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Local vs. International Hamburger Foodservice in the Consumer's Mind: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: Fast-food chains are everywhere and every day millions of people choose to have a break in a fast-food outlet. However, in recent years some local hamburger foodservice chains outside of the well-known international fast-food chains have found success by leveraging products linked with their territory. How do consumers value the service received in an international, rather than a local, fast-food outlet? This aspect is under-investigated in the literature, but is relevant in order to capture the main and most important differences between the two systems. Through a structured survey, consumers' perceptions of both international and local hamburger foodservice outlets in the Turin Metropolitan area (Italy) were measured and analysed. The results indicate that consumers generally have a break in an international fast-food restaurant, but the value assigned to local fast-food chains is higher than that assigned to international ones. Specifically, local fast-food chains are appreciated for particular aspects related to the supply chain (animal welfare, ethical and social aspects, the origin of the raw materials, and some other characteristics of the food). The findings contribute to a more in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour, and give an insight into the relevance of the local aspects as opposed to the international ones.

Keywords: foodservice; supply chain; consumer behaviour; fast-food; international and local chains; younger generation



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1. Introduction

Fast food is not an invention of the 20th century: the fast-food phenomenon exists everywhere and at all times (Pitte 1997). Street food is central in many geographical areas such as North America, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa (Abrahale et al. 2019; Bellia et al. 2016; Hill et al. 2016; Sezgin and Şanlıer 2016). From this point of view, Italy is a country rich in typical fast-food products, such as piadina, farinata, arancini, and focaccia (Barone and Pellerito 2020), but the need for a quick meal was also present centuries ago, in the Roman Empire (Grossi 2012) or in Bourbon Naples (Parente 2007), for example. For a long time, traditional street food and hamburgers underlined the distinction between an artisanal product and an industrial product, provoking conflicting opinions. Indeed, fast-food chains are a symbol of globalisation, exploiting an industrial and standardised production system, low prices, and speed of service, while on the other side there is the culture of food that seeks health, tradition, and ethical standards (Ritzer and Rainò 1997; Poulain 2017). Today, consumers are attracted by the authenticity of products and raw materials and the concept of 'tradition' (Guerrero et al. 2010); indeed, in recent decades, giants such as McDonald's or Subway started to pay attention to these aspects in what they offer (Crawford et al. 2015; Mathur 2017; Simi and Matusitz 2017).

Currently, the increasing attention paid to health and raw materials has been leading to various transformations in the fast-food offer, in terms of both ingredients and service:

this is also possible due the increasing success of local products and their recognition by customers (De Bernardi 2015; Kowitt 2014).

The literature focusing on the role of consumers and their loyalty, on the prediction of purchasing behaviour, and on managerial strategies provides a core of theoretical and empirical tools (Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Dahlggaard-Park 2012). The fundamental concept of consumer satisfaction measures the gap between the expectation and the perception of a service (Ciavolino and Dahlggaard 2007; Hemple 1977; Tse and Wilton 1988). Some studies focus on buy again and the attitude towards buying new products as a consequence of consumer satisfaction (Cardozo 1965; Yip et al. 2011); others highlight the psychological aspects and the concept of perceived value (Howard and Sheth 1969), and underline that consumer satisfaction is characterised by evaluative experience (Churchill and Surprenant 1982).

Many conceptual models have been proposed in the literature to measure the quality of a service; however, to the best of these authors' knowledge, consumers' perceptions of the quality of service received in international and well-known hamburger restaurants (fast-food outlets) and in local hamburger restaurants has not yet been investigated.

In this context, a multidimensional and hierarchical model is used to describe the quality of service (Brady and Cronin 2001; Dabholkar et al. 1996; Wu and Mohi 2015). A service is implemented to respond better to the needs of the consumer (Liu et al. 2017), reducing the gap between expectations and perception as much as possible. The aim is to increase re-purchase margins, the purchase of new products, and the impact of word of mouth on the acquisition of new customers (Yu et al. 2007), thus acting on the operating result. Specifically, the analysis is conducted on burger outlets in the city of Turin. We chose the expression 'hamburger foodservice' instead of the more generic 'fast food' to describe the nature of the gastronomic offer of the research area. Indeed, in addition to what we define as the International Hamburger Foodservice (IHF) of McDonald's and Burger King, which is distinctly fast-food, this study takes into consideration what we define as the Local Hamburger Foodservice (LHF) of M** Bun and L'Hamburgeria di Eataly, which do not have this feature as their main characteristic. The business of these two latter companies is serving hamburgers with particular characteristics in terms of tradition, authenticity, and origin of the raw materials.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section is dedicated to a literature review, which has a particular focus on the evolution of the fast-food industry and on the role of the traditions linked to a territory. The second section is about our materials and methods, and includes the main details about the area being analysed: the IHF and LHF industries. Here, the methods are explained. In the third section, the main results are presented and discussed, while the last section contains the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

In the last decade, the big fast-food chains have increased the levels of attention they pay to this area by implementing continuous updates. Some typical elements of a restaurant's setting, such as the care given to the interior (a studied mixture of furnishings and colours, correct and sufficient lighting, and background music that suits the tastes of the expected target) and the design of the menu, can affect the satisfaction of the consumer (Hultén 2011; Ifeanyichukwu and Peter 2018). The experience proposed to the consumer involves all the senses and exploits the power of the response to unconscious stimuli: sensory marketing is widely used to build strategies suitable for the fast-food industry (Grow and Schwartz 2014; Joe et al. 2020; Lewis et al. 2020; Thaichon et al. 2019). In this way, when a commonly frequented fast-food restaurant is quite crowded and noisy, for example, the sensory marketing choices take into consideration the most effective background music for an environment in the middle of such a flow of customers (Ifeanyichukwu and Peter 2018). The products are re-worked and the range of the offer is modified and adapted to the target and the geographical area, by means of menus that vary over time, offering local foods and seasonal news, according to glocalisation strategies (Crawford et al. 2015; Mathur 2017; Simi and Matusitz 2017). In order to attract as many consumers as possible,

some large fast-food chains have started to introduce vegetarian menus, organic products, and calorie indicators in their menus (Besson et al. 2020; Petimar et al. 2019). The classic strategies based on discounts, free meals, and collectible items, together with speed of service (which is, of course, an essential feature of international foodservice burgers), do not seem to be enough (Gheribi 2017; Lee and Lambert 2017; Mathur 2017). The menus have a proportion of fixed products, which are identifiable as the company's standard products, and a proportion of variable products (Crawford et al. 2015). Moreover, in the years of the economic crisis, the decrease in consumption linked to foodstuffs also affected fast-food giants such as McDonald's and Burger King (De Bernardi 2015; Kowitt 2014). This situation was accentuated by some 'scandals' related to the use of unhealthy products, which, undoubtedly, influenced demand to some extent (Zhu et al. 2017).

However, in the last two decades, the hamburger foodservice has developed new dimensions of product services. The LHF has proposed a different offer compared to the IHF and has emphasised the importance of the origin and provenance of raw materials and produces. The LHF is founded on local food production and, generally, on food sustainable systems. In this context, the LHF has absorbed the main principles of the Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) philosophy that has been proposed as an alternative to the dominant agro-industrial system, which is perceived as being unsustainable on an environmental level, a catalyst for social disparities, and characterised by economic hyper-centralisation to the detriment of local realities. Indeed, the AFN aims to reconnect productivity and nature, as well as producers and consumers, by means of increased product quality, the creation of short supply chains, and respect for local production and nature (Morgan 2015; Renting et al. 2003). Themes such as the wholesomeness of food, the well-being of workers and animals, and forgotten natural criteria (such as, for example, seasonality) are shown concretely through very different solutions (Forno et al. 2013; Morgan 2009). In particular, this phenomenon began with the Slow Food Movement, which was born as a result of the Braidese ferments of the 1970s and the 1987 'Slow Food Manifesto' (Petrini 2003; Andrews 2008) with a cultural revolution that introduced the concepts of tradition as innovation and that also takes into account the ethical aspects of the food supply chain (Burnier et al. 2021; Carbone 2018; García-Gudiño et al. 2021; Gross et al. 2021; Mastronardi et al. 2019; Sajdakowska et al. 2018).

Currently, in Italy and in other countries, it is possible to find organic agriculture, farmers' markets, the Slow Food movement (Petrini 2013), so-called Solidarity Purchase Groups (Schifani and Migliore 2011), consumer cooperatives, the use of crowdfunding, economic solidarity networks, factory outlets, and other circuits that are part of Alternative Food Networks (Carzedda et al. 2018; Cappella et al. 2015; Renting et al. 2003; Tregear 2011). The LHF phenomenon has followed these initiatives and has been developed in parallel with IHF.

These phenomena seem to fully demonstrate the growing possibilities and capacities for consumers to select producers and products. The introduction of short supply chains, the selection of natural and controlled raw materials, and the use of recipes and processing procedures linked to tradition and territory according to the principle of sustainability, contribute to local realities, guaranteeing a more stable profit for farmers, for example (Bonadonna et al. 2020).

The growing interest of consumers in traditional products has also been confirmed in the academic field by the scientific contributions dedicated to the topic, which significantly increased during the 2000s (Guerrero et al. 2010; Kumpulainen et al. 2018; Petrescu et al. 2020; Pícha et al. 2018). As emerged from the studies of the last 20 years, numerous definitions of traditional foods have been given in the literature (Trichopoulou et al. 2007; Weichselbaum et al. 2009), but they are mainly from the point of view of those employed in this sector, while it is essential to investigate the image that is formed in the minds of consumers (Guerrero et al. 2010). It has been highlighted that 'traditional' is a subjective concept, and therefore that the pool of 'traditional' food products is continuously transformed (Nosi and Zanni 2004). Finally, the definition of traditional can be influenced

by the media, marketing, and the different opinions of consumers who are in touch with each other (Almli et al. 2011).

The important socio-cultural trends that have developed in recent decades have made consumers more aware, attentive, and oriented, and managers have to take this into account (Arcese et al. 2015). These aspects strongly influence consumers' expectations and cannot be excluded from the set of variables used in research that aims to provide a reliable approximation of the quality of service. Moreover, consumer perceptions also depend on other elements: the importance attributed by the public to certain elements such as the design, the furnishings, the background music, the decorations, and the communication methods of the serving employees are of increasing importance, and are influenced by cultural dynamics.

On the one hand, part of the literature is focused on the relationship between consumers and IHF, highlighting the importance of service methods, menus, staff, and promotions as aspects influencing the frequency of return, establishment of relationships of trust with retailers, and environmental characteristics (Dastane and Fazlin 2017; Farahiyan et al. 2015; Jaini et al. 2015; Saghaian and Mohammadi 2018; Siddiqua and Shaw Alem 2018; Yarimoglu and Satana 2016). On the other hand, there is a lack of studies dedicated to the relationship between consumers and LHF. Starting from this consideration, we analysed the consumers' perceptions about the quality of service in international and well-known hamburger restaurants (IHF) and in local hamburger restaurants (LHF). In particular, we formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: How do consumers perceive the quality of service in international and local hamburger foodservices?

RQ2: Are there differences in terms of consumers' perceptions of the quality of service between international and local hamburger foodservices?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Hamburger Foodservice in Turin Area

Companies operating in the food sector are looking for new solutions that can answer the new needs of the market, and they have already taken certain measures. However, they are still living in a period of transition: consumption patterns are constantly changing, costs are high, and competition is growing. Several changes have already been introduced to renew the commercial offer, but the unstable revenues of the sector inform the actors involved that the offer is only partially meeting consumers' expectations. Therefore, the fast-food sector is facing a reduction in consumption caused by the economic crisis and consumers' reduced ability to spend money. In parallel with the lower spending capacity, there is a cultural ferment linked to ethical issues, higher quality standards, and the desire for new solutions.

The research was conducted in the Turin metropolitan area where, over the past 15 years, the traditional large multinational chains have been joined by a number of local hamburger sellers. The stores that record the highest consumption in this geographical area belong to four hamburger foodservice chains: McDonald's, Burger King, M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly. McDonald's and Burger King have an international profile, a number of retailers in the area under consideration and a standardised service. M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly represent the first LHF outlets with more than one store in the metropolitan area of Turin. These four companies have tried to adapt their offers to the new trends of the last few years, and have diversified their commercial propositions to meet the expectations of the market.

McDonald's and Burger King offer conventional products that are typical of IHF (hamburgers, chips, soft drinks). In the case of McDonald's, some local/typical products have been introduced, such as Piedmontese beef, Chianina meat, Calabrian red onion from Tropea PGI, and Provolone Valpadana DOP, while Burger King has chosen to update its menu from time to time with high quality products and new recipes. McDonald's is mainly chosen by consumers who want a meal in the shortest possible time: the waiting

time is between two and six minutes, while the average waiting time at Burger King is eight minutes, in line with an assemble-to-order production model. As for the price, a McDonald's meal ranges from €4.90 to €8.90, while for Burger King the price range is €3.99 to €10.

On the other hand, M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly are configured as LHF outlets, and base their commercial offers on raw materials, local ingredients, and local recipes, combined with traditional processing methods and the use of the short supply chain. Indeed, the main raw materials (beef, pork, and vegetables) are produced about 60 km from the metropolitan area of Turin, near the province of Cuneo. The price of a meal ranges from €11.50 to €14 for M** Bun, and from €13.30 to €18 for L'Hamburgheria di Eataly. The average waiting times are 15–25 min in the first case and 15–20 min in the second case, depending on the time required for the preparation of the meal on site (a make-to-order production model) (Bonadonna et al. 2019, 2020).

3.2. Methodology

Some studies (Brady and Cronin 2001; Wu and Mohi 2015) have taken into consideration the following primary dimensions: interaction quality, quality of the environment, and quality of the result. The 'quality of interaction' dimension was divided into three sub-dimensions: interpersonal interaction, problem solving, and professionalism. The 'quality of the environment' dimension was divided into the following sub-dimensions: aesthetics, atmosphere and degree of comfort of the internal environment, cleanliness in the restaurant, architecture and car park, and menu design. The third dimension, 'quality of the result', was structured in three sub-dimensions: waiting time and desired/expected experience, food quality/supply chain, and diversity and originality of the menu. Finally, in addition to the three primary dimensions used, the quality dimension of the product/market system (QP/M) was included in this study (Peri 2006).

Indeed, for an analysis that concerns Italian fast food, the data on the quality/price ratio could be useful, as there are considerable differences in the quality of the food (e.g., hamburgers, chips, draft drinks) served in different fast-food restaurants and, consequently, there are price differences that are not always in proportion to the qualitative variation of the food. The quality perceived by consumers, however, can confirm whether this gap in the quality or price is justified. Therefore, the primary dimension 'quality of the product/market system' is measured as a single sub-dimension. The objective of this variable is to investigate the relationship between the perceived quality and the price paid, in relation to the quality of the staff service, the raw materials, the food, and the overall quality of the product/service.

A questionnaire was built that covered some of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the quality of service. For each sub-dimension, different items were identified. The specific questions about the quality of the service were preceded by general questions that allowed the authors to identify the general characteristics of the consumers, such as their gender, age, employment status, preferred fast food, and frequency of going to the restaurant for a break. As regards the questions corresponding to the items of the model, a Likert scale with values from 1 to 7 was used; the respondents could also select 'NA' if they were unable to answer the specific question.

The questionnaire was administered online at the beginning of 2019 (it was closed after one week) with a virtual referral sampling technique. According to the objective of the paper, just the answers of individuals used to go to hamburger foodservice were taken into consideration (n. 227 questionnaires). Among the respondents, it was possible to identify those who had visited each of the four foodservice chains selected. Therefore, a statistical analysis was carried out and a separate analysis was conducted for each of the four groups of responses (pertaining to each of the chains identified). The questionnaire, as mentioned, presented some preliminary qualitative variables. Regarding the sample overall, by processing the answers to these questions, descriptive analysis was performed on both the qualitative and quantitative variables using the R software. Multivariate

analysis (PCA) was also carried out on the overall sample. Furthermore, descriptive statistical analysis was performed separately for each group containing the responses for each foodservice chain identified.

4. Results and Discussion

The majority of the sample was composed of women (representing 73.57% of the sample); the respondents were mostly students and workers (respectively 56.39% and 39.21%), and were generally young individuals with an average age of 27 years. The results indicate that 94.27% of the sample liked hamburger foodservice. The most popular hamburger restaurant was McDonald's (52.86%), followed by M** Bun (15.42%), Burger King (14.10%), and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly (3.52%). The majority of young people and students preferred McDonald's, while young workers chose L'Hamburgheria di Eataly. The respondents who indicated that they preferred Burger King or M** Bun had a slightly higher average age (29.31 and 29.03 years, respectively).

Regarding the frequency of visits, 48.9% of the respondents went to hamburger restaurants three or four times per year, 30.84% went monthly, 6.61% went weekly, 3.52% went once per year, and 6.17% went with other frequencies. Moreover, M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly show a clear prevalence of a visit frequency of three to four times a year (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the sample.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Sample (no.) | | 227 |
| Gender (%) | Female | 73.57 |
| | Male | 26.43 |
| Age (mean) (years) | | 26.96 |
| Occupation (%) | Student | 56.39 |
| | Worker | 39.21 |
| | Other | 4.40 |
| Preferred hamburger restaurant | McDonald's | 52.86 |
| | Burger King | 14.10 |
| | M** Bun | 15.42 |
| | L'Hamburgheria di Eataly | 3.52 |
| | Others | 8.37 |
| Visit (frequency) | once a year | 3.52 |
| | 3–4 times a year | 48.90 |
| | monthly | 30.84 |
| | weekly | 6.61 |
| | other | 6.17 |

Table 2 shows the average of the value for each sub-dimension. The results highlight that the means and standard deviations of the sub-dimensions lie, respectively, between 4.12 and 5.45 and between 1.26 and 1.75. The sub-dimension H has a better performance, indicating a general appreciation for waiting time, service time, type of experience, and related expectations (Table 2). In Appendix A (Table A1), further information dedicated to dimensions, sub-dimensions, and items of the quality of service are available.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, and variance by each sub-dimension.

| Sub-Dimensions | Mean | Standard Deviation | Variance |
|---|------|--------------------|----------|
| A—Interpersonal interaction | 4.72 | 1.43 | 2.06 |
| B—Problem solving skills | 4.79 | 1.38 | 1.93 |
| C—Professional skills | 5.07 | 1.38 | 1.92 |
| D—General questions as to the environment | 4.77 | 1.47 | 2.19 |
| E—Cleaning in the restaurant | 4.72 | 1.55 | 2.42 |
| F—Layout and design | 4.66 | 1.69 | 2.88 |
| G—Menu design | 5.09 | 1.57 | 2.5 |
| H—Restaurant experience | 5.45 | 1.26 | 1.61 |
| I—Quality of food/supply chain | 4.31 | 1.72 | 3.04 |
| L—Menu quality | 4.12 | 1.75 | 3.08 |
| M—Quality/price ratio | 4.87 | 1.50 | 2.26 |

Table 3 shows the average values for each hamburger foodservice identified. The LHF outlets obtained means with values lying between 4.78 and 5.90, while the IHF values lie between 3.86 and 5.41 (Table 3).

Table 3. Mean of sub-dimensions by each hamburger foodservice.

| Sub-Dimensions | McDonald's | Burger King | M** Bun | L'Hamburgheria di Eataly |
|----------------|------------|-------------|---------|--------------------------|
| A | 4.23 | 4.65 | 5.33 | 5.62 |
| B | 4.37 | 4.94 | 5.35 | 5.68 |
| C | 4.60 | 5.28 | 5.63 | 5.50 |
| D | 4.42 | 4.82 | 5.49 | 5.19 |
| E | 3.86 | 4.75 | 5.55 | 5.28 |
| F | 4.60 | 5.22 | 5.11 | 5.25 |
| G | 4.89 | 4.90 | 5.41 | 5.68 |
| H | 5.41 | 5.39 | 5.82 | 5.50 |
| I | 3.93 | 4.23 | 5.90 | 5.59 |
| L | 4.26 | 4.06 | 4.78 | 5.00 |
| M | 4.79 | 4.74 | 5.43 | 5.03 |

The findings indicate that the perceived quality reached a medium-high value and, de facto, confirm the expectations for all the hamburger foodservices identified. In more detail, the highest values are scored for C4 (staff speak an understandable language) with 5.839, C5 (staff are able to inform you about something that is not available that day) with 5.364, D6 (lighting of the dining room is adequate) with 5.362, E2 (pre-packaged condiments are available) with 5.635, G1 (menus are easy to read) with 5.32, G2 (menus are easy to understand) with 5.359, G4 (menus reflect the theme, image, and price range of the restaurant) with 5.396, H1 (waiting time) with 5.435, H2 (type of experience) with 5.509, H3 (service on time) with 5.374, and H4 (experience met expectations) with 5.50. Therefore, an appreciation of the service quality seems to be dependent on the professionalism of the staff, hygiene, the atmosphere, the menu design, and expectations about the overall restaurant experience.

The dimension of product/market system, which investigated the perception of the quality/price ratio, shows a satisfactory level for perceived value. In more detail, M1 (quality/price ratio as service used) scored 4.977, M2 (quality/price ratio as to raw materials used) 4.731, M3 (quality/price ratio as to food consumed) 4.864, and M4 (quality/price ratio as to product/service offered) 4.919.

The items with the lowest means are I6 (supply chain meets the needs related to animal welfare), I7 (supply chain satisfies ethical and social needs), I8 (raw materials used are of local origin), I9 (raw materials used are of national origin), L2 (proposed food is one of a kind), and L3 (proposed food cannot be prepared at home), which scored, respectively, 3.663, 3.738, 3.639, 4.052, 3.615, and 3.777. These items—i.e., I6, I7, I8, and I9 belonging to the food quality/supply chain sub-dimension and L2 and L3 belonging to the menu

quality sub-dimension—can be identified as areas of improvement for each of the four hamburger foodservices. The lowest ratings were assigned to the nature of the supply chain and therefore to animal welfare, ethical, and social needs. This is an important aspect, since it demonstrates how relevant these elements are for consumers. The lowest values were assigned precisely to ethical (or hedonistic) factors.

Moreover, in the analysis of these aspects for the four foodservices, it became evident that there is a general dissatisfaction with respect to McDonald's and Burger King, while the values assigned to these variables are definitely satisfactory for M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eataly. More in depth, some evidence emerged from items I8 and I9, i.e., respectively raw materials with local and national origin, where the typicality of food preparation is integrated with the origin of raw materials. Indeed, LHF's propose menus with regional selected ingredients e.g., Piedmontese beef, Toma Piemontese cheese, and mica bread, and promote them to the customers. Only in recent times have IHF's developed systems of valorisation of typicality with national ingredients such as Parmigiano Reggiano PDO or Bresaola della Valtellina PGI, but the respondents seemed to not perceive this improvement (Table 4).

Table 4. Specific items of food quality/supply chain and menu quality sub-dimensions by each hamburger foodservice.

| Items | Mean | McDonald's (Mean) | Burger King (Mean) | M** Bun (Mean) | L'Hamburgheria di Eataly (Mean) |
|-------|-------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| I6 | 3.663 | 3.00 | 3.37 | 5.35 | 5.66 |
| I7 | 3.738 | 3.13 | 3.44 | 5.48 | 5.33 |
| I8 | 3.693 | 2.72 | 3.48 | 5.96 | 5.62 |
| I9 | 4.052 | 3.44 | 3.48 | 6.13 | 5.75 |
| L2 | 3.615 | 3.02 | 3.37 | 4.67 | 5.37 |

Lastly, the map of the variable factors, obtained from the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and carried out on the variables of the entire questionnaire, shows the degree of correlation of the items and the level of cohesion and solidity of the model (Figure 1).

The map of the variable factors shows a dense group of items, closely related to each other, in which the majority of the variables lie and which is located in the second quadrant and in the lower area of the first. Moreover, in the first quadrant, there is a less numerous thickening of variables amongst the M, G, L, and H groups concerning, respectively, the product/market system, the menus, the waiting time, and the perception of the experience. The single factor E2, concerning the presence of pre-packaged condiments, lies on its own but has a strong correlation with respect to the groups just described. Overall, all the factors can be inscribed in an acute angle, with a new confirmation of the existence of a general correlation between all the variables that make up the dimensions of the model. The two dimensions identified through the PCA, Dim 1, and Dim 2, represent 46.88% of the sample analysed, which can be synthesised in satisfactory proportions.

The variables belonging to the sub-dimension M concerning the product/market system belong to the minor group of factors, with which they are closely related: they are located on the lower margin of this group and are, therefore, also very closely correlated with a consistent part of the largest group of items.

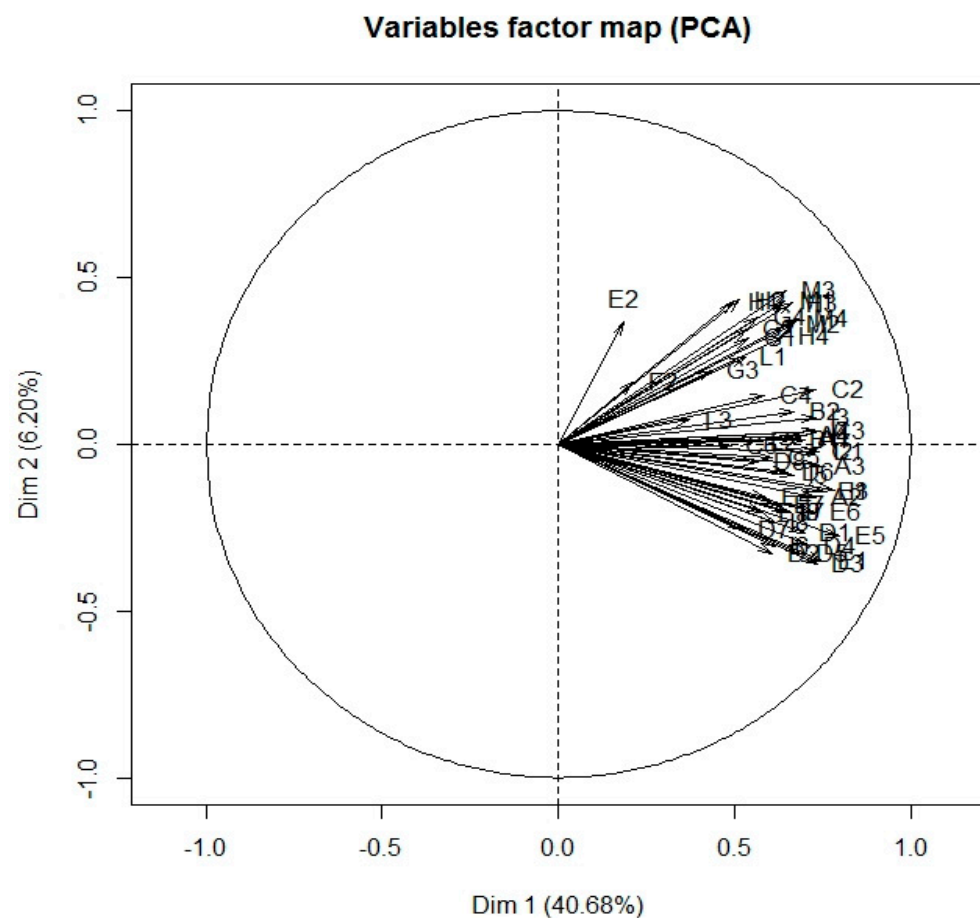


Figure 1. Variables factor map (PCA).

The findings can be compared with some observations that have previously emerged in the literature and that highlight the sensitivity of consumers towards certain topics, such as the speed of service, variety in the menus, the behaviour of the staff (Farahiyan et al. 2015), related promotional initiatives (discounts and gifts), the visual components of the brochures (Yarimoglu and Satana 2016), and the influence of social circles (Siddiqua and Shaw Alem 2018). It should be noted, on the basis of this comparison, that the IHF marketing strategies are particularly incisive for these aspects. In another recent study, however, the impact of certain factors on consumer satisfaction was analysed, and among them the intrinsic quality of the food provided was found to have a significant effect on the frequency of return to the restaurant chain (Saghaian and Mohammadi 2018). Other influential factors concern the characteristics of the environment, the structure itself, and the design of the restaurant chain (Dastane and Fazlin 2017).

The findings show a group of consumers who are sufficiently satisfied with the service time and the staff communication skills. This differs from a 2015 sector study, for example, where different consumers' opinions emerged, with a low appreciation for these variables (Jaini et al. 2015).

Regarding the comparison between IHF and LHF, the general level of consumer satisfaction was medium-high but some differences emerged for specific items. There was lower satisfaction with McDonald's and Burger King with regard to the perceived quality of the supply chain, the ethical and animal welfare issues, and the specifically selected food. On the other hand, M** Bun and L'Hamburgheria di Eatly achieved higher scores for the same items. Moreover, the diversification of products/services for LHF also seems to be evident to consumers, in line with what has emerged in other studies (Bonadonna et al. 2019; Bonadonna et al. 2020), and this diversification appears to be effective and highly appreciated by the sample involved. This positive approach highlights a marked sensitivity

of consumers towards issues such as the importance of the origin of food (Kumpulainen et al. 2018; Petrescu et al. 2020; Pícha et al. 2018) and the entire supply chain through food innovation, breeding methods, and the satisfaction of ethical and social needs (Burnier et al. 2021; Carbone 2018; Gross et al. 2021; García-Gudiño et al. 2021; Sajdakowska et al. 2018).

5. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

The results show that the younger generations are more inclined to have a break in an IHF restaurant than in an LHF one. However, looking at the level of satisfaction, IHF and LHF obtained very similar results, although there are some differences linked to a number of items considered. The research contributes to the theory giving new insights about the perception of young consumers on hamburger restaurants, presenting a comparison between international and local fast-food chains. Moreover, the study allowed us to reflect on the most important elements taken into consideration by respondents when they decide to have a frugal meal.

The foodservice models presented in this study have distinct characteristics. On the one hand, IHF is characterised by a strategy devoted to maximising efficiency by providing fast, cheap, tasty, and standardised food with small elements of personalisation. On the other hand, LHF provides slower food that is prepared using ingredients linked to the territory and tradition, with high quality standards, and provides relevant information involving the environmental sustainability of decision-making and production processes.

Although the results of the study show that respondents identify, as significant elements, animal welfare, the local origin of raw materials, and ethical and social needs in carrying out activities in the supply chain, at the same time they have a propensity to prefer IHF. This observation highlights several practical implications for fast-food operators, who should concentrate on more interaction with local supply chains for the creation of meals made from high quality raw materials.

However, this study has some limitations because of the data collected and the methodology applied. Indeed, the sample is limited to consumers resident in the study area, mainly belonging to younger generations such as Gen Y and Gen Z, and the sample size is small, mainly because of the survey technique (virtual referral sampling). In this case, the discussion has an explorative intention and compares only the main results obtained to highlight differences among hamburger foodservices. Moreover, the study opens opportunities for some future research.

Future research can go into greater depth by analysing the perception of the quality of service of different generational cohorts, to detect specific elements that are relevant to target. Moreover, it would be interesting to gain more insights into how people evaluate critical issues related to animal welfare and/or ethical aspects.

The relationship between IHF and LHF can also be analysed by looking at the roles of social media and social networks in influencing the common perception of online users. In this case, too, dividing the respondents into different generational cohorts could highlight interesting peculiarities.

Finally, it would be interesting to collect data on the perceptions of consumers in different European countries, to evaluate the critical issues within a wider area and with more socio-cultural nuances.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Dimensions, sub-dimensions, and items of the quality of service.

| Dimensions | Sub-Dimensions | Items |
|---|--|---|
| Quality of Interaction | A—Interpersonal interaction | A1—Staff has a pleasant demeanor |
| | | A2—Staff looks nice and well cared for |
| | B—Problem solving skills | A3—Staff are understanding and reassuring |
| | | A4—Staff can handle special requests |
| | C—Professional skills | B1—Staff is skilled in apologising to customers |
| | | B2—Staff are capable of handling problems and complaints |
| C1—Staff is knowledgeable about the products on offer | | |
| C2—Staff is skilled in handling requests | | |
| Quality of the Environment | D—General questions as to environment | C3—Staff shows good training and experience |
| | | C4—Staff speaks an understandable language |
| | | C5—Staff are able to inform you about something that is not available that day |
| | | C6—Staff also speaks languages other than Italian |
| | | D1—The wall decorations of the restaurant are pleasant |
| | | D2—The spaces between the tables are adequate |
| | | D3—The interior furnishings of the restaurant are pleasant |
| | | D4—The tables set up for catering are comfortable |
| | E—Cleaning in restaurant | D5—The seating is comfortable |
| | | D6—The lighting of the dining room is adequate |
| | | D7—The background music is pleasant |
| | | D8—The temperature of the dining room is pleasant |
| | F—Layout and design | E1—The perceived cleanliness is satisfactory |
| | | E2—Prepackaged toppings are available |
| G—Menu design | E3—The staff seem neat and clean | |
| | E4—The kitchen (if open) seems to be managed in a hygienically correct way | |
| Quality of the Result | H—Restaurant experience | E5—The catering areas are clean and welcoming |
| | | E6—The toilets are clean and well maintained |
| | | F1—Parking available near the restaurant |
| | | F2—The outside of the restaurant has an attractive appearance |
| | I—Quality of food/supply chain | F3—In the catering rooms can feel a pleasant scent |
| | | G1—Menus are easy to read |
| | | G2—Menus are easy to understand |
| | | G3—Menus are written in a foreign language (if any) with explanations |
| | | G4—Menus reflect the theme, image, and price range of the restaurant |
| | L—Menu quality | H1—Waiting time to sit down is reasonable |
| | | H2—The restaurant interprets the type of experience the consumer desires |
| | | H3—The staff serve the customers on time |
| | Quality of the price/quality ratio | M—Quality/price ratio (the primary dimension is not divided into sub-dimensions) |
| I1—The food is fresh and well cooked | | |
| I2—The food is attractive and tempting | | |
| I3—The food consumed meets expectations | | |
| I4—Food satisfies the sensory needs | | |
| I5—Food satisfies the desired nutritional intake | | |
| I6—The supply chain meets the needs related to animal welfare | | |
| I7—The supply chain satisfies the ethical and social needs | | |
| I8—The raw materials used are of local origin | | |
| I9—The raw materials used are of national origin | | |
| L1—The food meets the nutritional needs of consumers | | |
| L2—The proposed food is one of a kind | | |
| L3—the proposed food cannot be prepared at home | | |
| Quality of the price/quality ratio | M—Quality/price ratio (the primary dimension is not divided into sub-dimensions) | M1—Compared to the service used, the quality-price ratio is adequate |
| | | M2—Compared to the raw materials used, the quality-price ratio is adequate |
| | | M3—Compared to the food consumed, the quality-price ratio is adequate |
| | | M4—Overall, compared to the product/service used, the quality-price ratio is adequate |

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