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Competitiveness Factors In Smes Of The Gastronomic Sector In Ibagué – Colombia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to make an analysis of the identifiable factors of competitiveness in the companies of the gastronomic sector in the city of Ibague - Colombia, Competitiveness is measured through a questionnaire designed from a competitiveness map from the Inter-American Development Bank. Variables include quality assurance, human resources, innovation, information and communication technology, accounting and finance were collected. It´s based on a bibliographic review and a correlational statistical exercise carried out with gastronomic commercial establishments in the city during the months of April to august 2022. The results indicate that on average the firms have a level of competitiveness. This implies opportunities for improvement in all variables, but mainly in human resources.

Keywords: Competitiveness, SMEs, competitive advantage, gastronomy, supply chain, ICT, Human Resources.

Introduction

The Colombian government through the Law 905 of 2004 made a categorization of the enterprises based on two factors, the assets expressed in minimum wages and the total number of direct employees, this distribution gave the line for analyze the companies that was chosen.

The contribution of MSMEs to the Colombian economy is reasonably huge to the GDP, especially in medium size cities like

Ibague, where according to the data given by the Ibague's chamber of Commerce (2022) (CCI forward) the business tissue is composed in a 96% by micro enterprises, the percentage of small companies is reduced to barely the 3%, medium companies to 0.6% and big ones to 0.1%.

In the same way several companies are facing internal changes in a lot of ways since internal factors until external changes of the context traying to get acquired that retribution in terms of de time, cost and schedule of activities.

Table 1. Classification of the enterprises according to the Law 905 of 2004

SIZE	**ASSETS IN MINIMUM WAGE**	**EMPLOYEES**
MICRO	Until 500	From 1 to 10
SMALL	From 501 to 5000	From 11 to 50
MEDIUM	From 5001 to 30000	From 51 to 200
BIG	More than 30000	More than 200

Source: Prepared by the authors

The post pandemic economic dynamics and the prevailing changes in consumer habits, has forced to all the organizations to make a renewal in terms of innovation and digitalization of its process and services, most of companies has made considerable investments in terms of Backoffice and automating several internal processes as accounting, stocking, supply chain and distribution. Although is identified that sometimes these efforts are not synonymous with an improvement in terms of incomes and rentability. Specifically, because the mortality rate of these companies increases every year.

This is why the measurement of those determining factors in terms of competitiveness is carried out for companies that have managed to grow and remain despite different circumstances over time. To define competitiveness, it is necessary to determine the level of analysis, such as the analytical space in which economic agents are located according to their level of macro and micro aggregation.

Considering this background, the objective of the research is defined to measure the level of competitiveness of restaurants categorized as small and medium-sized businesses in the city of Ibague, based on the Competitiveness Map of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), using the directory of the Ibague Chamber of Commerce, to define the objects of study. To achieve the objective, the article is structured in five sections. The first is the present one where the reader is introduced to the topic, section two defines the methodology used, the third section presents the results and at the end it is concluded.

The IDB model was considered as a basis to achieve the objective of the research, adapting it to the characteristics of the restaurant sector. Selecting four variables from the map: quality assurance, human resources, information systems and accounting and finance; and incorporating the innovation variable. The latter is incorporated given the need to renew products on the menu that restaurants must carry out.

Methodology

Currently, several models can be implemented to measure competitiveness, from Porter's diamond to more modern quantitative analyses. The IDB Competitiveness Map proposal is made up of eight areas (variables), which are: strategic planning, procurement, quality assurance, marketing, accounting and finance, human resources, environmental management, and information systems (Saavedra, 2010). This model was demonstrated as a basis to achieve the objective of the research, adapting it to the characteristics of the restaurant sector.
Selecting four variables from the map: quality assurance, human resources, information systems and finance and accounting; and incorporating the innovation variable. The latter is incorporated given the need to renew products on the menu that restaurants must offer.

Considering the previous concept, it can be determined that this research, according to its purpose and scope, is correlational, because it seeks to determine whether quality assurance, training and motivation of human resources, innovation in processes, product, organization and marketing, information and communication technologies, and accounting and finance (independent variables) influence the competitive success of international cuisine restaurants (dependent variable). The above means that specifically for this study, we sought to observe the degree of relationship between the values obtained in the five variables indicated and competitiveness.

The collection of information began in April 2022 and ended in August of the same year. The field work consisted of applying a survey to the general managers or owners of high cuisine restaurants registered with the Ibague chamber of commerce as SMES. The selected population was the city's international cuisine restaurants categorized as SMES. As the population N=32, in principle it was intended to carry out a population study, however when going to the establishments the following was found: three had closed and twelve did not agree to answer the questionnaire, therefore the research was carried out with non-probabilistic sampling of volunteer subjects, whose sample n=17, that is, represents 53.12% of the population.

The instrument was designed with 75 questions, a pilot study was carried out in four restaurants, observations were received that allowed the instrument to be improved, in the end the questionnaire included 78 questions, divided into five blocks, one per variable. The reliability of the instrument was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, obtaining a value of 0.934 for the entire questionnaire. The reliability results for each of the blocks (questions per variable) with which the independent variables are measured are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Variables and Cronbach's Alpha

VARIABLE	**ITEMS**	**CRONBACH'S ALPHA**
Quality assurance	Questions 1 - 12	0.828
Innovation	Questions 13 - 33	0.806
Human Resources	Questions 34 - 51	0.827

TIC'S	Questions 52 - 61	0.892
Finance and accountant	Questions 62 - 78	0.759

Source: Prepared by the authors

The previous variables are located at values above 0.75, which means that it measures what it should measure. According to Ruiz (1998) cited by Pelekais et al. (2007) the variables quality assurance, innovation, human resources, and ICT have a very high reliability coefficient, while for the accounting and finance variable it is high.

Results

First, the object of study is described, indicating that restaurants on average have been in operation for 8 years, with a standard deviation of 9,906 years. In relation to the manager who responded to the survey, the statistics illustrate that on average he has worked for the company for 9.47 years with a standard deviation of 9.69 years. Table 2 illustrates the results obtained by each restaurant in each of the independent variables.

Regarding the quality assurance variable, the average score is 52.18 points, that is, it is located at the acceptable quality level; 47% of the establishments, according to their evaluation, are at the high-quality level; 29% of them are classified as medium quality, and it is notable that only one establishment obtained 38 points, which places it in the low quality level.

Table 3. Assessment of restaurant practices according to variables

RESTAURANT	QUALITY	INNOVATION	HUMAN RESOURCES	ICT	FINANCE AND ACCOUNTANT
1	60	88	86	50	81
2	48	61	70	31	56
3	50	86	71	38	60
4	57	90	68	44	75
5	38	79	61	33	63
6	55	81	77	40	79
7	52	79	70	37	55
8	52	79	69	39	71

9	49	68	69	38	62
10	51	64	70	28	68
11	55	73	59	24	76
12	55	80	72	28	81
13	52	80	70	38	65
14	51	79	66	45	79
15	44	72	65	37	72
16	56	55	42	31	65
17	62	82	81	47	82
AVERAGE	52.18	76.24	68.59	36.94	70

Source: Prepared by the authors

The topic of innovation, the average rating reached 76.24 points, which means that in general the restaurants are innovative, the particular analysis of the results indicates that five restaurants (29%) were evaluated with a high level of innovation, twelve of They (70%) have a medium level. In relation to the human resources variable, the average score is 68.59 points, that is, personnel management for competitiveness purposes is located at a medium level.

Particularly noteworthy are three (17.6%) restaurants that were evaluated with a high level in Human Resources, thirteen (76.47%) are working with a medium level and only one of the restaurants is working with a low level, so it is determined that the variable has an area of opportunity in restaurants. In the case of ICT, four (23.52%) restaurants were rated with a high level; ten (58.82%) are working at a medium level and three (17.64%) are working at a low level.

That represents an area of opportunity to use different hardware, software and tools. communication to facilitate both the attention of diners and the control of tasks and inventories in the restaurant. Finally, the accounting and finance results indicate that five (29%) of the restaurants have a high level in managing this variable; twelve (70.58%) are working with a medium level. Therefore, it is determined that this variable is located at the medium to high level in relation to its contribution to the competitiveness of the restaurant. The sum of the results of each of the variables gives the competitiveness score of each restaurant, which is valued according to the scale intensity described in table 4.

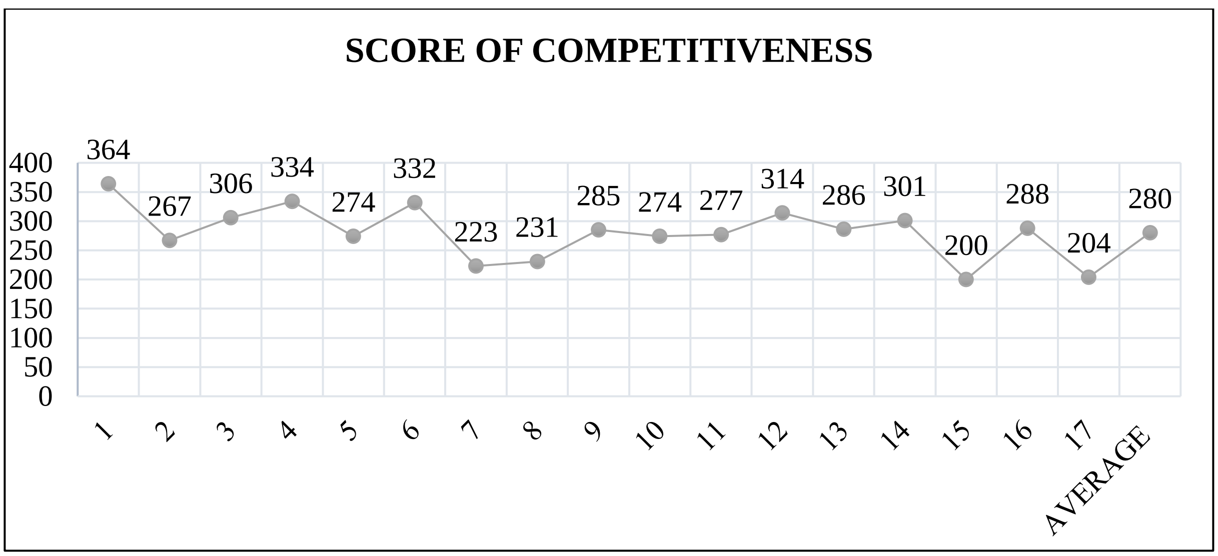
Table 4. Competitiveness intensity scale

SCORE RANGE	LEVEL OF COMPETITIVENESS
78 - 154	Poor
155 - 232	Low
233 - 310	Medium
311 - 382	High

Source: Prepared by the authors

Figure one illustrates the results of the competitiveness variable of the objects of study, in addition includes the average level, which is located at 280 points, that is, the restaurants have on average a medium level of competitiveness. Six establishments have ratings below average, this means that they have competitiveness problems, so their operation is at risk.

Figure 1. Level of Competitiveness in Restaurants



Source: Prepared by the authors

The figure two illustrates the results of each of the variables regarding competitiveness, purpose presenting it is to highlight that apparently the innovation variable is the one that contributes the most to the define the restaurant's competitive position. To verify this, a correlation analysis is made.

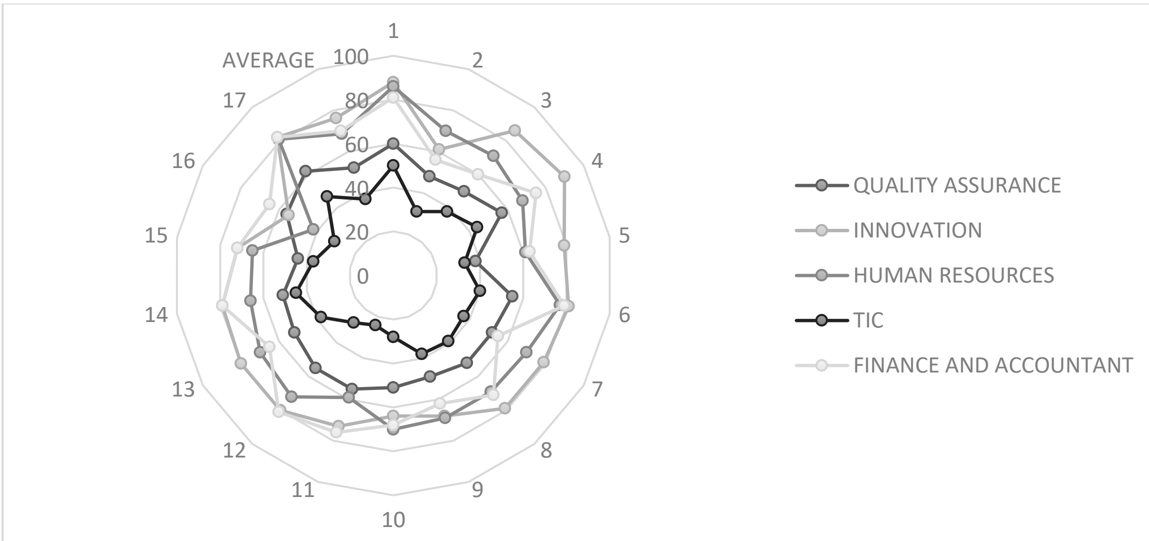
Table 5 illustrates the results of the performance of the correlation analysis through the Spearman Rho coefficient given that the variables were measured indirectly, and an ordinal scale was used for their measurement.

The results indicate that the quality variable is related to the innovation and accounting and finance variables; The HR variable (human resources) is only related to the innovation variable; The ICT variable is related to the innovation and accounting and finance variables; while the competitiveness variable is related to all the independent variables, but to a lesser extent with the HR variable and to a greater extent with the ICT variable.

Innovation is a variable that explains the variation in competitiveness by 75.16% (R2), which demonstrates its relevance, a result that coincides with the arguments of Lee (2008), which highlights innovation, technological advancement, effective management of activities in the organization, the brand, the quality of products and services, as well as human capital, as vital sources of competitiveness for firms. In the same sense, Jiménez, Martínez and González-Benito (2008) mention that product innovation is considered one of the practices that most improves competitiveness and business growth.

The human resources variable only explains the variation in competitiveness by 31.92% (R2), a fact that contrasts with the arguments of Thurow (1993) cited by García and Serrano (2003), which establishes: in the 21st century, specialized people are the only lasting competitive advantage, which is why the development of the skills of the workforce is the dominant competitive weapon of this century.

Figure 2. Evaluation of Competitiveness Variables in Restaurants



Source: Prepared by the authors

The figure above shows the values resulting from measuring the independent variables with the instrument. It stands out that the variable that least impacts Competitiveness is quality and the one that has the greatest impact is innovation. Certainly, all the variables add to competitiveness but in this innovation, sector is of great relevance.

Table 5. Correlations Among Variables

	YEARS OF SERVICE	**QUALITY**	**INNOVATION**	**HUMAN RESOURCES**	**ICT**	**FINANCE AND ACCOUNTANT**	**COMPETITIVITY**
YEARS OF SERVICE	1	-0.198	0.026	-0.141	0.254	0.217	0.002
QUALITY	-0.198	1	0.569	0.305	0.398	0.629	0.619
INNOVATION	0.016	0.596	1	0.549	0.709	0.526	0.867
HUMAN RESOURCES	-0.141	0.305	0.549	1	0.406	0.158	0.565
ICT	0.254	0.398	0.709	0.406	1	0.673	0.868
FINANCE AND ACCOUNTANT	2.217	0.629	0.526	0.158	0.673	1	0.74

Source: Prepared by the authors

The table five shows the results of the correlation analysis using the Spearman Rho coefficient between the independent and dependent variables. Illustrating that there is a direct linear relationship between some of them, highlighting that competitiveness has a direct linear relationship with the variable’s innovation and ICT.

In accordance with this, De la Cruz Osorio, M., & Villegas, C. D. M. (2013). Points out that there is a general consensus on the fundamental importance of human resources in organizations, recognizing that their management is key to the progress and achievement of the company's objectives. A possible cause of the result obtained may be the way in which human resources are managed in the objects of study, since according to (Davenport, 2000) human capital includes skill, experience and knowledge, however a result of this research illustrates that most restaurants do not provide frequent staff training, which represents an area of opportunity.

The ICT variable obtained the highest ρ result, equivalent to explaining 75.34% of the variation in competitiveness (R2). Result supported by Bond and Huston (2003) and Prasad, Ramamurthy and Naidu (2001), who indicate that the use of ICT constitutes a true source of competitive advantage; It is worth mentioning that in this research it was found that the restaurants with the most use of ICT are those that reach higher levels of competitiveness, therefore it is inferred that this variable represents an area of opportunity.

Conclusions

The present study suggests that competitiveness in restaurants is mainly related to five variables, which are: innovation, human resources, quality assurance, ICT and accounting and finance. The first of them is very important to determine customer loyalty, given that their continuous assistance is sought to taste dishes, which at the same time should not be monotonous, which is why restaurants must continually (seasonally) renew its menu, in order to offer a wide variety to its customers.

The human resources variable highlights the relevance of human capital in this sector, where a chef is often depended on to maintain the quality, presentation, flavor and safety of the dishes. Hence the importance of having adequate human resources management, where strategies are contemplated for their permanence or replacement in case they leave the company. ICT is another variable with a great impact on competitiveness, considering the development and penetration of social networks, companies in general and restaurants specifically should include them in their marketing and advertising strategies.

Tools must also be used to have better inventory control given that many inputs and raw materials are perishable. Regarding the results of assessing competitiveness, it can be inferred that in general the small and medium-sized business restaurants in the city of Ibague are competitive, but they must work in the areas of opportunity presented by the variables to consolidate their permanence in the market. market. A limitation of the research is having considered only one sector within the sector and not having carried out the study at the population level.

In forward research, it is important to assess competitiveness by incorporating other variables such as the management of intangibles, particularly knowledge, brands, and in the sector, what is related to recipes, in order to have results that allow feedback to companies so that they take actions. that provide them with significant competitiveness that helps them be profitable and transcend in the market.

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