STUDIA UBB NEGOTIA, LVIX, 4, 2014, pp. 5 - 30
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)

# A DIFFERENT APPROACH OF COMPETITIVE IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS: THE CASE OF YOUNG ROMANIANS' PREFERENCE FOR A LOCAL FAST-FOOD

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**ABSTRACT.** In a competitive market, if one uses the traditional Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) to evaluate service performance without considering the service level of competitors, misleading results may be obtained for managers responsible for developing improvement strategies. The purpose of this paper is to present a different approach of the Competitive Importance-Performance Analysis (CIPA) in order to evaluate the attributes that explain the preference of young people for a local fast-food in comparison with an international fast-food. The results revealed that the local fast-food is more competitive for only three attributes: the schedule, the low prices and the food consistency. The local fast-food's managers could use these attributes to obtain a unique position on the market and to conceive adequate marketing strategies for the young people's segment.

**Keywords**: Fast-food, Competitive importance-performance analysis, Attributes, Market

**JEL classification:** L83, L25

## 1. Introduction

The world's tendency of globalization and modernization led to rapid changes in the consumption habits and health status of the young people. One of the most important changes over the last 50 years is the development and marketing of the fast-food products. The fast-foods offer has especially affected

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young people (i.e. children and adolescents) (Seubsman et al., 2009). They are talking about the so-called "Fast-food culture" which is considered an emerging trend among the young people (Kaushik et al., 2011). The main features of fast-food products (the ready availability, familiarity with these products, the socializing possibility, the accessibility of the location, the convenience, the opening hours, home delivery, the availability of the menus at any time of the day, taste, low cost), peer pressure and the fast-foods' marketing strategies (maximizing the speed, efficiency and conformity, the menu is kept limited and standardized to minimize the waiting time etc.) are important factors that increase their demand among children and adolescents (Brown et al., 2000; Laroche et al., 2005; Goyal and Singh, 2007; Stevenson et al., 2007; Davis and Carpenter, 2009; Kaushik et al., 2011; Lachat et al., 2011; Stead et al., 2011; Dubuisson et al., 2012; Seliske et al., 2013; Untaru et al., 2013)

In Romania, fast-food restaurants appeared in the 1990s and fell quickly in Romanian landscape, thereby triggering a real phenomenon. Changes in eating habits and on the rhythm of life of big cities' inhabitants, the increase of the purchasing power, the emergence of a middle class may be the main explanation for the rise in consumption of fast-food products. Dining at fast-foods has turned for Romanians into a habit of contemporary lifestyle, obviously, it's an unhealthy eating behavior, but in accordance with capitalist society trends (Voinea, 2011). However, the research on Romanian young people's preference for fast-foods, on decision factors that support the choice of these type of units are of recent date and belong, in particular, to the academic field. Hence, a qualitative research that used semi-directive in-depth interviews with the restaurant managers from Brașov County investigated their perceptions of the quality of products and services they offer to consumers. The results of this research revealed that the young people segment is increasingly attracted to the fast-food restaurants (Untaru et al., 2012). This fact is also confirmed by the results of a previous qualitative research using the focus group method with a sample of 13 students from *Transilvania* University of Brașov. The aim of this paper was to investigate the preferences of the young people for local restaurants and the reasons that support their choices. Collected data analysis revealed the preferences for fast-foods of the young people. The attributes that the young people mentioned as determinant in choosing a fast-food were: the quickness of serving, the low prices, familiarity with these types of products, the socializing possibility, the accessibility of the location, the convenience offered by fast-food, home delivery and take away products, the menus display and the availability of the menus at any time of the day and the convenient opening hours (Untaru and Ispas, 2013). Further on, an exploratory study was conducted in order to identify the fast-foods that

the young people locate on the first two places from their consumption frequency's point of view.

The main objective of the present paper is to evaluate the importance and performance of different attributes of the fast-foods identified in the exploratory study. A different approach of the competitive importance-performance analysis was conducted in four stages (Lai and To, 2010): (1) identifying all the key attributes that define the importance and performance of the two fast-foods, (2) developing and conducting a survey to measure the perceived importance and performance of each attribute on separate Likert-based scales, (3) analysing the survey data collected by pairing the mean scores for each attribute as measured on the importance and performance scales, and (4) plotting the mean scores on a grid to assist management in decision making.

## 2. Review of literature

### *2.1. Consumption of fast-food products among young people*

The preferences for fast-food among young people and the entering of international chains in almost all countries in the world caused an increase in the number of researches carried out in this field (Kara et al., 1995; Laroche et al., 2005; Goyal and Singh, 2007; Stevenson et al., 2007; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Davis and Carpenter, 2009; Widome et al., 2009; Chen and Chen, 2010; Woodruff et al., 2010; Lachat et al., 2011; Dubuisson et al., 2012; DiSantis et al., 2013; Seliske et al., 2013). Researches carried out among young people and in connection with their habit to consume fast-food products have revealed significant conditions toward this behavior (Stead et al., 2011): their physical environment, which contains multiple cues promoting the consumption of energy dense foods (Kahn and Wansink, 2004); the superseding nature of factors inherent in foods (i.e. taste, smell, appearance) to instigate consumption in young people (Stevenson et al., 2007); inconsistencies between large portion size, satiation and subsequent energy intake compensation (Ello-Martin et al., 2005). Verma and Yadav (2010) conclude that the effects of other cultures and education were the main reasons of changing food habits.

Beyond the concerns related to the effects of fast-food consumption on the young people's health, considering that it is very difficult to change profoundly their consumption behavior, numerous authors (Brown et al., 2000; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Palan et al., 2010; Verma and Yadav, 2010; Ariffin et al., 2011; Voon, 2012) have been directed toward studying the importance the young people grant to different attributes of restaurant (when they choose to dine out or to spend time with their friends). Voon (2012) examines the importance of service environment (servicescape and human service), food

quality and price from the youth's perspective. Price or the perceived value for money was generally found to be the most important factor in determining the youth loyalty. Qin and Prybutok (2008) also investigated the role of price/ value in determining customer satisfaction for fast-food restaurants but did not find it to be of significance. This is however believed to be due to the nature of fast-food restaurants in which price is relatively low and therefore not of central importance to consumers compared to other types of establishments such as fine-dining restaurants (Voon, 2012).

Nevertheless, the youth, who are not economically strong, may find that price is important to attract them to the restaurants. Kara et al. (1995) have presented the consumers' perceptions of and preferences for fast-food restaurants in the US and Canada. According to their study, the consumers aged between 12 to 24 years look for variety, price, delivery service and location in US and for price and novelties in Canada.

Kim and Chung (2011) have explored restaurant attributes that customers perceived to be important in their selection and examined if there is any difference in selection criteria between fast-service and full-service restaurants. They concluded that managers should determine which restaurant attributes are more important to their target customers to meet customers' expectations.

### *2.2. Consumption of fast-food products among Romanian young people*

The fast-foods have largely influenced the consumption habits of Romanian people and have become a very profitable business for specific restaurant chains. However, the studies carried out in Romania are very few (ISRA Center Marketing Research, 2007; Unilever Food Solutions, 2011; Andreca and Halanei, 2013) and are focused on providing information about the profile of the Romanian people who dine out most often, what they would prefer to order, how much they usually pay for a meal and what the convenient hours to dine out are. The "Out of home consumption habits" study (Unilever Food Solutions, 2011) was conceived in March 2011 by Synovate Romania for Unilever Food Solutions on a representative sample for the population of 18-64 years in the urban area (891 respondents). The results revealed that the Romanians who dine out with a frequency of at least once in 2-3 months are characterized as having high incomes (more than 300 euro per month), they are full-time employed and graduates from high school and college. When dining out, the Romanians order differently depending on the age group to which they belong, as follows: those between 18-24 years of age choose to eat fast-food most often (pizza, shaorma and burgers), those between 25-34 years of age prefer snacks and seals potatoes, and the Romanians over 35 years of

age prefer traditional food: sour borsch, soups, dishes from meat (chicken snitzel or chicken wings) and deserts (Unilever Food Solutions, 2011).

Because fast-food is a quick meal, more than 70% of the Romanians who live in urban areas choose a fast-food when they go out, according to the results of a survey conducted by ISRA Center Marketing Research (2007). The study was conceived on a sample of 952 respondents aged between 20 and 60 years (from which 679 were eligible, i.e. they use to eat at fast-food) from the urban area. All the respondents asserted that they prefer the quick meals due to their lack of time. The same survey showed that one out of three Romanians consumes fast-food products only during the weekend, and one out of five both during the week and during the weekend. Cleanliness is the main aspect that about half of the respondents take into account when choosing the fast food. About two-thirds of respondents prefer fast-food products because they are a quick meal. The taste of fast food is to the liking of about half of the interviewees, and one-quarter appreciate its variety (ISRA Center Marketing Research, 2007).

Regarding the fast-food consumption among young people, the Romanian academic literature is very poor with respect to the amount of information in this field. According to a survey conducted in 2008 by the National Agency for Supporting Young People's Initiative (ANSIT) and financed by the National Authority for Tourism (ANT), the fast-food consumption is very frequent among young people up to 25 years of age (ANSIT, 2008). 46% of the young people between 20-24 years of age and 44% of those between 14 and 19 years of age frequently consume such products. The option for fast-food products is the most mentioned among pupils and students (45%) in comparison with young people that are active in the labor market (32%) or those inactive (27%). Also, these types of products are much more consumed in the urban areas (41%) than in the rural areas (27%).

At the request of The National Authority for Sport and Youth, Romanian Institute for Assessment and Strategy (IRES), "the public opinion barometer – Youth 2012" was carried out in 2012. It revealed that 21% of the young Romanians eat daily from fast-food and 36% of them 2-3 times a week, while only 14% of the respondents asserted that they did not consume such food products. Many of the young people aged between 18 and 35 years of age declare themselves as followers of fast-foods (IRES, 2012). Although the information provided by these studies are valuable in terms of knowledge consumption habits of young Romanians, they have a series of disadvantages arising from the general nature of the research carried out – from the perspective of their objectives, the respondents included in the sample, the error with which they have been guaranteed results, etc.

### *2.3. Importance-performance analysis (IPA)*

The importance and performance analysis of the attributes that characterize the activity of an organization has been carried out for the first time by Martilla and James (1977), who were the first to introduce IPA for a study of an automobile service dealer. Matzler et al. (2004) noted that IPA has two assumptions. On one hand, attribute performance and attribute importance are independent variables and, on the other hand, the interdependence between attribute performance and overall performance is linear and symmetrical. Martilla and James (1977) conceived an IP matrix which classified the importance and performance attributes on a scale of low to high, making the interpretation of data easier. The first quadrant (*Concentrate here*) means that importance levels are very high for respondents, but performance levels are very low. This suggests that improvement efforts should be concentrated here. The second quadrant (*Keep up the good work*) means that both importance and performance attributes have high levels for respondents. The message here is to keep up the good work. The third quadrant (*Lower priority*) means that both importance and performance attributes have low levels for respondents. However, managers should not be concerned, since the attributes in this cell are not perceived to be very important. This suggests that limited resources should be expended on the attributes in this quadrant. Finally, the fourth quadrant (*Possible overkill*) means that importance levels are very low for respondents, but performance levels are very high. In this situation, managers should reconsider their efforts on the attributes of this quadrant.

The key objective of IPA is thus diagnostic in nature, allowing managers and marketers to identify important attributes where the product or service is under or overperforming (Abalo et al., 2007). IPA method has proven to be a broadly applicable tool which is relatively easy to administer and interpret resulting in extensive use among researchers and managers in various industries (Hosseini and Bideh, 2014). The IPA framework has been widely applied in various fields and contexts including food services (Sampson and Showalter, 1999; Tontini and Silveira, 2007), education (Alberty and Mihalik, 1989; Ford et al., 1999; Kitcharoen, 2004), healthcare (Dolinsky, 1991; Abalo et al., 2007), banking (Matzler et al., 2003; Yeo, 2003; Joseph et al., 2005), public administration (Van Ryzin and Immerwahr, 2004), e-business and IT (Levenburg and Magal, 2005; Hosseini and Bideh, 2014), tourism or tourism destination (Hudson et al., 2004; Deng, 2007).

Despite the simplicity of IPA, its applicability has certain limitations (Matzler et al., 2004). For instance, no definitive standard is available for setting the range of horizontal and vertical axes, measurement scale, and placement of

the crosshairs (i.e. vertical and horizontal lines) in IPA. Measurement biases and placement of the crosshairs both influence the quadrant of the IPA plot to which the service attributes fall into, subsequently affecting the reliability of decisions in terms of improving service quality (Oh, 2001; Taplin, 2012). IPA is also limited in that it considers only its own performance and disregards the relative performance of competitors in a competitive marketplace (Keyt et al., 1994), making it impossible for a business to recognize its market share and ultimately diminishing their competitive edge.

The performance of competitors has occasionally been included in IPA (Dolinsky, 1991; Dolinsky and Caputo, 1991; Yavas and Shemwell, 2001; Kim and Oh, 2002; Kaczyski and Crompton, 2004). This literature typically investigates restaurants or healthcare. While performance is compared between the competing venues, it assumes the importance of each attribute is the same at the two venues. Denga et al. (2008) presented a revised IPA that integrates a three-factor theory and benchmarking. The proposed revised IPA also completes quantitative competitive analysis about the best business competitor. The revised IPA that includes the actual importance of service attributes and a competitive situation assists business managers in resolving service quality management and customer satisfaction management issues.

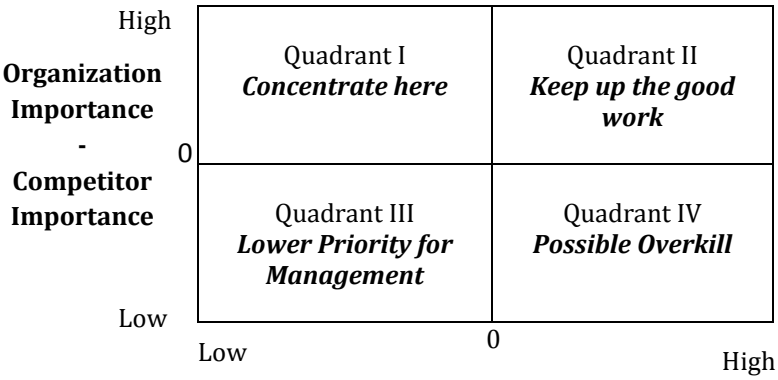


**Fig. 1.** Competitive Importance-Performance Analysis (CIPA)
Source: based on Martilla, J.A. et al. (1977)

In a competitive market, if one uses the traditional IPA to evaluate service performance without considering the service level of competitors, misleading results may be obtained for managers responsible for developing improvement strategies (Chen, 2014). Therefore, results obtained through a comparison with competitors can more effectively assist managers in devising appropriate improvement strategies and making resource allocation decisions, ultimately helping a business to gain a competitive advantage.

Competitive IPA (CIPA) is an IPA-type analytical method based on two indices: mean difference in performance and importance. To extend the practical applications of IPA, CIPA compares both the importance of each service attribute within the Caversham Wildlife Park and also the importance of each service attribute between the Caversham Wildlife Park and its competitors (Taplin, 2012). By benchmarking against competitors, CIPA determines the placement of crosshairs, reduces measurement biases, and determines the market position. CIPA is applicable not only to tourism, but also to other management or marketing-related areas of a product or service (Taplin, 2012). This comparison with competitors can help businesses to understand more thoroughly their positions in the competitive marketplace (fig.1).

According to Taplin (2012), the competitive importance-performance analysis (CIPA) includes two levels of importance and performance with a view to carry out a comparison between an organization and competition that is an entity typically referred to as benchmarking. CIPA method proposes enhancements to the Importance-performance analysis (IPA) and the corresponding gap (performance minus importance) analysis. This methodological advancement places IPA within the competitive world, eliminates measurement biases and solves a recurring problem in IPA regarding the placement of crosshairs.

## 3. Method

### *3.1. A different approach of CIPA*

A different approach of CIPA, using a single section of importance (absolute importance), is due to a large number of attributes used in the questionnaire (48 statements for each of the three sections: importance, LFF performance and IFF performance). The use of two levels of importance and performance, in accordance with the method proposed by Taplin (2012) would hinder the process of completing them by the respondents, which may give rise to problems related to the completion of the survey questionnaire (refusal of respondents to participate in the interview, partial completion of the questionnaire etc.).

CIPA can be represented in a two-dimensional plot of performance and importance similar to IPA. The horizontal axis is the mean performance at LFF

minus the mean performance at IFF, with the the mean performance at LFF minus the importance on the vertical axis (fig. 2).

The gap is defined as the mean performance minus the mean importance. Gap analysis typically compares gaps with the benchmark of zero. Positive gaps (performance exceeds importance) are considered satisfactory while negative gaps (where performance is lower than importance) indicate management attention may be required. Gap analysis can be viewed as a reduction of the two-dimensional IPA to a one-dimensional scale. This can be achieved by adding a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right where performance equals importance. Attributes falling to the right of this line have positive gaps and attributes falling to the left of this line have negative gaps. When two attributes fall on different lines, the attribute with the higher gap lies on the line to the right. Hence gap analysis retains the information concerning which diagonal line the attribute falls onto but ignores the information concerning where on this line the attribute falls. Although this dimensional reduction must involve some loss of information, the assumption of gap analysis is that, by retaining the dimension of most interest to management, little useful information is lost (Taplin, 2012).

In CIPA method, the most important direction is from top left to bottom right because the quadrants "concentrate management here" and "possible overkill" suggest more need for management action that the "keep up the good work" and "low priority for managers" quadrants. The approach used in this research proposes some changes in interpretation of the values falling to the left and to the right of the diagonal line. Thus, the triangle which suggests more need for management action is the one from the top left, because, in this area, the importance exceeds the competitor performance.

Mathematically, the difference in gap values –LFF performance minus IFF performance ($G_1$), on the horizontal axis, and LFF performance minus importance ($G_2$), on the vertical axis – is given by:

$$\begin{aligned} G_1 &= P_1 - P_2 \\ G_2 &= P_1 - I \\ G_0 &= G_1 - G_2 = (P_1 - P_2) - (P_1 - I) \end{aligned} \qquad \text{(i)}$$

where, $P_1$ denotes performance for LFF, $P_2$ is performance for IFF, I is the importance, and $G_1$, $G_2$ and $G_0$ denote gaps. One sample t-tests were used to test whether the differences in gaps ($G_1$, $G_1$ and $G_0$) differ significantly from zero. The statistical software SPSS 16 was used for all calculations.

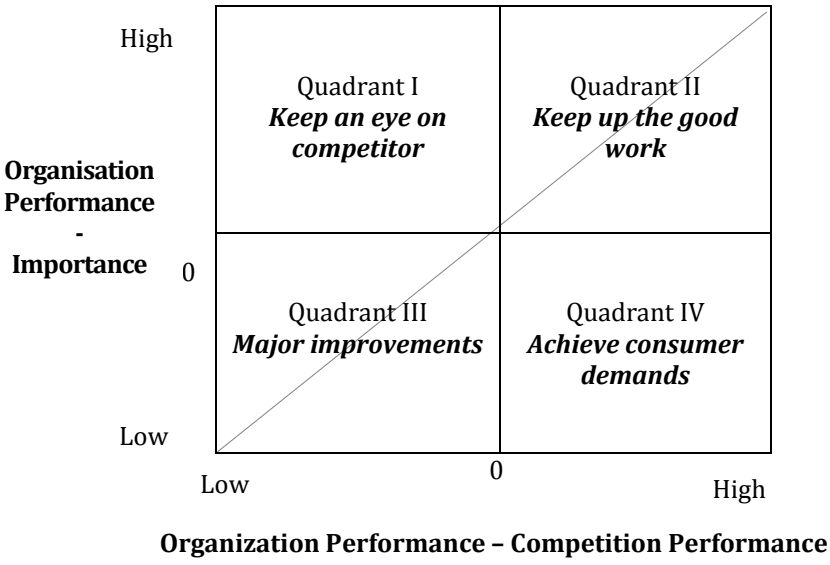


**Fig. 2**. A different approach of CIPA

When plotting these differences (as in fig. 2), crosshairs can logically be placed through zero as it compares LFF performance with the importance (on the vertical axis) and with IFF performance (on the horizontal axis), "comparing the importance and performance at this venue with these crosshairs is equivalent to comparing differences in importance and performance with zero" (Taplin, 2012, p. 32).

Positioning attributes in the four quadrants requires some changes in the interpretation of results, but also in labeling quadrants I, III and IV (fig. 2). Negative values on the vertical axis indicate that the LFF performance is lower than the importance, meaning that LFF management should be required to submit significant efforts to improve the performance of the attributes in quadrants III (*Major improvements*) and IV (*Achieve consumer demands*). For the attributes in quadrant III, LFF should make substantial efforts to achieve the level of importance as well as the level of IFF performance. For the attributes in quadrant IV, the LFF performance exceeds the IFF performance but is lower than the importance, wherefore the management of LFF should improve those attributes to achieve the level of importance.

The attributes in quadrants I (*Keep an eye on competitor*) and II (*Keep up the good work*) have positive values on the vertical axis (LFF performance exceeds importance). For the attributes in quadrant I, the management of LFF

should allocate resources to improve them up to the level at which its performance is equal to that of the competitor. On the other hand, for the attributes in quadrant II, where the LFF performance exceeds importance and IFF performance, the management of LFF should use those attributes to achieve a competitive advantage on the market. For the values in quadrant II, to the left of the diagonal line, $G_2$ is higher than $G_1$, which means that LFF allocate too many resources for those attributes. For the values in the triangle to the right of the diagonal line, $G_2$ is lower than $G_1$, which means that LFF allocate an adequate quantity of resources for those attributes and should use them to obtain a unique position on the market.

### *3.2. Survey methods*

The questionnaire which we have used as a basis for the application of the CIPA method included four sections. The questionnaire was pre-tested among a group of students familiar with this subject, for the purpose of checking whether the statements have been formulated clearly, correctly and without ambiguities. The first section included questions related to the demographics of young people, and the other three sections were taken into account by 48 statements concerning the attributes which young people considered important in the choice of a fast-food. As can be seen in table 1, the 48 statements refer to the exterior and interior facilities of a fast-food (1-3), the comfort (4-5), the cleanliness (6-7), the employees (8-20), the fast-food's image (21), the dishes (22-37), the fast serving (38-39), the products supply (40), the consumption's safety (41), the brand trust (42), the promotions/ discounts (43), the information's visibility on available products (44), the atmosphere (45), the price (46-47) and the schedule (48). Table 1 presents the results from SPSS program: mean importance (I), mean performance for the local fast-food (LFF Perf.), mean performance for the international fast-food (IFF Perf.), differences in the mean performances ($G_1$= LFF Perf. - IFF Perf.), difference in the local fast-food mean performance and importance ($G_2$=LFF Perf.-I), difference between $G_1$ and $G_2$ ($G_0$), with significantly levels for $G_1$, $G_2$ and $G_0$ (sig. 1, sig. 2 and sig. 3).

**Tabel 1.**

IPA and CIPA results

| Attributes | LFF Perf. | IFF Perf. | $G_1$ | Sig.1 | I | $G_2$ | Sig.2 | $G_0$ | Sig.3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Fast-food has a convenient location. | 4.49 | 4.78 | -0.277 | 0.000 | 4.44 | 0.055 | 0.201 | -0.334 | 0.000 |
| 2. Fast-food has an attractive exterior. | 4.11 | 4.59 | -0.472 | 0.000 | 4.32 | -0.212 | 0.000 | -0.263 | 0.000 |
| 3. Fast-food has an attractive interior. | 4.11 | 4.61 | -0.496 | 0.000 | 4.55 | -0.439 | 0.000 | -0.059 | 0.128 |
| 4. Fast-food makes me feel comfortable. | 4.02 | 4.51 | -0.478 | 0.000 | 4.46 | -0.425 | 0.000 | -0.051 | 0.169 |
| 5. Fast-food offers consumers adequate seats and spaces. | 4.14 | 4.52 | -0.385 | 0.000 | 4.53 | -0.392 | 0.000 | 0.006 | 0.868 |
| 6. Facilities are clean. | 4.20 | 4.59 | -0.383 | 0.000 | 4.90 | -0.694 | 0.000 | 0.303 | 0.000 |
| 7. Toilet is clean. | 4.23 | 4.61 | -0.381 | 0.000 | 4.91 | -0.680 | 0.000 | 0.297 | 0.000 |
| 8. Employees behave properly. | 4.18 | 4.60 | -0.410 | 0.000 | 4.73 | -0.536 | 0.000 | 0.124 | 0.000 |
| 9. Employees have an adequate apparel. | 4.30 | 4.72 | -0.416 | 0.000 | 4.37 | -0.082 | 0.061 | -0.341 | 0.000 |
| 10. Employees have a pleasant appearance. | 3.96 | 4.46 | -0.503 | 0.000 | 4.02 | -0.064 | 0.169 | -0.441 | 0.000 |
| 11. Employees' apparel is clean. | 4.21 | 4.67 | -0.450 | 0.000 | 4.76 | -0.545 | 0.000 | 0.093 | 0.004 |
| 12. Employees respond quickly to my questions and requirements. | 4.21 | 4.57 | -0.356 | 0.000 | 4.47 | -0.254 | 0.000 | -0.104 | 0.007 |
| 13. Employees are polite. | 4.12 | 4.49 | -0.374 | 0.000 | 4.73 | -0.609 | 0.000 | 0.237 | 0.000 |
| 14. Employees' behavior is trustworthy. | 3.96 | 4.39 | -0.427 | 0.000 | 4.34 | -0.385 | 0.000 | -0.051 | 0.251 |
| 15. Employees have the competence to answer my questions. | 4.05 | 4.42 | -0.370 | 0.000 | 4.30 | -0.239 | 0.000 | -0.126 | 0.002 |
| 16. Employees smile. | 3.90 | 4.32 | -0.414 | 0.000 | 3.96 | -0.062 | 0.154 | -0.363 | 0.000 |
| 17. Employees use simple language. | 4.23 | 4.40 | -0.172 | 0.000 | 4.19 | 0.037 | 0.394 | -0.210 | 0.000 |
| 18. Employees are friendly. | 3.93 | 4.31 | -0.376 | 0.000 | 4.16 | -0.226 | 0.000 | -0.148 | 0.001 |
| 19. Employees apologize quickly if they are wrong. | 3.93 | 4.37 | -0.445 | 0.000 | 4.20 | -0.268 | 0.000 | -0.177 | 0.000 |
| 20. Employees shall provide the order as it was made. | 4.29 | 4.53 | -0.239 | 0.000 | 4.79 | -0.485 | 0.000 | 0.241 | 0.000 |
| 21. Fast-food communicates a young image. | 4.15 | 4.48 | -0.325 | 0.000 | 3.86 | 0.277 | 0.000 | -0.612 | 0.000 |
| 22. The dishes' quality meets consumer needs. | 4.24 | 4.39 | -0.150 | 0.000 | 4.70 | -0.458 | 0.000 | 0.301 | 0.000 |
| 23. The dishes' variety meets consumer needs. | 4.26 | 4.40 | -0.139 | 0.002 | 4.53 | -0.270 | 0.000 | 0.126 | 0.004 |
| 24. The dishes are permanently in the menu. | 4.30 | 4.46 | -0.164 | 0.000 | 4.40 | -0.102 | 0.020 | -0.062 | 0.151 |
| 25. The dishes are fresh. | 4.20 | 4.41 | -0.197 | 0.000 | 4.92 | -0.711 | 0.000 | 0.507 | 0.000 |
| 26. The dishes are prepared hygienically. | 4.20 | 4.41 | -0.208 | 0.000 | 4.92 | -0.722 | 0.000 | 0.510 | 0.000 |
| 27. The dishes have a pleasant aroma. | 4.36 | 4.58 | -0.212 | 0.000 | 4.78 | -0.412 | 0.000 | 0.197 | 0.000 |
| 28. The dishes are well prepared. | 4.32 | 4.54 | -0.219 | 0.000 | 4.82 | -0.505 | 0.000 | 0.279 | 0.000 |
| 29. The dishes are visually attractive. | 4.35 | 4.64 | -0.288 | 0.000 | 4.55 | -0.208 | 0.000 | -0.086 | 0.021 |
| 30. The ingredients are of good quality. | 4.06 | 4.28 | -0.215 | 0.000 | 4.84 | -0.762 | 0.000 | 0.545 | 0.000 |
| 31. The dishes have a low number of calories. | 4.04 | 4.10 | -0.053 | 0.208 | 4.19 | -0.139 | 0.003 | 0.084 | 0.089 |
| 32. Fast-food provides information about the number of calories. | 4.21 | 4.21 | 0.013 | 0.765 | 4.19 | 0.017 | 0.721 | -0.026 | 0.580 |
| 33. The dishes' and beverages' temperature is adequate. | 4.17 | 4.40 | -0.221 | 0.000 | 4.54 | -0.370 | 0.000 | 0.150 | 0.000 |
| 34. Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients. | 4.49 | 4.50 | -0.017 | 0.640 | 4.49 | -0.008 | 0.824 | -0.006 | 0.873 |
| 35. The dishes are tasty. | 4.46 | 4.64 | -0.175 | 0.000 | 4.82 | -0.361 | 0.000 | 0.181 | 0.000 |
| 36. The dishes are full. | 4.37 | 4.33 | 0.046 | 0.242 | 4.41 | -0.039 | 0.332 | 0.082 | 0.059 |
| 37. Fast-food offers the possibility to customize the menu. | 4.18 | 4.40 | -0.208 | 0.000 | 4.35 | -0.155 | 0.001 | -0.053 | 0.222 |
| 38. Fast-food supplies the order in time. | 4.23 | 4.51 | -0.277 | 0.000 | 4.70 | -0.465 | 0.000 | 0.188 | 0.000 |
| 39. The waiting time at the cashier is short. | 4.05 | 4.25 | -0.206 | 0.000 | 4.42 | -0.370 | 0.000 | 0.172 | 0.000 |
| 40. Fast-food permanently adds new dishes in the menu list. | 3.80 | 4.26 | -0.445 | 0.000 | 3.92 | -0.117 | 0.008 | -0.348 | 0.000 |
| 41. I feel safe when I eat fast-food's dishes. | 4.04 | 4.18 | -0.130 | 0.002 | 4.66 | -0.618 | 0.000 | 0.483 | 0.000 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 42. The fast-food's brand is recognized and I trust it. | 4.10 | 4.40 | -0.292 | 0.000 | 4.37 | -0.270 | 0.000 | -0.031 | 0.491 |
| 43. Fast-food has promotions/discounts. | 4.00 | 4.36 | -0.343 | 0.000 | 4.18 | -0.166 | 0.001 | -0.184 | 0.000 |
| 44. Information on dishes is visible to consumers. | 4.12 | 4.38 | -0.263 | 0.000 | 4.55 | -0.414 | 0.000 | 0.159 | 0.000 |
| 45. The atmosphere is pleasant. | 4.11 | 4.50 | -0.381 | 0.000 | 4.44 | -0.330 | 0.000 | -0.055 | 0.171 |
| 46. The price is in accordance with that communicated. | 4.51 | 4.54 | -0.033 | 0.336 | 4.79 | -0.279 | 0.000 | 0.248 | 0.000 |
| 47. The price is low. | 4.10 | 3.97 | 0.130 | 0.003 | 4.11 | -0.011 | 0.796 | 0.139 | 0.002 |
| 48. The schedule is convenient. | 4.59 | 4.41 | 0.177 | 0.000 | 4.56 | 0.022 | 0.567 | 0.155 | 0.000 |

Mean performance for LFF (LFF Perf.), mean performance for IFF (IFF Perf.), differences in the mean performances ($G_1$= LFF Perf. - IFF Perf.), difference in the LFF mean performance and importance ($G_2$=LFF Perf.-I), difference between $G_1$ şi $G_2$ ($G_0$), with significantly levels for $G_1$, $G_2$ and $G_0$ (sig. 1, sig. 2 and sig. 3), mean importance (I).

The semantic differential scale was applied for the assessment of the upper attributes, as follows: for the section relating to Importance, the value 1 means that the attribute is "unimportant", the value 2 means that the attribute is "relatively unimportant", the value 3 means indifference of the young people toward the attribute, value 4 means "relatively important" and the value 5 means "important". Similarly, the Likert scale was applied for the sections related to the local fast-food Performance (LFF) and the international fast-food Performance (IFF), value 1 meaning the total agreement with the statement, value 5 meaning the total disagreement and value 3 meaning indifference towards that attribute.

Data collection has been taken into account using a cluster sampling combined with a systematic sampling. Out of the 29 high schools, vocational schools, post-secondary schools and the existing craftsmen in Braşov County, a number of 10 units were chosen at random, and out of the 7 universities, a number of 2 were chosen at random. Then, using a systematic sampling, a number of 200 pupils and 251 students were selected, in proportion to the percentage each category has in the total number of pupils and students from Braşov County –23,502 pupils and 26,267 students (Statistical Yearbook, 2012). The young people were selected to participate in an interview only if they had consumed the products of the two fast-foods at least once in the last month. Reliability assessment demonstrated acceptable Cronbach's alpha for all scales (0,963) based on Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

## 4. Results

### *4.1. Young people's profiles*

Out of the 460 questionnaires distributed in the educational establishments, 9 have been rejected since they have not been entirely completed, thus obtaining a number of 451 questionnaires. 44% of the total numbers of respondents are pupils and 56% students. 35% of the subjects

aged between 14-18 years of age, 36% were between 19-21 years of age and 29% between 22-24 years of age. Approximately 64% of the total subjects are females and 36% are males. As regards the income, it should be specified that there were used two types of questionnaires, one for pupils and another for students. The difference between the two types of questionnaires lies in the fact that, in the case of pupils (14-17 years old), the question related to income has been left out, as they do not know how to answer this question. The question relating to income indicates that 38.6% of the students have an income of up to 227 Euro per family member, 13.9% have an income ranging between 228 and 341 Euro per family member and 9.4% of more than 341 Euro per family member. With regard to the source of income, 72.4% of the students declared that they are supported by their parents, 21.6% of them work and 6% have scholarships or other sources of income.

### *4.2. IPA results*

Table 1 includes the LFF mean performance (LFF perf.), the mean importance (I), the mean difference ($G_2$) and the statistical significance (sig. 2), which indicates that $G_2$ differs significantly from zero. These values are used to perform importance-performance analysis (IPA) – fig. 3. These are typically displayed in a two dimensional plot with importance on the vertical axis and performance on the horizontal axis (Martilla and James, 1977; Ryan and Cressford, 2003).

Figure 3 is the plot of importance-performance analysis. We can notice that the most attributes are located in quadrants II (*Keep up the good work*) and III (*Lower priority*) – sixteen attributes for each of the two quadrants. This placement of the attributes confirms the results obtained by Ryan and Huyton (2002), who found positive correlations between the performance and importance assigned to attributes and suggested performance is a function of importance.

Out of the sixteen attributes in quadrant II, only the attribute 48 ("The schedule is convenient.") has positive differences, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating a higher performance of LFF than importance (table 1). For the attribute 34 ("Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients."), the LFF performance is equal to importance ($G_2$ is zero). The other fourteen attributes – the cleanliness (6, 7), the employees (11, 20), the dishes (22, 23, 25-29, 35), the fast serving (38) and the price (46), have negative differences, statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), when the LFF performance is lower than the importance. The latter attributes are close to quadrant I (*Concentrate here*) and require substantial efforts from the LFF's management to improve them to achieve the importance level.

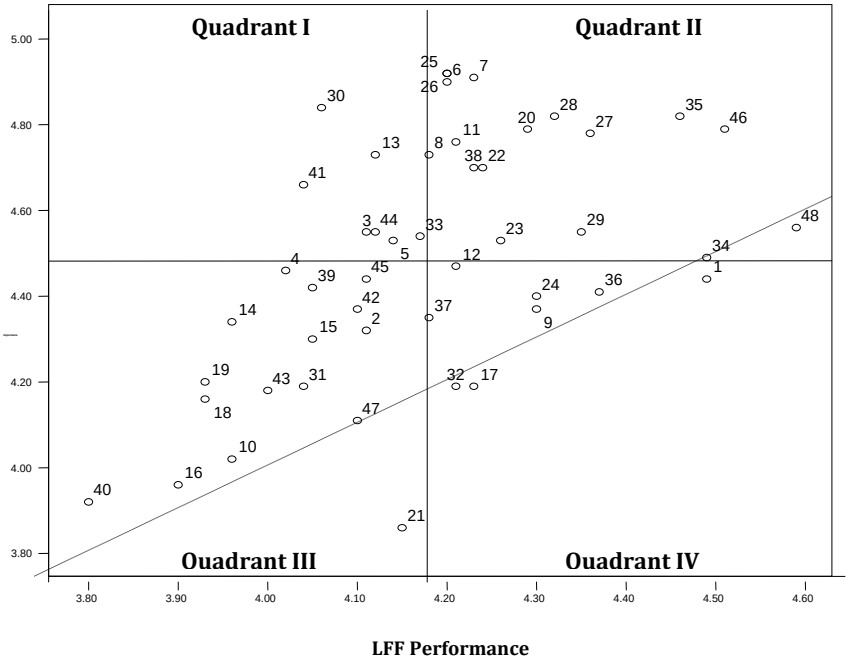


**Fig. 3.** Importance-performance analysis (IPA) for LFF

Quadrant III (*Lower priority*) includes attributes with lower levels of importance and performance; an improvement should not represent a priority for LFF. Table 1 indicates that only the attribute 21 ("Fast-food communicates a young image.") has a positive difference, statistically significant, and the LFF performance exceeds importance. Also, the attributes 47 ("The price is low."), 10 ("Employees have a pleasant appearance.") and 16 ("Employees smile.") have negative differences, but they are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$); the LFF performance is, therefore, closer to the importance. Quadrant I (*Concentrate here*) includes the attributes 30 ("The ingredients are of good quality."), 41 ("I feel safe when I eat fast-food's dishes."), 13 ("Employees are polite."), 3 ("Fast-food has an attractive interior."), 44 ("Information on dishes is visible to consumers."), 33 ("The dishes' and beverages' temperature is adequate.") and 5 ("Fast-food offers consumers adequate seats and spaces."). Table 1 indicates that the differences in $G_2$ for the upper attributes are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); the LFF efforts should focus on their improvement. The attributes in quadrant IV (*Possible overkill*) have lower importance levels but higher performance levels. Table 1 indicates that the attributes 32 ("Fast-food provides information about the number of

calories.”), 17 (“Employees use simple language.”) and 1 (“Fast-food has a convenient location.”) have positive differences in $G_2$ but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, for the attributes 12 (“Employees respond quickly to my questions and requirements.”) and 24 (“The dishes are permanently in the menu.”) the differences in $G_2$ are negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

### *4.3. CIPA results*

Table 1 includes the LFF’s mean performance, IFF’s mean performance, the differences between LFF’s mean performance and IFF’s mean performance ($G_1$) and the statistical significance (sig. 1) for $G_1$ that the gap differs from zero. Figure 4 indicates the results of CIPA, with the difference in $G_1$, on the horizontal axis, and in $G_2$, on the vertical axis, with horizontal and vertical crosshairs placed at zero.

Quadrant II (*Keep up the good work*) includes the attribute 48 (“The schedule is convenient.”), to the right of the diagonal line. For this attribute, the difference in $G_2$ is positive, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), and the difference in $G_1$ is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) – table 1. Thus, $G_2$ is lower than $G_1$ and the difference in $G_0$ is positive and statistically significant. For this reason, the attribute 48 could be used by LFF to obtain a competitive advantage on the market. The attribute 32 (“Fast-food provides information about the number of calories.”) is located in quadrant II, on the vertical axis, close to the origin, and the difference in $G_1$ and $G_2$ is positive, but it is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). The attributes 36 (“The dishes are full.”) and 47 (“The price is low.”) are located in quadrant IV (*Achieve consumer demands*), but close to quadrant II (*Keep up the good work*), with positive differences in $G_1$ and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), and negative differences in $G_1$ and statistically not significant ($p > 0.05$). The attribute 34 (“Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients.”) is placed between quadrant I (*Keep an eye on competitor*) and III (*Major improvements*), the difference in $G_2$ is equal to zero and the difference in $G_1$ is negative, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

The attributes 21 (“Fast-food communicates a young image.”), 1 (“Fast-food has a convenient location.”) and 17 (“Employees use simple language.”) are located in quadrant I (*Keep an eye on competitor*), with the LFF’s mean performance exceeding the importance, but lower than the IFF’s mean performance. The differences in $G_2$ are positive, but they are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), and negative, but statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in $G_1$ for the attributes 1 and 17. Also, the differences in $G_2$ are positive, but not

statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), and negative, but statistically significant in $G_1$ for the attribute 21. LFF should focus on improvement of the attributes in quadrant I to achieve the IFF's performance.

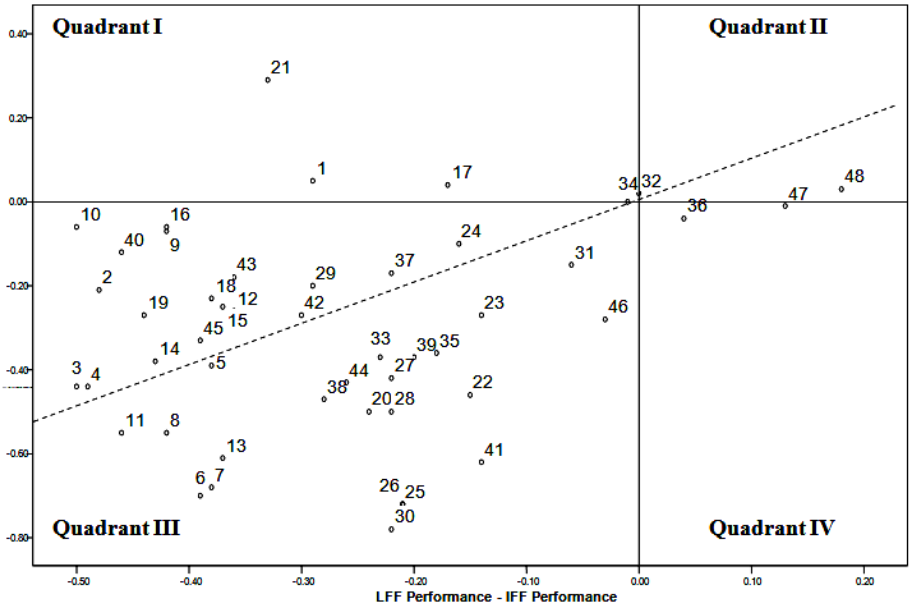


**Fig. 4.** Competitive Importance-Performance Analys

Most attributes (forty out of forty-eight) are located in quadrant III (*Major improvements*), where the LFF's performance is lower than the importance and the IFF's performance. We can notice that the attributes 9 ("Employees have an adequate apparel."), 10 ("Employees have a pleasant appearance.") and 16 ("Employees smile.") have negative differences in $G_2$, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), while for the attributes 31 ("The dishes have a low number of calories.") and 46 ("The price is in accordance with that communicated.") the differences in $G_1$ are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). The differences in $G_1$ and $G_2$ are negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for all other attributes in quadrant III: exterior and interior facilities (2, 3), comfort (4, 5), cleanliness (6, 7), employees (8, 11-15, 18-20), dishes (22-30, 33, 35, 37), fast serving (38, 39), products supply (40), consumption's safety (41), brand trust (42), promotions/discounts (43), information's visibility on available products (44) and atmosphere (45).

## 5. Discussion

IPA method has been used by a large number of specialists due to the advantages offered to the company's management. According to Sampson and Showalter (1999), while consisting of two dimensions and four quadrants based on evaluations of performance and importance of the attributes, IPA is an effective means of prioritizing attributes. Oh (2001) cited the variety of literature using IPA and concluded the main reasons for its wide acceptance included its ease of application and ability to present strategic recommendations together with data. In addition to facilitating a matrix-based evaluation of how the quadrants differ from each other, IPA allows managers to identify areas in which they must reallocate resources (Matzler et al., 2004). On the other hand, using the competition is useful for a company's management as to evaluate and determine the best improvements of performance by benchmarking against the service levels of competitors, allowing businesses to gain a competitive edge (Keyt et al., 1994; Taplin, 2012).

The different approach of CIPA in this paper has used the difference between LFF's mean performance and importance, on the vertical axis, and the difference between LFF's mean performance and IFF's mean performance, on the horizontal axis. The advantage of this method is the possibility to observe simultaneously the LFF's performance in comparison to the importance and the IFF's performance. On the other hand, the method's disadvantage is that it uses a single section of importance. According to Oh (2001), two competing companies are the same in terms of importance of service attributes. Such an assumption is irrational because, in a competitive marketplace, each company is unique, explaining why different companies assign different levels of importance to various service attributes. On the basis of the observation according to which consumers tend to rate the importance by using high values, placing most attributes in quadrant II (Garver, 2002; Wade and Eagle, 2003; Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004; Abalo et al., 2007), the proposed method eliminates this disadvantage by using the difference between LFF's performance and importance, on the vertical axis.

The method IPA highlighted that the LFF's performance exceeds the importance for the attributes 1, 17, 21, 32 and 48 (table 1). The attribute 48 ("The schedule is convenient.") is located in quadrant II (*Keep up the good work*), to the right of the diagonal line (performance exceeds importance) and the attribute 34 ("Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients.") is placed on the diagonal (performance is equal to importance), so that they could be used by the LFF's management to obtain a competitive advantage on the market.

Introduction to the analysis of the main competitor (IFF) changes the positions of the attributes in the plot (fig. 4). Thus, quadrant II (*Keep up the good work*) includes the attributes: 48 ("The schedule is convenient.") – as in the IPA plot – and 32 ("Fast-food provides information about the number of calories.") – in quadrant IV in the IPA plot. The difference in $G_2$ is positive, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$) and the difference in $G_1$ is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for the attribute 48; the LFF's management should use this attribute to obtain a competitive advantage on the market. Also, the differences in $G_1$ and $G_2$ are positive, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). We can also notice that the attribute 47 ("The price is low.") is located in quadrant III (*Lower priority*) in IPA plot, but in quadrant IV (*Achieve consumer demands*) in the CIPA plot. One sample t-tests indicates that the difference in $G_2$ is negative, but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), and positive, but statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) for the attribute 47. Therefore, LFF's management could use the low prices to obtain a competitive advantage on the market. The attribute 36 ("The dishes are full.") is in quadrant IV (*Possible overkill*) in the IPA plot and in quadrant IV (*Achieve consumer demands*) in CIPA plot. One sample t-tests indicates that the differences in $G_2$ are negative, but not statistically significant, and the differences in $G_1$ are positive, but not statistically significant. The attribute 34 ("Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients.") is located in quadrant II (*Keep up the good work*) in the IPA plot and between quadrant I (*Keep an eye on competitor*) and III (*Major improvements*) in the CIPA plot, but the differences are not statistically significant for $G_1$ and $G_2$. The LFF's performance is lower than the IFF's performance for the attributes 1 ("Fast-food has a convenient location."), 17 ("Employees use simple language.") and 21 ("Fast-food communicates a young image."), which are in quadrant I (*Keep an eye on competitor*) in CIPA plot, although they were placed in quadrant III (attribute 21) or IV (attributes 1 and 17).

## 6. Conclusions and future research

The different approach of CIPA used in the present paper highlighted that IFF has a higher performance than the LFF's performance. Figure 4 indicates that LFF has a higher performance for the attributes 48 ("The schedule is convenient."), 32 ("Fast-food provides information about the number of calories."), 47 ("The price is low."), 36 ("The dishes are full.") and 34 ("Fast-food offers the possibility to add additional ingredients."). These results could be correlated with those from a previous research which has established that information relating to price and quality has a bearing on

consumers' evaluations of fast-food brands (Laroche and Toffoli, 1999). Although IFF has a higher performance than LFF, the young people prefer the latter one as it achieves to a greater extent their demands – to dine out any time of the day and to have full and cheap dishes. The results are also confirmed by the respondents' answers concerning the consumption's frequency at the two fast-foods. Hence, 44.3% of the total respondents chose LFF and 38.8% chose IFF at least once a week. Similarly, 55.7% of the total respondents chose LFF and 61.2% chose IFF at more than once a month. A similar situation was detected in other countries. Hence, although young Japanese consumers have wholeheartedly adopted foreign brands like McDonald's, their loyalty to national brands such as Mos Burger remains unwavering (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1997).

To successfully compete, the LFF should inform the young people segment about their schedule, low prices and the satiety of dishes and adopt niche marketing (Kotler, 1994; Laroche and Parsa, 2000). This is especially important in the Romanian fast-food industry, which is in the early maturity stage of its life cycle. The results of this research could be used by the LFF's management to obtain a unique position on the market and to conceive adequate marketing strategies for the young people's segment. Also, using the competition to evaluate the LFF's position on the market is an useful information for the management in order to determine the best improvements of its performance. A different CIPA helps different organizations to identify those attributes that differentiate them from the competitors and that could be used to position them in the consumers' minds. These attributes could also be used in conceiving adequate marketing strategies, with emphasize on the components of the marketing mix that differentiate the LFF from its competitors.

One limit of this paper is the fact that the research was carried out only among young people from Brașov County. Therefore, the results cannot be extended to the whole population of young people in Romania. Moreover, the research was carried out in a single area in Romania, so the results cannot be extrapolated to the whole country.

Future studies among adults and elders could highlight different attitudes and behavior in relation to fast-food consumption, the preference for other fast-foods, but also different claims as regards the supply of the preferred fast-food. In addition, further studies should consider a comparison between different consumers' segments as regards their preferences for some fast-foods, their consumption habits, but also for the importance and performance of two competing fast-foods.

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