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Impact of a Localized Marketing Strategy on an International Fast Food Chain within the Central American Region



Abstract

The main interest of this document is to describe the importance of a localized marketing strategy and its implications when operating in the fast food industry within the Central America region, at the same time of illustrate the benefits in terms of customer satisfaction, loyalty, and growth in the short and long term that this type of strategy brings into context when applied correctly. For this purpose, a survey was conducted among consumers within the region, and as result of this, a positive relation was identified among localized food menus, new menus, and the recognition of an international brand, with a better customer satisfaction perception when operating among such industry. These findings may allow companies to determine based on their actual situation, the need to include new flavors, new meals, or develop new strategies that may take advantage of an international brand.

Keywords: customer service, customer satisfaction, fast food, attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty, Central America.

Introduction

After reviewing several materials related with Marketing Management within the international context, the author of this document has identified several topics in the Central America market that could be of interest for the retail business community as a research paper. Among them, and knowing that the franchising of fast food concepts among emerging economies, such as the one in Central America, has had a significant growth in recent years (Hoffman & Preble, 2004), the author of this document believes that the concept of a localized marketing strategy within the food menus, could make a significant difference among all businesses involved in such sector and region in terms of sales and growth. Therefore, the idea of a research within such topic and its importance among retail businesses comes into context (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Becker-Olsen, Taylor, Hill & Yalcinkaya, 2011; Cayla & Arnould, 2008).

Retail business in general, have had a tremendous growth during the last years, mainly due to the creation of new channels or the use of multiple channels by such retailers. In addition to this, retail activities have also been expanded in their target markets, and new ways of interacting with consumers have arisen. Among such ways and channels the internet and new technologies play a fundamental role expanding the knowledge and interaction between retailers and consumers, which at the same time increases the possibility of launching new products in short timeframes, allowing companies to interact within different segments of consumers, thus, expanding businesses and achieving growth in the short term (Sorescu, Frambach, Singh, Rangaswamy & Bridges, 2011). Consequently, the author of this document considers that the fast food industry is not the exception, and such new ways of interaction are pushing companies to find new ways to satisfy consumers' needs to gain market share. Nevertheless, retailers continue expanding, and creating systems where consumers' needs are satisfied, and value is created and delivered to customers (Sorescu, Frambach, Singh, Rangaswamy & Bridges, 2011). Therefore, fast food companies as retailers, come to be in need to establish localized marketing strategies that may allow them gain market share and continuous growth (Harish, 2008; Cooper, 2010; Yum! Brands Inc., 2012).

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The Fast Food Industry

The fast food industry includes all companies offering what is described as a food served through a self-service counter or through a drive-through window. Such food can be prepared in advance, or may be cooked when ordered. However, the main objective of a fast food restaurant becomes to serve such food in a minimal amount of time (Bougoure & Neu, 2010). As explained by Keillor, Hult and Kandemir (2004), most of the time customers may look within such restaurants more for the quality of the food and its presentation, giving less importance to the functional elements such as the service quality, among other, even though such elements if absent may affect the future of the business.

In a global environment where fast food companies come to participate in a notorious rate (Hoffman & Preble, 2004), differences among markets are represented by a variety of factors such as culture, politics, and economics, where culture becomes the "software of the mind" and the

heart of every individual market. As a result of this, companies need to recognize the differences among markets and be aware of their specific environment, discovering and understanding the most important controllable and uncontrollable factors, and keeping in mind at the same time that any cultural force is not easy to change in the short term (Kanso & Nelson, 2002; Van Heerden & Barter, 2008).

Cultural Forces

Any values and norms common to a group of people that become their way of living, represent their culture and at the same time, come to distinguish themselves from any other group. Therefore, when operating in different countries or territories, companies need to understand the cultural differences within such places and be aware of how any specific culture works. As a result of this, culture comes to influence in depth any international marketing strategy, reason why to achieve success, culture needs to be understood and took into account when executing any marketing plan (Kanso & Nelson, 2002; Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

There are two ways of implementing a marketing strategy when going global. The first one known as standardization, comes to represent the creation of economies of scale and scope, and as a result of this, a global brand image across different markets. Such global brand image may bring synergies to those markets where standardization is applied, something that at the end may come to contribute to increase acceptance within the selected territories (Levitt, 1983; Douglas & Craig, 1986; Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007). Localization, on the other hand, takes into account the culture of the involved territories, and comes to adapt marketing strategies by considering such cultural differences to avoid have an effect on any competitive advantages that may be lost when using standardization (Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Kanso & Nelson, 2002).

Therefore, within the fast food industry, as well as in many other industries, localization has become of fundamental importance when entering new markets, especially in those markets where cultural believes and tastes are different to the ones where a company has operated in the past. That is the case of the fast food industry, where such aspect becomes even more crucial when preferences and customs are reflected on daily meals. As a result of this, companies such as Yum! Brands Inc., and many others, have been challenged when entering into new markets, not only by taking advantage of its global brands and concepts, but also on how the company may need to adapt part of their menus to embrace a new culture or to adapt its flavors, based on the new local customs. Such local customs in terms of flavors and food consumption become even more important when a market has an ethnic identity, which becomes a psychological focal point within every cultural aspect, since it comes to shape the way members of certain group think and behave (Cleveland, Laroche, Papadopoulos, Berács, Elliott, Hallberg, Rojas-Mendéz, Solano, Szamosi & Verma, 2009; Yum! Brands Inc., 2012).

Use of Localized or Standardized Marketing Strategies

The use of a localized or standardized marketing strategy will depend in a good proportion, as stated above, on the approach companies and strategists may have within certain market, based on the culture as well as the immediate need of making certain product recognizable by consumers in a short period of time. In addition to this, the fact that a brand may

already being recognized as a global brand, e.g. Coca-Cola, may also influence the type of strategy being adopted. Consequently, the use of a standardized strategy may depend in a good proportion on the ability of the company to transmit its competitive advantages within one market or segment to the other, and its need to implement a consumer-oriented strategy based on the attitudes and ideals of the target customer (Cleveland, et al., 2009; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007). Therefore, it can be inferred that the advantages of standardization become the disadvantages of localization and *visa versa*. Nevertheless, there is a middle point since it cannot be argued that there are just two ways of doing things. Consequently, there will be certain occasions where a company will use standardization without ignoring the influence of culture and behaviors, and as a result of this the company will think globally but will act locally, executing what is called a 'globalization' (Cleveland, et al., 2009; Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Kanso & Nelson, 2002).

Since there is not a unique way of doing things, as stated above, the strategy that a company may use needs to be one that may come to integrate and coordinate in an efficient way, all the necessary marketing efforts that will allow a company to get the most of the potential synergies resulting of such operations among different countries or territories. Consequently, the marketing strategy for any company will depend on aspects like the type of products, the coordination needed, and the different elements related with the production and distribution of such products, e.g. raw materials, components, technology, licensing, and know-how among others. Furthermore, other aspects to consider when evaluating such ideal strategy are the design of products, the different management needs (which includes recruiting), and the necessary logistical systems when introducing or implementing what is described here (Douglas & Craig, 1986).

In addition to what has been mentioned above, the decision on using a standardized or a localized marketing strategy within a retail or fast food company, as well as within any other company going outside their actual boundaries, may depend on the time available to enter such new market, since a localized strategy that takes into account the local culture most of the time becomes more efficient in terms of timing than a standardized one. Consequently, a standardized marketing strategy may take more time compared to a localized strategy, mainly due to the mental evolution that may be needed within a global market to assimilate a new product. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that there is a common world culture that is emerging, however, such world culture does not substitute the fact that there will never be an absolute unique and equal culture around the world. Nonetheless, as described previously, the ideal marketing strategy could be an hybrid one that allows a company to maximize time and achieve its goals at a minimal expense (Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

The Need of Adaptation within the Fast Food Industry

Based on what has been describe previously, fast food companies need to take into consideration when going into new territories all the business functions, products and marketing elements such as product design, name, positioning, packaging, theme, price, advertising materials, distribution, promotions, and customer service needed, to penetrate the desired new markets and determine the ideal strategy and way of implementation to follow, without forgetting at the same time the necessary brand identity, product focus, consistent product launches or new products, and the all-time needed word of mouth and perception among consumers. In addition to this, it is also fundamental to evaluate the transferability of the competitive advantages a

company has among its actual territories, as well as the economic freedom in similar conditions, and based on this, adapt the marketing strategy as needed to minimize risk and attain success in the short and long term (Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007). All these aspects come to influence companies to evolve and admit that most of the time adaptation is needed up to certain point, not ignoring the expertise of local managers and their needs, as well as the consumers' opinions when establishing the most adequate and efficient marketing plan (Perlmutter, 1969).

Furthermore, it is fundamental not to forget that the ultimate goal becomes to touch the emotions of consumers within the selected market and the creation of great experiences that may come to assure the short and long term success of the company (Asokan & Payne, 2008; Madden, Hewett & Roth, 2000; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). There may be certain characteristics of the culture or market being penetrated that may have a bigger weight, and consequently, due to its influence, could prevail in comparison to others. A good example of this is price, which in certain markets may influence consumers' culture or actual behaviors, and drive them try new products or experiences based on their actual preferences or perceived needs (Shavitt, Johnson & Zhang, 2011; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In addition to this, customer service, which is not perceived the same way by all consumers, comes to be the perceived judgment that customers use to compare what they have experienced in the past with their actual experience, and based on this, they come to decide if the quality of service they were expecting was received or not. Therefore, such overall evaluation by consumers constitutes their satisfaction with certain product or service, and becomes the main factor affecting customer retention. Such customer retention is defined as the long-term relationship that can be developed with a customer through his satisfaction, which becomes essential for a company's survival in the short and long term. As a result of this, to achieve such customer retention and satisfaction, employees and a good quality product exceeding customers' expectations come to play a fundamental role. There are findings suggesting that the quality of service perceived by consumers is directly related with customer's loyalty and consequently, it becomes fundamental to achieve success (Muyeed, 2012; Yuen & Chan, 2010; Di Mascio, 2010; Thenmozhi & Dhanapal, 2010; Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Therefore, the author of this document believes that such role in the fast food industry is even more important due to the fact that the interaction between companies and customers tend to happen more frequently than in other type of industries, or with other type of products. Consequently, it can be inferred that fast food menus as products of such fast food companies, bring with them the need to satisfy customers' expectations and increase customers' retention to achieve success.

Based on what has been stated above in regards to customer service, retention, and products, strategists need to have in mind that consumers will have a better reaction to messages that represent their cultural beliefs, which at the same time, as mentioned above, are deeply influenced by their cultural background. Consequently, such cultural aspects generally accepted by a society, are not the exception in the fast food industry, and need to be considered even when a global brand or product is already accepted within such society, since is not just the product by itself what influences consumption, but the attitude and behaviors towards a culture and its customs expressed when promoting such products (Zukin & Maguire, 2004; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). For that reason, the author of this document believes that if fast food menus come to contemplate the adequate variables, the customers' base of the related fast food company considering in depth such variables will grow, and consequently, will contribute to create an adequate customer's relation and retention. However, the aspects described above need to be constantly re-evaluated and adjusted as necessary.

If consumers get familiarized with products as stated above, the customers' base is most likely to continue growing until the company involved may decide stop taking into consideration the evolving preferences and culture of such consumers. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to understand the valorization process and aspirations of such target customers, since the processes and values become the forces that move consumers to acquire certain products (Holt, 1995; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Consequently, the products and image established as part of the marketing strategy need to take into consideration what people care about, and make sure such consumers feel that they are being listened and taken into account when creating and promoting such products. Therefore, cultural sensitivity cannot be ignored to succeed in different cultures, and especially within a global environment and strategy (Mooij, 2010).

Based on all what has been explained above, understanding local cultures, adapting the actual strategy of the company when necessary, and reviewing the short and long-term goals before entering a new market, contribute to define the necessary approach to succeed (Couturier & Sola, 2010). Consequently, to maintain a fast food company growing and succeeding, different aspects need to be evaluated. Among such aspects, the hypothesis that such localization becomes fundamental to increase sales when a fast food company enters a new market, as well as the question if localized flavors should be considered part of such localization, and consequently, play a fundamental role when penetrating new markets in emerging economies within the fast food industry, come to be of fundamental importance to understand how the fast food industry evolves in a global environment.

The Central America Region

Taking into consideration that emerging economies are having a significant growth in retail and franchising, and that restaurant franchising is having the most significant growth (Hoffman & Preble, 2004), the case of Central America as an emerging region, comes into context. Guatemala, which due to its similarity with other countries in Central America could represent the emerging economies in such region and among Latin America up to certain point, gives the reader an idea of the way countries within the Central America region evolve. Guatemala is the largest economy within the Central America region, and as stated above is the typical country of Central America where micro, small and medium companies represent 97% of the businesses. It has the largest GDP among the countries considered part of Central America, including Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica (not including the Caribbean which includes Dominican Republic), and has an estimated population of more than 15 million people up to 2013 (Parnell, Spillan & Singh, 2006; Spillan, Parnell & Virzi, 2011; ACAN-EFE, 2013; CIA, 2012). In correlation with this, the study of how fast food international companies, such as Yum! Brands Inc. apply localization strategies in emerging economies, such as, but not limited to, Central America, and within different cultures, becomes of special interest since emerging economies have become a target in recent times due to the wide variety of opportunities available to expand the operations of similar multinational companies (Yum! Brands Inc., 2012). Therefore, as stated by Spillan, et al. (2011), Guatemala's middle class, which is used as an example for this analysis of an emerging economy within the Central American region, demands relatively high value, and consequently, such demand drives companies to develop singular differentiation strategies that come to support the linkage of consumer purchase decision factors with such organizational strategies, taking into account what has been discussed previously within this document. Based on all this information, Central America becomes a region of interest for the purpose of this research.

Hypothesis

As a result of all the previous concepts and research, the author of this document considers that the actual research literature on how international corporations apply localized marketing strategies in emerging economies, could be benefited by studying the use of localized fast food menus or meals in a region such as Central America, expanding the actual knowledge on how this type of strategies contribute to increase sales. Consequently, the following hypotheses come to be of significant importance to understand better the impact of a localized fast food menu as part of a localized marketing strategy, and how such menus contribute to increase sales and customer satisfaction among consumers.

The defined hypotheses are as follows:

H1: There is a significant positive relation between the presence or absence of a local flavor in a fast food menu, and customer satisfaction.

H2: The constant use of new fast food menus helps increase customer satisfaction.

H3: The fact that a company may be recognized as an international fast food company helps increase the perceived customer satisfaction among consumers.

Method

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how the use of a localized marketing strategy within a fast food company operating in the Central America region (including the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica), comes to affect the customer service perception among consumers. In addition to this, the preferences of the consumers in regards to the questions specified as part of the survey, will be used to validate the hypothesis described above. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that concepts such as customer service and its relation to the use of local recipes, may have different significances within the same region or market depending on the type of business, the front line employees, and even the income of the consumers, among other, since the definition of service depends on the previous experiences and knowledge of who is describing such service (Di Mascio, 2010; Thenmozhi & Dhanapal, 2010). Nevertheless, this research aims to identify general findings in terms of consumers' perceptions which at the end may open the gate for future and more specific analysis.

As a result of what has been stated above, the present document comes to reach the following objectives:

- Understand the correlation between the availability of a localized fast food meal and the customer service perception, to determine if such correlation means that a good customer service perception is positive correlated to the availability of such localized meal.
- Understand the average importance of international fast food brands in Central America compare to local brands, and its perception in terms of customer satisfaction.

- Understand the correlation of changing constantly fast food menus against the customer service perception among consumers of such fast food companies.

Sample, Data Collection and Research Questions

The population used for this research includes all the potential consumers of fast food within the Central America region with an age of 18 years and above. For this purpose, a survey was promoted among consumers of malls and retail workers in the Central America region through the Internet, using for such purpose Facebook ads which targeted users of such platform with a high-school degree, with more than 18 years of age, and working or living among the Central America region. In addition to this, a written survey was also promoted among mall's visitors, consumers, and retail workers within such region. Last but not least, secondary data of peer review research papers as well as companies' annual reports were used as a reference when interpreting the results of such surveys.

The following demographic information was included in all versions of the survey mentioned above:

- Name (optional)
- Phone (optional)
- Email (optional)
- Gender (male, female)
- Marital Status (married, single)
- Age (under 20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, above 50)
- Educational level (secondary education, bachelor degree, graduate school)
- Occupation (civil servant, retired, house wife, student, worker, self-employed, unemployed, private sector employee, other)
- Income level (less than US\$500 per month, US\$501-US\$1000, US\$1001-US\$2000, US\$2001-US\$3000, US\$3001-US\$5000, above US\$5000)

At the end of the survey's collection process, 201 surveys were accumulated during one month between June and July 2013, and 114 surveys were selected due to its 100% compliance in terms of answers.

The questions included in the survey were as follows:

- 1) Does a fast food menu or meal with a local recipe and/or flavor included, makes you buy more in a fast food company in your country of origin where it is offered?
- 2) If certain fast food company does not offer new meals constantly, do you avoid to go to such company, and consequently, buy less frequently from such company?
- 3) Do you prefer to buy more from an international fast food company than from a local fast food company in your country of origin?
- 4) Does the fast food company where you buy more frequently offers what you consider is a good customer service?

The survey was performed in Spanish (see Appendix A for reference) and records have been kept for future review.

Scales

The survey designed for the research contains two sections. The first section was used to capture the demographic information related with the sample as described previously. The second section contains 4 questions as mentioned above, and a 5 point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree ... 5=Strongly Agree) for each question, which was used for testing the hypotheses described within this document.

Analysis Method

To achieve the objectives described above, and to analyze their importance among consumers in emerging markets as explained previously, the used 5 point Likert-scale came to allow the author of this document to gather the necessary data to calculate the mean and correlations among the questions described previously, as well as other statistical information that was needed to interpret respondents' perceptions such as standard deviation for the overall results on each topic.

Results

Participant Profile

Demographic results of a total of 114 valid surveys were as follows:

- Gender: Male 50.00%, Female 50.00%
- Marital Status: Married 57.02%, Single 42.98%
- Age: Under 20 0.88%, 21-30 35.96%, 31-40 33.33%, 41-50 26.32%, Above 50 3.51%
- Educational Level: Secondary Education 21.93%, Bachelor Degree 64.04%, Graduate School 14.04%
- Occupation: Civil Servant 8.77%, Retired 0.88%, House Wife 1.75%, Student 5.26%, Worker 16.67%, Self-Employed 22.81%, Unemployed 5.26%, Private Sector Employee 35.96%, Other 2.63%
- Income Level: Less Than US\$500 Per Month 33.33%, US\$501-US\$1000 30.70%, US\$1001-US\$2000 25.44%, US\$2001-US\$3000 6.14%, US\$3001-US\$5000 2.63%, above US\$5000 1.75%

Some important facts of the participant profiles are as follows:

- Genders are split 50% each.
- 57.02% are married.
- Most of the participants age is between 21-30 years old (35.96%) and between 31-40 years old (33.33%).
- 78.08% of the participants have an university degree.
- 35.96% of the participants belong to the private sector, and 22.81% are self-employed.
- 64.03% of the participants earn \$1000 or less per month, and 33.33% earn \$500 or less per month.

In addition to this, by analyzing the IP address which was requested from all participants at the time of filling-up the survey, the country of resident was established for the sample of 114 participants and the following results were obtained:

- 5.26% from Costa Rica
- 16.67% from El Salvador
- 38.60% from Guatemala
- 18.42% from Honduras
- 16.67 from Nicaragua

4.39% of respondents didn't have an identifiable IP address.

Correlations, Direct and Indirect Effects

To determine the validity of the hypotheses described above, the correlation between questions one and four, two and four, and three and four were analyzed, and consequently, the following results and effects were identified:

For H1, " There is a significant positive relation between the presence or absence of a local flavor in a fast food menu, and customer satisfaction ", correlation between question one and four was analyzed and a result of +8.002% was obtained. Therefore, it can be inferred that by having a positive correlation, when question one is positively answered, question four will be also answered in a positive way, which means that when there is a local flavor offered as part of the menu, customer satisfaction perception will also improve among consumers, and *vice versa*, when there is not offered a local flavor, customer satisfaction perception may also decrease. Consequently, the hypothesis may be considered as valid.

For H2, "The constant use of new fast food menus helps increase customer satisfaction", correlation between question two and four was analyzed and a result of -15.176% was obtained. Therefore, it can be inferred that when no new fast food menus are offered, customer satisfaction will decrease, and *vice versa*. Therefore, the hypothesis may also be considered as valid. For this case, is important to notice that the question was made in a way that "strongly agree" could mean that a customer strongly agrees with the fact that if a new menu is not offered, such customer will avoid to buy from the fast food company involved as much as possible. Therefore, such negative correlation comes to verify the hypothesis mentioned above.

For H3, "The fact that a company may be a recognized as an international fast food company helps increase the perceived customer satisfaction among consumers", correlation between question three and four was analyzed and a result of +12.834% was obtained. Therefore, it can be inferred that customers buying from an international fast food company, perceive such company as a better customer service, and *vice versa*. Such correlation means than when question three is answered as a strongly agree, question four will tend to be answered as an agree or strongly agree too. Consequently, hypothesis three is considered valid.

In addition to the validation of the hypotheses above, the following means and standard deviations were obtained from each question described within this document:

- Question one: Mean 3.06, Standard Deviation 1.16.
- Question two: Mean 2.98, Standard Deviation 1.17.
- Question three: Mean 3.05, Standard Deviation 1.25.
- Question four: Mean 3.66, Standard Deviation 1.27.

Conclusions and Discussion

As a result of all what has been described within this document, it can be concluded that when localizing fast food menus, customer satisfaction's perception tends to grow on the positive side, confirming that a localized marketing strategy taking into consideration local customs and values, helps increase up to certain point the attractiveness towards a new product within a new market, and makes valid the fact than in the Central America region due to the findings in this document, this principle will apply to the fast food companies and their menus (Kanso & Nelson, 2002; Van Heerden & Barter, 2008; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Cleveland, Laroche, Papadopoulos, Berács, Elliott, Hallberg, Rojas-Mendéz, Solano, Szamosi & Verma, 2009).

Another aspect to consider is the fact that innovation in the fast food menus comes also to affect customer's satisfaction perception among consumers of a fast food company within Central America. As stated on H2, if new menus are not offered, customer satisfaction perception will tend to decrease. Therefore, it is clear that interaction with consumers and the introduction of new products comes to benefit the perception among them, and consequently, contributes to exceed their expectations to the point that may contribute to increase their satisfaction. As a result of this, innovation cannot be ignored since it comes to stimulate the necessary brand differentiation and demand in any marketing strategy that may involve fast food menus, especially within a global environment. Consequently, the innovation process should be dynamic and constant, when necessary, to remain competitive and retain actual customers specially on those areas where the company has developed a competitive advantage (Bowonder, Dambal, Kumar & Shirodkar, 2010; Francesca, Ciommi, Donatella & Enrico, 2010).

Last but not least, through this document has also been validated the fact that in the Central America region an international fast food company may have a competitive advantage by using what is considered a global brand, and consequently, may benefit of being associated with a better service or quality, thus increasing customer's perception and satisfaction. Therefore, a global brand due to the prestige developed through its cultural awareness and actions, becomes commonly associated with status, prestige, and quality, which allows such brand to develop an adequate reputation that contributes to achieve a better customer service perception, compare to a company not recognizable as a global brand. Nevertheless, it becomes fundamental to understand that global brands are developed with time, and that depending on the culture and customs of the market being penetrated, if such cultural aspects are not handled correctly they become a disadvantage compared to local options (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Jun, Lee & Gentry, 2005; Harish, 2008).

Finally, a good customer service brings with it more customer loyalty, and such customer loyalty means more sales, growth, and even survival within difficult times. Therefore, as stated previously, customer perception plays a fundamental role within any company since it comes to warrant up to certain point, the short and long term success of such organization (Grewal, Krishnan & Lindsey-Mullikin, 2008; Sainy, 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

This research paper has been concluded with various limitations. Among the ones identified by the author of this document is the fact that 70% of the surveys were obtained online, and consequently, the sample includes only those people filling the established criteria, and willing to answer the survey. Therefore, the psychological situations and general conditions of the participants are unknown, and as a result of this, the reliability of the answers could be questionable. Based on this, it becomes also possible that the sample may not represent all the involved population within the Central America region, and consequently, as a result of this, generalizations may become difficult to be totally supported. This is also reflected on the standard deviation of each question in the survey, where the non-predictability observed is high. Therefore, a much bigger sample population is recommended for future studies in order to improve accuracy of correlations and results (Ross, Westerfield & Jaffe, 2002; Corrado & Jordan, 2002).

In regards to future research, since this study is mainly focus on fast food companies within the Central America region, products from different industries or type of companies, as well as consumers from wider regions, or other specific territories, may be of interest to perform similar studies. In addition to this, a more specific study is recommended to analyze the effect of customer perception on loyalty, among consumers, within the fast food industry, since it has been identified as a fundamental aspect to attain success in the short and long term.

Last but not least, the ideal frequency to innovate, as well as the ideal time to introduce new menus or products within such fast food companies becomes also of special interest for future research, since the subject is most of the time considered fundamental to avoid mistakes and waste within such type of companies. Additionally, the analysis of the differences and impact that the multiple subjects discussed in this document may have based on different demographics such as gender, income level, or age, may also become important for future studies.

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Appendix A

Información General

- Nombre: _____
- Teléfono (opcional): _____ Email (opcional): _____

Información Demográfica (marque con una X donde corresponde)

- Género: Masculino Femenino
- Estado Civil: Casado Soltero
- Edad: Menos de 20 años Entre 21-30 Entre 31-40 Entre 41-50 Arriba de 50
- Educación: Educación Primaria o Secundaria Universitaria Maestría o Doctorado
- Ocupación: Servidor Público Retirado Ama de Casa Estudiante Trabajador Negocio Propio Desempleado Sector Privado Otro
- Nivel de Ingresos: Menos de US\$500 por mes US\$501-US\$1000 US\$1001-US\$2000 US\$2001-US\$3000 US\$3001-US\$5000 Más US\$5000

Instrucciones: Marque con un CIRCULO entre los números 1 a 5 el número que más le parezca, siendo 1-Muy poco, 2-Poco, 3-Algunas Veces, 4-Casi Siempre y 5-Mucho, según corresponda a su respuesta en cada pregunta. Esta información será utilizada en la elaboración del trabajo de investigación "El Impacto de una Estrategia de Mercadeo Localizada en una Cadena Internacional de Comida Rápida dentro de la Región Centroamericana".

PREGUNTAS:

1) Una comida o menú de comida rápida hecho con una receta local (del país) o un sabor local incluido, le hace comprar más en una compañía de comida rápida en su país de origen donde se está ofreciendo?

Respuesta: (Muy poco) 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 (Mucho)

2) Si una compañía de comida rápida no ofrece nuevos platos de comida constantemente, usted evita ir a dicha compañía, y consecuentemente compra menos en dicha compañía?

Respuesta: (Muy poco) 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 (Mucho)

3) Usted prefiere comprar más en una compañía internacional de comida rápida que en una compañía de comida rápida local en su país de origen?

Respuesta: (Muy poco) 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 (Mucho)

4) La compañía de comida rápida donde usted compra más frecuentemente ofrece lo que usted considera es un buen servicio al cliente?

Respuesta: (Muy poco) 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 (Mucho)