at will. For example, with respect to waste management, one franchisee commented: “We have freedom because we are independent. Each restaurant adapts to the municipality and to the sorting of the municipality's waste” (Interviewee #9). Another one said: “The headquarters are not here to impose things on us [in relation to environmental issues]. Each franchisee will have his convictions, and it is up to us to develop them or not” (Interviewee #13). It was apparent that franchisee autonomy directly influenced their pro-environmental behaviors. However, for other franchisees, such autonomy was not evident, and the franchisees in this case appear not to be bothered about the lack of autonomy in relation to environmental practices. For example, one franchisee commented: “All materials are imposed: napkins, cups, recyclable cutlery, light bulbs, ecological cleaning products ... Everything is decided by the headquarters” (Interviewee #18). Thus, in some cases, the pro-environmental behaviors were predominantly task based, while in other systems, with franchisees having greater autonomy, they engaged in voluntary pro-environmental behaviors. The relationship between autonomy and the level and type of pro-environmental behaviors was further complicated by the franchisor's mandated environmental practices. In some cases, where the franchisor mandated few practices, the autonomy granted to franchisees meant that they engaged in voluntary pro-environmental behaviors. In others, where practices were well established within the franchisor's mandated process, this remained predominantly task based. Similarly, where there was limited autonomy, engagement reflected franchisor policies; limited franchisor activity resulted in few (task



based) pro-environmental behaviors, while for more active franchisors, task-based pro-environmental activities were evident.

#### 4.2.2 | Franchisor transfer of know-how

Franchisees asserted that they receive environmental issues-related know-how from their franchisors through various, complimentary means. Unlike franchisee autonomy (discussed above), which only had a direct influence on franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors, the transfer of know-how from the franchisor has both direct and indirect influences on franchisees' engagement in voluntary and task-related pro-environmental behaviors (with the indirect influence being through franchisees' perceptions of behavioral control). The know-how is orally transferred to franchisees during meetings, with several interviewees mentioning the regional meetings and annual conventions as a source of information that affects how they perceive their system's performance in terms of environmental practices (i.e., perceptions of behavioral control). For example, "As soon as we have a meeting, it always comes up in the debate: plastics, the environment, recycling. [...] It's coming from them [franchisor headquarters] directly. That's why I know it's important for them" (Interviewee #24). Another interviewee explained: "Every time we're in a meeting or we have the opportunity to meet the management team, it's a subject [environmental practices] that comes up very, very regularly" (Interviewee #11). Field consultants also have a key role in the transfer of environmental issues-related know-how, providing franchisees with updates on environmental practices and holding small training sessions with the franchisees' teams. In addition to this oral transmission, franchisees noted that environmental issues-related know-how is transferred to them from their franchisors, in a written form as well, in the operations manual and via the Intranet, newsletters, WhatsApp messages, and emails. While some of this transmission of franchisor know-how is important in terms of task-related pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees, it was also clear that franchisees could infer the importance of environmental issues to their franchise chains (i.e., franchisor transfer of know-how influences franchisees' perceptions of behavioral control). It was observed that these were helping to encourage voluntary pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees as well.

#### 4.2.3 | Franchisee involvement in the decision-making process

Our findings show that there are three categories of franchise chains: chains where franchisees are driving the changes towards more sustainable practices (i.e., "bottom up" approach), chains where franchisors are driving the changes towards more sustainable practices (i.e., "top down" approach), and chains where the process towards more sustainable practices is more collaborative. Similar to franchisor transfer of know-how (discussed above), the extent to which franchisees are involved in the decision-making process has both direct and

indirect influences on franchisees' engagement in pro-environmental behaviors (with the indirect influence being through franchisees' perceptions of behavioral control). A franchisee in a chain in which franchisees are very much involved in the decision process (i.e., "bottom up" approach) stated: "Our role, as franchisees, all together, is to push the headquarters to act on these subjects [waste sorting] and quickly ... In the last two messages [sent via the franchisee network], what we're talking about is CSR and packaging ... So, you see when I tell you that we're really ... hot on the subject and that proves to you that we discuss it every day and that we have to push the network to act in a better way" (Interviewee #11). This suggests that franchisee involvement in the decision-making process influences their pro-environmental behavior through their perception of their system's environmental performance and the ease with which they could engage in pro-environmental behaviors (i.e., perceived behavioral control). A franchisee in a chain in which both franchisor and franchisees are involved in the decision process (i.e., collaborative approach) explained: "We're definitely working in collaboration [with the franchisor], so when we talked about [Collecting and recycling company name], they said it was great and they asked if there was [Collecting and recycling company name] in Paris. So, they would like to work with associations and companies like that" (Interviewee #22). Altogether, the findings indicate that franchisee involvement in the decision-making process influences their perceptions of behavioral control and subsequently the extent to which their engagement in pro-environmental behaviors is predominantly voluntary or task-related. However, the findings do not suggest that franchisees are more sensitive to sustainability issues than franchisors.

#### 4.3 | Personal moral norm

The findings revealed that franchisees' awareness of environmental issues and the consequences for the environment triggers their personal moral norm, which in turn influences their attitudes mainly towards voluntary pro-environmental behaviors, as shown in the following excerpt: "Quite simply ... I think that everyone should do it [waste sorting] ... in order to protect the planet and the future planet of our children" (Interviewee #17). In terms of awareness of the consequences, another interviewee stressed: "... that's what makes me want to do it [waste sorting] [...]. That's all that's topical. That's where I'm going to precisely understand the impact of what it is not to sort out. To see the consequences that it can bring to the environment. So that's what makes me aware" (Interviewee #24). The findings also revealed that social pressure about environmental sustainability issues had an effect on the pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees, suggesting that social norm triggers franchisees' personal moral norm, which subsequently influences their attitudes towards voluntary pro-environmental behaviors. As a franchisee explained: "I think everyone is becoming aware as we go along, we see it on TV, it's really the debate of the moment [environmental issues]. So, we're a little bit into it. [...] We're thinking about how to optimize by equipping the restaurants with electric bikes, electric cars" (Interviewee #15). In all, the

findings suggest that personal moral norm influences franchisees' attitudes largely towards voluntary pro-environmental behaviors.

#### 4.4 | Other types of awareness

Further types of awareness, relating to costs and benefits, were shown to affect franchisees' attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviors. On the one hand, some interviewees viewed waste management as a cost and, as a result, were less likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, as shown in the following excerpt: "It's a subject that really concerns me. When I started, the boxes were revalorized, so it was a bargain that didn't cost anything. Now it's not the case anymore! Now the collection of the boxes ends up costing a lot. So I think I'm going to focus on passing collectors ... So I should go towards a reduction of that cost" (Interviewee #1). On the other hand, franchisees who considered waste management as a saving, or as providing benefits for their businesses mainly in terms of brand image, were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. For example, "I get back about 2,000 euros a month from [...] unsold items [thanks to the Too Good To Go solution]" (Interviewee #19). Another interviewee explained: "Too Good To Go, for example, is clearly giving a sign to our customers ... that we want to control or reduce unsold products. So, in terms of [brand] image, it's rather positive, even for customers" (Interviewee #1).

#### 4.5 | Perceived behavioral control

Franchisees' perceptions of behavioral control, with regard to the extent to which the franchisees felt their franchise chains performed well in terms of environmental impacts (termed here, in accordance with Lülfs and Hahn (2013), as corporate environmental performance) and the perceived easiness and difficulty of pro-environmental behaviors, could be explained by the organizational context. The franchisees' perceptions of behavioral control in turn influenced their engagement in pro-environmental behaviors.

##### 4.5.1 | Perceived corporate environmental performance

Interviewees identified a number of areas where their franchisors are proactive in terms of green practices: waste management, collaboration with external companies and associations, reviewing of packaging and containers to be more environmentally friendly, and communication on waste management. The franchisors' proactivity was found to influence the franchisees' engagement in pro-environmental behaviors. For example, in terms of the franchisors' proactivity in collaborating with external associations, a franchisee stated: "[According to] the [operations] manual, we [are expected to] give our unsold goods to associations. So, I'm in contact with several charities, with some sports associations and with a reintegration association. So, all these

associations mean that 100% of my unsold items are potentially taken back" (Interviewee #1). In terms of franchisors' communication on waste management, another franchisee noted: "The headquarters tend to find solutions to sort better, to set up flyers and stickers for customers ..." (Interviewee #11). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that not all franchisors are proactive or competent in waste management, which may reduce their franchisees engagement in pro-environmental behaviors.

##### 4.5.2 | Easiness/difficulty

The findings indicated that the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a green activity influences the extent to which franchisees engaged in pro-environmental behaviors. Taking the example of waste sorting, a key issue within the fast-food sector, only a few franchisees stated that sorting their waste was not difficult; most franchisees stressed the difficulties they encountered in correctly sorting their waste and adopting green practices. In particular, the interviewees expressed difficulties that arise for them due to the lack of customer participation or, in some cases, customer loyalty, as a franchisee emphasized: "In reality, you can't [sort waste properly] because if you did, it would mean that every night I would have to sort through this garbage because people put everything anywhere and anyhow" (Interviewee #23). It was noted that customers have difficulties in terms of correctly sorting their waste in the restaurants. For example, "It's very complicated for the customer to understand ... There is too much information and the customer is in a fast-food restaurant and, even in the management of the waste, it has to be as fast as possible. I have the impression, he doesn't want to make the effort" (Interviewee #10). Other difficulties highlighted by franchisees comprise those associated with restaurant spaces and locations, where franchisees have space constraints (e.g., no room for bins), difficulties in accessing franchisees' location for waste collection, inefficient waste-collecting/sorting system in the cities, and the difficulties that arise for franchisees due to waste management costs. Where franchisees perceive difficulties, these limit their intentions to voluntarily engage in pro-environmental behaviors. However, they were able to engage more in task-related pro-environmental behaviors notwithstanding the difficulties they encountered, as these problems were eased by franchisor support.

#### 4.6 | Attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors

The findings indicate that franchisees' attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors influences their engagement in these behaviors. Franchisees' environmental values also seem to be reflected in how easy/difficult they perceive a task. Most of the franchisees expressed positive attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors, in general. It was also evident that some franchisees have good habits, which underpin their positive attitude towards pro-environmental

behaviors, as a franchisee noted: “So it's [waste sorting] not at all restrictive, because I would say that it's instinctive ... At some point, you have to feel responsible for what you do. For me, there's no constraint to do it on a daily basis... It's normal, that's it” (Interviewee #5). Franchisees emphasized that waste sorting comes naturally to them, with many referencing it as being something they had done since childhood. They considered it as a reflex action, a usual habit for them. For example, “It's natural ... I have grandparents who were farmers. So, there's always been a manure pile at my grandparents' house [...] In addition, my grandparents ... had gardens, so vegetables. So there was ... very little packaging. In fact, the bins weren't used very much. It's not necessarily a constraint for me. It's more a matter of habits” (Interviewee #10). A franchisee also explained: “Waste sorting is in our genes. In the whole family, it's in the genes. So, at the restaurant, I do it. I separate all the glass [...] I separate everything that's cardboard from everything else” (Interviewee #6).

Nevertheless, the findings revealed some negative franchisee attitude towards green practices, which may reduce their adoption of pro-environmental behaviors. The negative attitudes arose due to other priorities, and the associated difficulties. For example, “[Sorting] takes more space. It does take time. That's why I say it's restrictive and it's an additional cost ... I think there are restaurants that have more means that can do it, but it's going to be dictated by someone for whom it's a real value” (Interviewee #7).

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the literature on green practices in the hospitality industry by investigating the environmentally sustainable behaviors of franchisees operating their restaurants in the fast-food sector. Although franchise chains are important institutions that disseminate environmental practices (Mir & Feitelson, 2007), many franchise organizations in the food service sector are seen as major contributors to environmental degradation, for example, in terms of waste generation (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Moreover, it has been noted that, compared to other retail sectors, restaurants are the world's largest energy user, using almost five times as much energy per square foot than any other type of commercial building (Wang et al., 2013). With franchise chains mostly prevalent in the restaurant industry (Rhou et al., 2019; Sen, 1998), this study offers important theoretical and practical implications on how to encourage better pro-environmental behaviors in franchise organizations.

Based on an adaptation of the Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) model of voluntary pro-environmental behavior of employees, the qualitative findings reported in this study reveal some core types of pro-environmental behaviors among franchisees—namely, behaviors focused on reduction of food waste and non-food waste; while behaviors focused on energy consumption and carbon emission received less attention. In relation to these behaviors, franchisees also displayed further pro-environmental behaviors by offering suggestions to their franchisors on making changes to their corporate environmental practices. These indicate that franchisees undertake

pro-environmental behaviors that can have positive effects on the environment, either directly or indirectly (Lülfs & Hahn, 2013). As Lülfs and Hahn (2013) explain, pro-environmental behaviors, such as those relating to energy, waste, and emission issues, are directly targeted towards addressing environmental concerns. On the other hand, pro-environmental behaviors, such as those relating to making suggestions for improving environmental practices of the company, are indirectly targeted towards the environment and do not lead to environmental improvements right away, but rather, they act as enablers for such improvements. Nevertheless, given the fast-food context, we observed that a large part of franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors is focused on issues of waste, as this is an area where franchisees are most likely to have potential to contribute to environmental practices.

Three layers of influential factors were found to drive the voluntary pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees. Drawing on Lülfs and Hahn (2013), the influential layers start with the distal predictors (made up of the organizational context, personal moral norm, and awareness) which impact the motivational determinants (consisting of perceived behavioral control and attitude) that in turn affect the enactment of voluntary pro-environmental behaviors. Although Lülfs and Hahn (2013) conceptualize personal moral norm as a motivational determinant, the findings in this study reveal that it represents a distal predictor in the franchising context. This suggests that the moral standards of franchisees explain their outlook (i.e., attitude) towards pro-environmental behaviors. The finding here is consistent with the assumption of the norm-activation-model, that personal norm explains moral behavior (Lülfs & Hahn, 2013). Based on the norm-activation model, the finding implies that franchisees' personal norms about the environment are used to assess whether their behavior is either appropriate or inappropriate (Onwezen et al., 2013). Additionally, the franchisees' personal norms are activated by awareness of need and consequences, as well as social norm.

Underpinning the layers of influential factors are the roles of organizational and personal factors. The *organizational factors* are reflected in the support and know-how provided by franchisors, which encourage pro-environmental behaviors among their franchisees. Consistent with organizational support theory, franchisor support creates an enabling organizational context that gives franchisees the freedom to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. However, it would seem that just as the franchisor influences franchisee pro-environmental behaviors, the franchisee has the capacity to also influence the franchisor, thereby offering supplementary means of support. In the cases where franchisees are involved in the decision-making process, there was evidence that they were able to promote pro-environmental behaviors at the organizational level. Additionally, the intra-organizational transfer of franchisor environmental issues-related know-how to franchisees strengthens the organizational context by influencing franchisees' discernment about the state of their corporate environmental practices (i.e., performance). The *personal factors* are reflected in the constructs of both the norm-activation-model and theory of planned behavior—namely, franchisees' social norm, awareness, attitudes, and perceived behavioral

control. In all, this study contributes to the theoretical underpinnings of pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees with findings suggesting that an integrated norm-activation model—theory of planned behavior model can best explain pro-environmental behavior (Onwezen et al., 2013) when incorporated around organizational support theory. Although the resultant model of franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors was based on understanding the applicability of an adaptation of the Lülfs and Hahn's (2013) model of pro-environmental behavior of employees in the workplace, the former model reveals the uniqueness of the franchise system. In particular, we identify a number of organizational factors, particular to the franchise context, that influence pro-environmental behaviors. These primarily emerge as franchisees, unlike employees, are (semi-) independent outlet entrepreneurs.

This study has important practical implications for franchise chains. It is crucial to understand how pro-environmental behavior can be influenced in organizational settings in order to successfully inform organizations on how to improve their environmental performance (Robertson & Carleton, 2018). The findings from this study imply that franchisors can develop mechanisms to support their franchisees' green behaviors in the workplace. This may involve embedding support within franchisee training to signal leadership commitment to environmental sustainability in franchised units. Perrigot et al. (2021) argue that franchisors can codify their know-how on waste management practices in their operational manuals and get this transferred to their franchisees via initial and ongoing training. Additionally, the findings imply that franchisees can be proactive in driving pro-environmental behavior within their systems.

The findings also reveal that franchisees face a number of challenges that may discourage them from engaging in pro-environmental behaviors. The difficulties may even be more complicated in larger franchise chains. For example, an increase in the scale of franchising implies that more stakeholder groups requiring important considerations may be involved, such as franchisees, employees hired by franchisees, different customer span, local community, and government; the additional groups may come with values, needs, and wants that are different from those of existing stakeholder groups (Kim & Lee, 2020). This implies that franchised units can benefit from targeted franchisor support on sustainable environmental practices. Indeed, achieving sustainable management requires the support of all stakeholders (Lee et al., 2021; Perrigot et al., 2021). Prior research also suggests that it is challenging for a company in the fast-food sector to truly attain an environmentally sustainable business model due to certain characteristics of the sector, such as the waste generated through the use of disposable food and beverage containers and greenhouse gas emissions attributable to cars idling in drive-thrus (Hutchinson et al., 2012). The findings from this study contribute to knowledge on environmentally sustainable business models for franchised units in the fast-food sector. In particular, the findings show the features of such a model.



Our study is not without limitations. Although a qualitative approach was deemed suitable for the empirical investigation, it may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research using large-

scale quantitative research designs could be conducted to test the qualitatively derived model of pro-environmental behaviors of franchisees presented in this study. This could include exploration of potential mediators and/or moderators between attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors and franchisees' pro-environmental behaviors. Additionally, the impact of the organizational context (franchisee autonomy, in particular) on pro-environmental behaviors could be contingent on the extent to which the franchisor is mandating environmental practices, and transferring that knowledge, thus supporting opportunities to test moderating effects in future studies. Furthermore, since the interviews were focused on the franchisee perspective, it eliminates franchisors' "voices" from the findings. Future research could be conducted with franchisors as a comparative study to elucidate their views on the green behaviors of their franchisees. Despite the potential limitations of this study, it offers avenues for more research on green practices in franchising, as well as in the hospitality sector and other sectors such as retailing.

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