



# Business Adaptive Strategies in Crisis: The Case of Joshua's Shoarma Grill

*A case study of the strategic response to the Covid-19 Crisis from a  
Portuguese restaurant chain*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 crisis pandemic, and its consequent restrictions, forced many companies to reinvent themselves and innovate to keep being active in the Portuguese economy. The following dissertation, presented in the form of a case study, has as subject Joshua Shoarma Grill and focuses on the strategies implemented in response to the challenges faced during the pandemic years.

Joshua's Shoarma Grill is a Portuguese restaurant chain that is present in the main shopping centers of the country, which represents two of the most affected sectors by the COVID-19 restrictions. The restaurant sector faced constant rules and restriction changes throughout the pandemic and the shopping centers were almost completely closed during the lockdown months of the crisis. As a consequence, Joshua's Shoarma was forced to reinvent and innovate their brand, which meant making several crucial changes to find new ways to reach their clients and create new channels of revenue for the sake of successfully continuing operating during the crisis.

The purpose of this case study is to serve as a pedagogical instrument for the students to explore the application of strategic management concepts, in a real case scenario, on how to successfully keep the company operating during the Covid-19 crisis.

The information in the case study was attained through interviews, news and online resources available on their website and social media.

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## **Resumo**

A crise causada pela pandemia do COVID-19, e as suas conseqüentes restrições, obrigaram muitas empresas a reinventar-se e a inovar para se manterem ativas na economia portuguesa. A seguinte dissertação, apresentada na forma de um caso de estudo, tem como tema a Joshua's Shoarma Grill e foca-se nas estratégias implementadas para responder aos desafios enfrentados durante os anos da pandemia.

Joshua's Shoarma Grill é uma cadeia de restauração portuguesa que está presente nos principais centros comerciais do país, dois dos setores mais afetados pelas restrições do COVID-19. O setor de restaurantes enfrentou constantes mudanças de regras e restrições durante a pandemia e os centros comerciais foram quase totalmente encerrados durante os meses de confinamento da crise. Como consequência, Joshua's foi forçada a reinventar-se e inovar a marca, o que significou fazer várias mudanças cruciais, encontrar novas maneiras de alcançar os seus clientes e criar novos canais de receita para continuar a operar durante a crise.

O objetivo deste caso de estudo é servir como instrumento pedagógico para que os alunos explorem conceitos de gestão estratégica, num cenário real, sobre como manter a empresa em funcionamento durante a crise do Covid-19.

As informações neste caso de estudo foram obtidas através de entrevistas, notícias e dos recursos disponíveis no site e redes sociais da empresa.

**Título:** Adaptação da estratégia da empresa em tempos de crise: o caso da Joshua's Shoarma Grill

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**Palavras-chave:** Covid-19; crises; estratégia; adaptação; restaurantes; capacidades dinâmicas; plataformas de entrega de comida; Portugal

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## **List of Abbreviations**

COVID-19	Virus classification for coronavirus disease in 2019
COO	Chief Operating Officer
HR	Human Resources
EU	European Union
US	United States
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
VRIO	Value, Rarity, Inimitability and Non-substitutable
DC	Dynamic Capability

## **List of Exhibits**

**Exhibit 1:** Example of products available on Joshua’s online store

**Exhibit 2:** The four “Chef em Casa” Baskets

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**Exhibit 7:** Food Delivery Platforms promotions on Joshua’s social media

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 SWOT Analysis**

A SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is one of the most widely used tool to identify internal and external factors related to an organization. It provides a summary of the strengths and weakness of an organization internal resources and capabilities, as well as explores its environment by looking, externally, for opportunities and threats. This analysis is a good instrument to generate strategic options. After executing an analysis, organizations should develop strategies that “*build on the strengths, eliminate the weakness, exploit the opportunities and counter threats*” (Dyson, 2004).

The effectiveness of the SWOT analysis can be increased with a TOWS matrix, where the factors identified on the SWOT are paired between them (eg. An opportunity with a weakness), in an attempted to connect both internal and external factors and generate new strategic options (Dyson, 2004).

### **1.2 Resource-based view and VRIO**

The resources of an organization are the assets that it possesses and can be used to implement their strategies. They can be tangible, which are physical assets used in the operations (eg. factories, workers, and vehicles), or intangible, assets that can't be physically seen or touched (eg. brand reputation, patents, and the firm's culture).

According to the literature, resources have a potential to bring competitive advantage to an organization if its positive on the following four key principles – Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable. To summarize, valuable resources are the ones that create a product/service that is of value to customers and empower a company to respond to external factors; a resource is rare if only a few competitors possess them; they are inimitable if its costly or difficult for competitors to have it; and it is non-substitutable if there is not any other resource that a competitor has with an equivalent strategic value (Barney 1991).

Later, in 1997, Barney further developed its framework and created VRIO by aggregating the inimitable and non-substitutable criteria in the “I” and adding an “O” which represents organizations, that is, if the internal organization of a firm is able to exploit its resource and turn it into a competitive advantage (Cardeal & António, 2012).

### **1.3 Dynamic Capabilities**

According to Teece, Pisano & Shuen (1997), dynamic capabilities are the organization ability to attain new forms of competitive advantage. They are “dynamic” because they must be able to renew capabilities of a firm in order to meet the needs of a changing external environment (Teece et al, 1997). However, other researchers in the managerial field have suggested different conceptualizations of DC.

More than a decade later, Barreto (2010), in an effort to find a definitive concept of DC, suggested that “*a dynamic capability is the firm’s potential to systematically solve problems, formed by its propensity to sense opportunities and threats, to make timely and market-oriented decisions, and to change its resource base*”. According to this definition, it is possible to turn the dynamic capability concept into a framework with four distinct propensities when analyzing an organization’s capabilities during a moment of rapid and critical environmental changes.

Therefore, it is a complement of the resource-based view, since it looks beyond it and allows to analyze the change of the usefulness of resources and capabilities related to changes in external factors (Wójcik, 2015).

### **1.4 Strategic response to the COVID-19 crisis**

The COVID-19 global pandemic presented a great threat to the health of millions of citizens in the whole world, with the risk of its effects being even more prominent in countries with the most aged populations. On March 16th, even though there were still no reported deaths from the virus in the country, the Portuguese government made the decision to impose restrictions on economic and social activities. As a result of it, the population manifested high levels of compliance, with 83% reducing their mobility for retail and leisure (Peixoto, 2020). The government strategy was meant to contain the spread of the virus in order to keep the health system from failing due to an influx of diseased citizens needing hospital treatment.

Furthermore, the implications of the crisis also put a threat to the health of the Portuguese economy. According to the Bank of Portugal, the GDP of the country decreased 7.8% along with the small and medium-sized enterprises being highly affected as 44,5% of non-financial firms reported negative returns in 2020 (Banco of Portugal, 2021).

Those figures, display the need of the Portuguese companies to strategically react to the crisis. According to Wenzel, Stanske & Lieberman, there are four possible ways that companies can respond to a crisis: retrenchment, persevering, innovating, and exit Those strategies can be summarized as: **retrenchment** which involves “reductions in costs, assets, products, product lines, and overhead” (Pearce & Robbins, 1993); **innovating** which, as the name suggest, refers to renew the strategy of a firm; **preserving** that contrasts with the innovating since it intents to preserve the status-quo while attenuating the damage of the crisis; and finally the **exit** strategy that, as the name implies, is to close the business activities of a firm (Wenzel et al, 2020).

### **1.5 Food Delivery Platforms**

According to a McKinsey study, there was a substantial move towards online channels during the pandemic. Moreover, it was shown that an early adoption of new technology capabilities was a key factor of success for firms facing the crisis (LaBerge et al, 2020).

As claimed by Raj, Sundararajan & You, when restaurants were facing the lockdowns and restrictions, they were forced to use alternative channels such as online food delivery platforms to be able to reach their clients. It is well documented that, in the US, restaurants were able to leverage on online delivery platform to generate revenue and, in many cases, to stay alive during this crisis (Raj et al, 2023). Which illustrates the significance of these tools in this particular crisis.

Regarding the competitions between platforms, they mainly compete “*through incentivizing a high-quality group of participants to join*” (Panico & Cennamo, 2020). Thus, it is expected that different platforms offer different incentives to motivate new participants to join and stay loyal to them. Those incentives will be one of the most decisive factors on the competition between-platforms.

## **2. Joshua's Shoarma Grill – Case Study**

### **2.1 Company overview before the crisis**

Joshua's Shoarma Grill is a Portuguese “fast-service” chain that serves Middle-East type food (such as Pitas, falafel and wraps). They began operating in 1980, with a restaurant in Cascais, and then expanded to shopping centers in the main cities of Portugal, having reached 34 restaurants throughout the country.

The firm considers themselves a “fast-service” chain and not a “fast-food” one because their recipes and cooking/preparation methods of the meals are “homemade” unlike the typical restaurant in a shopping center.

To back-up the restaurants and their brand, they had a factory which produced their main ingredients, storages facilities to store them, a website, social media, and their own distribution network that operates daily to guarantee the freshness of the food available on Joshua’s restaurants.

According to the company, they focus on median to median-high income class individuals that look for healthy meals and identify themselves with the brand. Moreover, they consider their competitors as restaurants that offer grilled meat, kebab restaurants and restaurants with vegetarian options. They identified two types of customers: professionals, the ones that work close to the mall and eat there mainly for lunch; and leisure clients, the ones that go to the shopping for leisure cinema, clothes shopping, technological shopping and mainly go to the shopping restaurants at dinner time and weekends.

One of their marketing strategies is the “Joshua's lovers card”. A loyalty card that offers points and vouchers to their customers by purchasing in Joshua’s stores that can be traded for discounts/coupons in futures orders and offered a 50% discount on client’s anniversary.

In 2019, they entered the food delivery platform market and made an exclusivity agreement with UberEats to make their food available to their customers from their own houses and offices.

For the year 2020, the chain already had some objectives in mind: Firstly, they wanted to increase their sales volume and brand notoriety. To achieve this, the firm was considering

creating a new brand for healthy products and starting to sell products from their website. Moreover, Joshua's intended to expand the presence of self-service machines in their restaurants to decrease the customer's waiting time.

## **2.2 Mission and Values**

Joshua's mission is to *"Offer nutritious, delicious and healthy meals to all our customers, always respecting the ethical values that characterize us."* The chain has a team of chefs, nutritionists and food engineers to guarantee that every new product has an authentic flavor.

They swear to *"stay true to Joshua's signature flavors through authentic, homemade recipes with artisanal preparation methods"* to ensure that they are able to respond to the demand for *"fresh, natural and wholesome products."* Additionally, they consider their main values to be quality, integrity, and sustainability. For instance, the sustainability value was demonstrated when they decided to drop products that are detrimental to the environment, like plastic straws, before it was declared illegal to commercialize them in the EU.

## **2.3 Organizational Structure**

As any other restaurant chain present in dozens of locations across the country, it requires a strong organization structure and a strategic leadership to keep the firm working and the restaurants homogeneous.

In this case, the organization has a classic pyramid hierarchy shape. At the bottom there are the "operators", the ones in charge of customer service, cooking the food and serving the meals; followed by the "specialists" which are also responsible for training the operators; then the "shift boss" that manages the shift and takes care of the deposits; next is the sub manager of the restaurant that takes care of the recruitment and the new operator's integration plan; followed by the restaurant manager that in charge of a location and has the duty to explore the restaurant in a way to improve the profits, manage the fixed costs (eg. labor and electricity costs), the variable costs (eg. meal ingredients) and report the accounts; then the "coordinator" who, as the name suggests, coordinates multiple restaurants; there's then the "supervisor" who oversees the work of the coordinators; followed by the chief operating officer that is focused on implementing strategies into the daily operations of every restaurant; and finally the administration which are the owners.

Every single employee of the chain must be aware of the work that is done on the frontline. Everyone, from the operator to the COO, needs to know how to fry, be a cashier and serve the meals and is expected to be able to exercise those functions at any time when necessary.

The firm is aware that the majority of the workers came from necessity and not from an urge of interest to work in the sector. Thus, the company has an HR policy to, on the recruitment process, try to choose the candidates that are more reliable, adaptable, and high energy, because if a single employee doesn't put in the necessary effort or skips a day, it's enough to overload the rest of the team.

#### **2.4 The Restaurants' Restrictions during the Pandemic**

During the entirety of the COVID-19 crisis, the restaurant sector was one of the most affected as it was almost totally dependent on human contact and, on most times, it meant close contact with dozens of people at every mealtime while eating and drinking. Furthermore, we're discussing a sector where hygiene concern is crucial, even before the pandemic, meaning that throughout the process of serving a customer there are several steps in which the concern for hygiene is never pushed aside, starting in the making of the food and finishing in the cleaning of the tables previously occupied. All of these motives, in the times of a highly infectious disease being spread around the country, fueled the Portuguese government to enforce strict rules on the sector to ensure social distancing, for the protection of both clients and restaurant staff.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the restaurants were forced to cease their operations, with the exception being takeaway service (Expresso, 2020). This measure forced many to close, and some never reopened again. It was only after three months, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2020, that the government allowed them to reopen, but not without a new set of rules. Regarding capacity, there was a maximum of 50% capacity allowed. Social distance was also mandatory, being a minimum distance between two customers of 2 meters (Jornal de Negócios, 2020). Lastly, it was implemented a strict universal schedule that the companies had to comply with.

As we were living uncertain times, the rules implemented suffered constant changes throughout the crisis. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, following a sharp rise in cases and the main hospitals around the country exceeding the maximum capacity, a new lockdown was announced by the government to begin two days later which forced restaurants and shopping centers to stop serving their clients on their venues once again (Público, 2021).

Only by the 19th of April, almost four months later, were restaurants allowed to, once again, start serving their clients inside their doors, but like before, a new set of rules was enforced, only allowing 4 people per table inside the restaurant and 6 per table if it was on an open space (Jornal Económico, 2021).

Additionally, this time, the government created more rules regarding the schedule of restaurants, such as having to close their doors after 1:00 PM on weekends. Once again, the laws would constantly change, but as the months went by, these changes were progressively more positive to the restaurants, until the 1st of October 2021, when the sector was finally out of restrictions, with the exceptions of the use of a mask and the presentation of an “EU Digital COVID certificate” (or a negative test) from the clients (TSF, 2021).

These several months of lockdowns, constant changing in rules, uncertainty about the future and the consumers’ fear of going out to eat and risking contracting the virus during the pandemic, greatly affected the capacity of the sector to generate revenue.

## **2.5 The Crisis Starts**

It’s the last week of February 2020 and life in Portugal remains unchanged despite the news channels, websites, social media and newspapers depicting a new reality that was slowly taking over Europe. The same question pondered on everyone’s head: will this virus reach Portugal? And if so, what would be its consequences? Up to this point, and similar to the rest of the country, the reality at Joshua’s stores remained unaltered.

It was only by the end of the first week of March that the virus began disseminating in Portugal. Despite not coming as a shock, it was clear that the country was fairly unprepared for the difficulties ahead. People became more fearful and started avoiding public spaces and activities that involved being in crowded places. This new mindset quickly affected shopping centers and these areas became more and more empty, which led to a significant drop in daily customers and sales. By the middle of the second week of March, Joshua’s sales had dropped 70% compared to the previous week.

By the third week of the month the Portuguese government declares its first state of emergency. These uncertain and unprecedented times fueled fear and panic across the country, more than half of the Portuguese population closed themselves at home. 30 out of 34 Joshua’s stores ceased functions which took a toll on the chain staff members, where most workers were laid-off.

Ten days after the lockdown was established, Joshua's made the decision to not let the crisis stop them from operating and focused its efforts on finding the best solution to keep serving their clients, in a safe way. In order to do so, they re-opened 21 stores and directed their aim to online food delivery platforms. The stores were strategically chosen based on several crucial factors for this operation, in particular the length of the area that they covered on the delivery platforms. To prevent cannibalization, in areas with more than one store, the chain chose to keep operating solely the ones that assure the maximum area of availability to their customers. However, four of the restaurants closed permanently since they were already showing signs of unprofitability before the crisis.

Another measure Joshua's took was terminating their exclusivity agreement with UberEats and starting to operate within Glovo, "comer em casa.", nomenu (currently known as "Please.") and takeaway.com platforms. The delivery platforms were in charge of promoting its partner restaurants, which now included Joshua's, and on the other end of the deal, Joshua's was in charge of absorbing the costs of any campaign in place (for instance, "pay 1 menu, get 2"), as well as free shipping.

## **2.6 Being useful to the Community**

One of the many consequences of establishing a national lockdown was that the supply couldn't always match the growing demand. In the early stages of the first lockdown, a lot of small supermarkets decided to close its doors and the ones that remained open soon realized they had too much demand for the supply they offered (Eco 2020). Thanks to the restrictions, there were huge lines in every hypermarket in the main cities of Portugal with the population struggling to buy their goods (Visão, 2020).

This realization, in the strategic eyes of Joshua's, turned into a new business opportunity. In April 2020, the chain launches an online store on their website and "Chefe Em Casa".

"Chefe Em Casa" (Chef At Home) operates as a brand on the food delivery platforms where the customer could buy uncooked food – meats, bread, vegetables, sauces, beverages, etc. There were also an online store available on Joshua's website (**Exhibit 1**). The clients were able to purchase the products individually or in the form of a basket of goods which lead to a more economical checkout price. "Chefe em Casa" would appear on the website store and social media mainly referring to the bundle products. To Joshua's, the basket option came with the challenge of figuring out which ingredients to include and the quantity/weight that would be

more appropriate to sell to the customers. Initially, they came-out with 4 baskets: Mix of Meat Basket, Grill and Vegetarian Basket, Veggie and Vegan Basket, and the Authentic Experience Basket. Each targeting a different niche of their potential customer base. (**Exhibit 2**)

These ingredients and bundles were available for purchase on Joshua's website store, where they could make the order, pay and then pick it up on restaurants. Plus, they could be sent directly to their home by using their food delivery platforms partners under the "Chefe em Casa" brand (**Exhibit 3**). This strategic plan proved to be a brilliant move on Joshua's behalf, as it allowed for the chain to accomplish two important tasks: on the one hand they managed to create a second source of revenue, and on the other they found a way to drain the extra stock that was coming from the factories, that would most likely become waste. This initiative came to represent 2,5% of Joshua's sales in 2020.

Alongside the "Chefe Em Casa", Joshua's came up with a second idea, this time to support the new initiative and boost engagement towards the brand, creating then "Ideias Para Cozinhar" (Ideas To Cook), which consisted on a webpage with food recipes (**Exhibit 4**) for the ingredients and baskets the customers were already purchasing from them through their online store and "Chefe Em Casa".

These new services carried several advantages to the company, especially when it came to the costs of implementing them. The only initial expenses made by Joshua's fell solely on packaging and communication, since "Chefe Em Casa" and the online store were able to take advantage of their website, the food delivery platforms and were operated from within their restaurants in function. Meanwhile "Ideias Para Cozinhar" was a page inside their own website, which represented minimum additional costs.

When kicking-off "Chefe Em Casa", Joshua's invested in its communication and launched a new marketing campaign featuring the headline "This Easter, Joshua's brings food to you" to create awareness towards their new service. This new campaign was promoted through the chain's social media platforms, email marketing to their stakeholders (Joshua's lover card clients, employees and suppliers) and influencer marketing – Joshua's paid several famous Portuguese influencers at the time to promote the new service on their platforms and channels. One of their most famous promoters is 'Pipoca Mais Doce', a very influential person on Portuguese social media. To better fit the easter spirit, Joshua's created two special "Easter Baskets" during this campaign, one of which with the traditional leg of lamb for a Portuguese easter lunch (**Exhibit 5**).

Additionally, Joshua's displayed their solidarity with the crisis by supplying the medical professionals that were on the front line at the Hospitals of Santa Maria and Amadora-Sintra with food.

## 2.7 Taking Advantage of Technology

*“The most technologically advanced companies were the ones that overcame the crisis quicker”* – João Antunes, Joshua's Chief Operating Officer.

Keeping a close eye on the market, customer needs and their surroundings, they decided it was time to focus on a growing niche: vegetarians/vegans. Since Joshua's new focus relied on delivery platforms, the firm quickly came to realize a new business opportunity emerging through taking advantage of the platform's algorithm. With such in mind, they created a new brand and launched it in delivery platforms called “Veggie by Joshua's”, in May 2020.

Veggie by Joshua's is a vegetarian/vegan sub-brand that acts exclusively on food delivery platforms (**Exhibit 6**). The aim of this is to target vegetarian customers, offering a new meal alternative to them, whenever a person searched for vegetarian restaurants on their apps it would appear in the top options. Moreover, this contributes positively to promote Joshua's brand image as a vegetarian/vegan friendly chain, thus potentially attracting new customers to their other offerings. Even though was only being available for 7 months, and within a time without a lockdown, Veggie by Joshua's ended the 2020 year representing 10% of Joshua's sales on food delivery platforms.

Alongside the 2021 lockdown, Joshua's decided to change the lay-off policy to keep the whole staff working but adjusting everyone timetable according to the allowed opening schedule of the stores. Apart from that, they expanded their food delivery platforms presence to Bolts Food, comidas.pt and Rocket, therefore becoming available for their customers in every relevant platform.

However, this emphasis on delivery platforms had its setbacks. Firstly, it changes the competitive landscape of the chain. At first, Joshua's only competition were the restaurants inside the shopping centers, meaning the target were solely the visitors. Now that range is broader as the company is forced to also compete with every other restaurant within the app's covered area, even if they're kilometers away from Joshua's restaurant. Secondly, the price of the meals was 40% higher than the ones available by take-away to ensure profitability for the

reason that the platforms take a high commission of the sales (For example, UberEats has a 30% commission). Additionally, with several new ideas in hands, Joshua's found themselves needing to focus on offering practical meals in their three brands as well as suspending the sale of foods that had less demand. In addition, they had to take in consideration possible mislays of orders by couriers, the risk of wrong orders, delays of delivery time and the limitation of the number of people inside the shopping that many times made it difficult for the couriers to reach the restaurant.

Nevertheless, they decided to focus on this delivery system and leveraged their social media presence (Facebook and Instagram) to promote the new services and the delivery platforms campaigns that were different across platforms. For example, they would promote a 20% discount across all products campaign on BoltFood, a 30% discount in selected products on Glovo and a “buy one, receive another free” campaign in UberEats in the same post to make their clients aware of the different campaigns available for them so that they could consistently choose the one that would fit better their needs (**Exhibit 7**).

It is difficult to identify if their social media marketing had any impact on their follower's adoption of the new delivery platform service for Joshua's because, even though their pages count with thousands of followers, they lack real engagement from their clients in metrics such as likes, comments and shares.

Although their loyalty program “Joshua's Lovers” wasn't directly available on the food delivery platforms, they found a work-around. Clients had the option to send an e-mail with the bill to gain the Joshua's credits. However, they couldn't use the points/vouchers on orders in the platform. The program went from being present in 13% of the sales in 2019 to only 11% in 2020.

Considering the 2020 year, the firm sales went down by 50% compared to 2019, food delivery platforms became 27% of their total 2020 sales (compared to 10% in 2019), with UberEats representing 25% of Joshua's sales followed by Glovo with 0,5%. As for the 2021 year, the platforms become even more relevant for the firm representing 33% of the sales. Regarding costs, in 2020 the rent of the space for the restaurants in the shopping centers represented 30% of the costs in function of the sales, while the workforce represented 33%. In normal years, on average, the rent costs represent 17% and the workforce 28% of the cost of sales.

Looking back and evaluating the path Joshua's took to overcome the difficulties and restrictions carried by the COVID-19 pandemic, their refusal to close their arms during lockdown and instead focus their strength to learn and grow as a company comes across as an inspiring example of how to take swift and innovative action in times of a crisis by taking advantage of the technology that they had accessible to them.

### **3. Teaching Notes**

This case is a perfect example of how to use the resources and capabilities of a company to adapt to a crisis that fundamentally changes the whole sector and consequently how the firm mainly operates.

This chapter provides the necessary materials for the professor successfully teach this case study. It includes suggested assignment questions and provides guidance, examples, and solutions on analyzing and discussing the case. The suggested questions and solutions are a generic recommendation, which means that the professor is free to assign different questions to the students that may be more appropriate for the specific context of the class.

#### **3.1 Synopsis**

Joshua's Shoarma Grill, founded in 1980, is a successful Portuguese fast-service chain that serves Middle-East type food and is present in the main shopping centers of Portugal. The COVID-19 pandemic brought lockdowns, restrictions, and consumer fear and uncertainty that greatly affected the restaurant sector. The case study describes how the chain innovated and strategically adjusted its marketing and resources to adapt to the crisis by focusing on food delivery platforms as a safe and effective way to reach its consumers. This case starts from the first day of the Portuguese state of emergency and focuses on the actions taken by the chain during the first year of the pandemic crisis.

#### **3.2 Target Audience**

This case-study was designed for students that frequent courses such as strategic management and strategic marketing. As such, it is target at both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the areas of Management and Business Administration.

### **3.3 Approach**

There are multiple ways to approach this case study. Taking in consideration its relative short length, it may be the most appropriate to either discuss it in an open discussion class setting or as an individual take-home assignment. It may be good to use this case as an exercise right after teaching the frameworks and concepts of the SWOT analysis, Resourced-based view and Dynamic Capabilities.

### **3.4 Teaching Objectives**

The main goal is to challenge students to analyze and discuss a real case scenario of a business adaptive strategies of a firm that strategically used all its resources and capabilities to address a crisis that fundamentally affected its sector. Students are challenged to use their creativity, frameworks, and theories such as SWOT analysis and Dynamic Capabilities to fully understand the case and to find new strategies and solutions to improve the revenues of the company during the crisis and its aftermath.

### **3.5 Suggested Assignment Questions**

1. Identify the capabilities and resources of the company.
2. How did Joshua's adopt its dynamic capabilities to respond to the COVID-19 crisis?
3. From a SWOT analysis point of view, explain the logic behind the strategic adjustments made. What other strategic moves should Joshua's consider?
4. Imagine that all COVID-19 restrictions end. Provide strategic recommendations to the company.

### **3.6 Analysis and Discussion**

1. Identify and discuss the capabilities and resources of the company.

In this introductory question students are expected to identify Joshua's resources and capabilities before and during the crisis. In this context, resources are the assets (tangible and intangible) that business have on their disposal and the capabilities are the ways those resources are used to give value to their customers (Johnson et al, 2016). Below is an example list of possible resources and capabilities, students may be encouraged to find different ones.

#### Resources:

- The restaurants;
- The factory;
- The distribution network;
- The storage facilities;
- The employees;
- Reputation and awareness of Joshua's brand;
- Its presence on food delivery platforms;
- Joshua's website;
- Joshua's Social Media;

#### Capabilities:

- Offer nutritious meals to their customers;
- Provide a big range of meal choices including vegetarian and vegan options;
- Able to deliver food directly to their customers house;
- Offer meal ingredients in both individual and basket form;
- Suggest meal ideas for their clients to make at home;

After identifying the resources and capabilities listed above, students should discuss how these resources and capabilities have been impacted while adapting to the COVID-19 crisis.

For example, according to this case-study, in order to save costs, some resources like the restaurants and workers were diminished as several Joshua's restaurants had to be temporarily closed (some even permanently closed) and dozens of workers laid-off. On another hand, the capability of being able to deliver food directly to their customers house was improved, because it became the main focus during the crisis and Joshua's became available, for the first time, in multiple food delivery platforms. Additionally, the meals were made more practical to better fit this delivery context.

Furthermore, Joshua's used its resources: their restaurants, factory, distribution network, employees, their presence on food delivery platforms, the reputation and awareness of their brand, and their online channels (website and social media) – to create two new services: the “Chef em Casa”/online store and “Veggie by Joshua's”. With Veggie, they were capable to offer nutrition vegetarian/vegan meals to the users of the delivery food platforms and further

enhance their brand image along with improving the penetration in the vegetarian/vegan market. While thanks to their “Chef em Casa” available on the restaurant and on food delivery platforms, and the online store on their website they were capable to provide meal ingredients to the customers, in both individual and basket form, therefore responding to the new needs created by the lines in the supermarkets. Additionally, it helped to drain off the stock from the factory. In both cases, the chain created two new income streams in a time where the sales were at an all-time low thanks to the restrictions imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the VRIO framework, states that a resource/capability needs to have the four key - Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Organization Support to allow the organizations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Having the previous analysis in consideration, we can place the three discussed main capabilities in the following table:

<b>Capability</b>	<b>Valuable</b>	<b>Rare</b>	<b>Inimitable</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Able to deliver food directly to their customers house	Yes	No	No	Yes
Provide a big range of meal choices including vegetarian and vegan options	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Offer meal ingredients in both individual and basket form	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

According to the VRIO framework, only the capability to “offer meal ingredients in both individual and basket form”, which is displayed through the “Chef em Casa” initiative, granted Joshua’s a sustained competitive advantage in the restaurants market during the crisis.

## 2. How did Joshua's adopt its dynamic capabilities to respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

The main objective of this question is for students to understand the relation between the concept of dynamic capabilities and the strategically adaptation to the crisis that Joshua's undertook.

Dynamic Capabilities, according to Barreto, are the conditions for a company to adapt in a context of sudden and significant changes. It refers to four dimensions: the propensity to sense opportunities and threats, to make timely decisions, to make market-oriented decisions and to change the firm's resource base. Based on this definition, we can conclude that Joshua's faced this crisis following those propositions:

Firstly, they sensed the growing adoption of the food delivery platforms and decided, right in the beginning of the pandemic, to terminate the exclusivity deal with UberEats and expanded their products to other platforms, adapted their meals to be more practical for this distribution strategy and chose to close down some restaurants to prevent cannibalization thereby changing the firm resource base.

Later, they identified a new business opportunity to respond to the new needs of the consumers that had limited access to meal ingredients and created their online store and "Chef em Casa" by making use of the chain's factory, storages, restaurants, and distribution network. Additionally, on Joshua's website, they launched "Ideias Para Cozinhar" in order to give ideas to their clients for meals to make at home with the products available on the new service. Furthermore, since there was a pandemic and the potential customers were spending more time online, they had partnerships with influencers to promote this new service to them. Thus, taking advantage of the timing.

<b>Barreto's 4 Dimensions</b>	<b>Joshua's Actions</b>
Sense / Seize Opportunities & Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Created a new brand and service to meet consumers' needs of ingredients for their at home meals;</li><li>- Reinvented their meals offering to become more practical for delivery.</li></ul>

Timely / Market oriented Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanded the availability of Joshua’s products to multiple food delivery platforms;</li> <li>- Created partnership with influencers;</li> <li>- Launched “Ideais para cozinhar” to support the launch of their new brand.</li> </ul>
Change the Resource Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Used the website, food delivery platforms, storages, staff and restaurants to fulfill the needs of the new online-store/“Chef em Casa” service and products;</li> <li>- Temporarily closed restaurants;</li> <li>- Laid-off workers.</li> </ul>

3. From a SWOT analysis point of view, explain the logic behind the strategic adjustments made. Which other strategic moves should have been considered?

On this question, students are required to use a SWOT analysis to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats Joshua’s was facing at the time of the crisis. With the analysis done, the logic behind each strategic move will be clearer to understand.

Starting with the internal factors, the discussion will begin with an analysis of Joshua’s strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the crisis.

In terms of **strengths**, Joshua’s had a brand image of serving high quality/nutritious foods, a big range of meal choices (including vegetarian/vegan options, which distinguishes them from their competitors since a lot of them don’t include these options in their menus). These attributes clearly help differentiate their chain from the rest of the restaurants usually available at a Portuguese shopping center, which is good a strategy when targeting a segment of median to median-high income class individuals that look for healthier meal options. Possibly thanks to those qualities, they had an existing customer base and a loyalty program that offered coupons and discounts to their clients which incentivized future purchases on the chain. Furthermore, the chain had their own factory, storage facilities and distribution network which translated to be more independent and self-sustained than the average Portuguese restaurant.

Moreover, they had an active online presence which consisted of their own website and social media accounts that together combined thousands of followers.

Looking at their **weakness**, thanks to this case-study, we can suppose that Joshua's operations were above average because of the number of locations and staff that a chain of that size had to have. These high costs in a time of a crisis that affects so much the restaurant sector could become a real challenge to sustain. Additionally, they were only available on shopping centers and, therefore, were subjected to the shopping center's conditions, schedule and amount of people that frequent them. Plus, in this pandemic context, the shopping center were not a good place to have a take-away service thanks to the government restrictions and their location that was in disadvantage compared to regular restaurants available in the middle of the streets of Portugal. Regarding their social media, even though they had a wide following, the chain lacked engagement which might be a sign that their social media communication was ineffective. Additionally, the moment the pandemic started, Joshua's was only available in UberEats which potentially excluded possible consumers that preferred other food delivery platforms. Within the same subject, some of their offerings were not suitable for the pandemic context because they sold meals that didn't fit well in boxes and were meant to be eaten right after being made, which was a clear disadvantage compared to some of their competitors.

Regarding external factors, Joshua's was aware of the trends of the market at the time, therefore it identified **opportunities** in the increased use of food delivery platforms, which was logical because a lot of customers continued to desire food from their favorite places and, with the restrictions in place, the platforms were one of the only ways to have access to them. Additionally, for many, the apps would even become the preferred way because they felt too comfortable (or safe) at home and/or didn't wish to cook or leave their house to get food in a take-away service and were willing to pay a higher price for that. Moreover, with the population closed at home, there was an increase in spending time online, therefore it was a good time to consider the opportunity of having partnerships with influencers. Additionally, as presented in the case-study, there was an opportunity in the new needs of the consumers that had limited access to meal ingredients because of the lines in the supermarket. Finally, unrelated to the pandemic, there was a growing niche of vegetarians/vegans and that could be a market segment worth exploring for Joshua's.

In terms of **threats**, there was a big influx of restaurants joining the food delivery platforms and offering take-away services that threaten Joshua's market share in the online space. Furthermore, there were constant rule changes made from the Portuguese government affecting the sector and new ones could have followed at any time during the pandemic. Finally, the

pandemic itself was unpredictable, in terms of the severity and the duration, for the majority of the time of the crisis.

The following bullet points exemplifies a SWOT analysis table from the above analysis:

Strengths:

- High quality/nutritious foods;
- Big range of meal choices;
- Vegetarian/vegan meal options
- Its Brand image;
- Social Media accounts with thousands of followers;
- Having their own website;
- Having an existing customer base and a loyalty program;
- Having their own factory, storage facilities and distribution network;

Weakness:

- High fixed costs (dozens of locations and employees);
- Some of the offerings weren't suitable for the pandemic context;
- Was only available on shopping centers (difficult for a take-away service);
- In the beginning, was only available in one food delivery platform (Exclusivity agreement with UberEats);
- Poor engagement on Social Media;

Opportunities:

- Expanding Joshua's presence to more food delivery platforms;
- Creating Partnerships with influencers;
- Selling meal ingredients to fulfill the needs of the consumers that were having difficulty finding them at the supermarkets;
- Investing in the growing vegan/vegetarian market;

Threats:

- Unpredictable rule changes from the government affecting the sector;
- Growing competition on the food delivery platforms from other restaurants;

- Unpredictable duration and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic;

Looking at the SWOT, students can derive that the actions Joshua's took while adapting to the crisis was a way to take advantage of the opportunities that appeared in the market while leveraging on their strengths and reducing its weakness. For example:

Joshua's chose to focus on the food delivery platforms strategy. However, they had a UberEats exclusivity agreement which limited their potential online customers to the users of that App. Since there was a growing number of users on every food delivery platform, Joshua's had to reconsider the exclusivity deal with UberEats to become available to a growing audience of potential customers in other apps. Therefore, ending the exclusivity agreement came from the opportunity that appeared from the increased use of food delivery platforms and terminated the weakness of being only available in one food delivery platform. Moreover, it also opened itself to more opportunities of food delivery platforms campaigns since different platforms had different types of campaigns.

Secondly, the "Chef em casa" initiative/online store came from seizing the opportunity regarding people having a difficult time buying ingredients for their meals while capitalizing on their strengths: their brand image, online presence, having their own factory, storage facilities and distribution network.

Also, the "Veggie by Joshua's" idea came from seizing the opportunity of the growing vegan/vegetarian market by using the strengths of its Brand Image related to having nutritious meals with vegetarian options, online presence, great range of meal choices and the whole operations of the chain (restaurants, factory and use of food delivery platforms).

Furthermore, they were able to tackle on their weakness of having a lot of costs and having some of the offers not suitable for the pandemic context by closing down some locations, laying-off staff and suspending the sale of foods that had less demand.

Now, for the strategic moves that Joshua's should have considered, a possible example would be to have leveraged the strength of having an existing customer base and a loyalty program by making an App for their loyal customers to make it easier to save the credits after purchase and find a way for it to generate coupons to use them on future orders of Joshua's in the food delivery platforms.

4. Imagine that all COVID-19 restrictions end, provide strategic recommendations to the company

Here, the students are invited to use their creativity and any concept/framework they have learned in class to provide a strategic recommendation on what to do in the case the market scenario shifted swiftly.

The main goal that Joshua's would have in this situation is to recover the level of revenue from pre-COVID-19 crisis by looking for ways to improve sales numbers.

There are three ways to increase revenue on this sector: bring in more customers, increase purchase frequency of the clients and increase the average purchase size.

Immediately, the first move should be to re-open every restaurant to become able to serve customers of every main shopping center of Portugal that would for sure have a big influx of people coming back to them for missing going shopping and going to the movie theater like they used to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, they shouldn't adopt the food delivery service on these reopened restaurants because there would still be a risk of cannibalization on the online space.

Joshua's Lovers Card is a clear example of a strategy looking to increase purchase frequency of the clients, increase customer loyalty and possibly increase the average purchase size. However, a card system may be outdated. A great suggestion would be investing on a creation of a Joshua's Lovers App, like the ones already existing in other chains, where their clients could have access to their points and available coupons. Additionally, Joshua's could use the App to gather information from their clients and, through the App, offer customized coupons to every user to increase the average size of purchase. Plus, they could send App notifications of those coupons at lunch and dinner hours to influence their clients on using them right at that moment. A good recommendation when launching this App would be to offer a coupon for a free product in everyone that signs-up and installs it on their smartphone.

Veggie by Joshua's quickly representing 10% of sales in the food delivery platforms is a clear sign that the vegan/vegetarian niche is worth exploring and a possible recommendation would be to create campaigns around those type of products and try to retain this niche of clients with the help of Joshua's Lovers App.

With the pandemic ending, we can suppose that the need of the customers for meal ingredients because of the unavailability in supermarkets or preference to be sent at home for safety reasons will disappear. However, there may exist specific products that the online store and “Chef em Casa” offers that are not available in local supermarkets so there could still be a reason to keep the service opened. Nonetheless, I would suggest focus the resources on the main Joshua's Shoarma Grill brand especially in terms of communication.

Moreover, the chain should consider an investment on communication, with particular incidence on their social media profiles, in order to improve the engagement of their clients considering it will most likely result in a greater awareness of their new products and service and thus making it easier to enhance their differentiation strategy. Additionally, a good recommendation would be to keep offering their products on the multiple food delivery platforms because a lot of their clients are for sure used to the comfort of having their meals directly sent to their houses and will keep being willing to pay an extra for that service.

#### **4. Conclusions and Limitations**

The objective of this dissertation was to create a case-study that displayed a real case of a Portuguese company that had to make crucial strategic changes to face the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the firm was operating in one of the most affected sectors: the restaurants.

The restaurant sector was one of the most affected by the pandemic. As we can witness in the case, the Portuguese government enforced strict rules, which would change often, that forced restaurants to reinvent themselves and innovate to keep being in business.

Nevertheless, Joshua's Shoarma Grill was able to capitalize on their differentiative strengths and capabilities to innovate consistently during the pandemic period, which kept them in the market and available for thousands of customers during the crisis. We can affirm that Joshua's started by applying a strategic response of retrenchment by reducing its resources, followed up quickly by the innovating strategy of creating new ways to provide value to their clients and generate revenue while persevering and improving their already existing service of home food delivery through the platforms.

Clearly, the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic happened in this day and age, where food delivery platforms were already in use in Portugal, highly influenced the direction and outcomes of Joshua's strategy during this crisis.

Moreover, we can presume that Joshua's actions and success was only possible thanks to their dynamic capabilities. Which implies that the strategy explored in this case-study wouldn't be possible to adopt by other restaurants chain if they don't have the resources, capabilities, and internal organization capable to sustain a competitive advantage such as Joshua's.

Creating this case-study gave me the opportunity to learn more about the reality of the restaurant chain business in my country and enabled me to apply frameworks and concepts that I have learned throughout my master's degree courses and during the research done to make this dissertation.

However, there are limitations in this dissertation. Mainly, there is a lack of official documentation in the study, especially regarding the sales and costs of the company during the period studied. Furthermore, the majority of the information attained came from multiple physical interviews with the COO of the chain, we have to take in consideration that the story

behind this case-study comes from the perspective of that department and biases may have influenced the direction of this thesis.

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Social Media:

<https://www.facebook.com/joshuashoarma>

<https://www.instagram.com/joshuashoarma/>

## 6. Appendix

### Exhibit 1: Example of products available on Joshua's online store

# A nossa loja

Agora já pode usufruir dos nossos produtos em sua casa.  
Crie o seu cabaz personalizado.

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AS SUAS COMPRAS PODEM SER LEVANTADAS 2H APÓS PAGAMENTO VÁLIDO

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 <b>Cabazes</b> 4 Cabazes pré-feitos e perfeitos para preparar as refeições em casa.	 <b>Carnes</b> As mais saborosas e saudáveis carnes para grelhar, agora em sua casa.	 <b>Vegetariano/Vegan</b> Descubra um mundo de saúde e sabores nas nossas opções vegetarianas.	 <b>Petiscos e Complementos</b> Especialidades típicas da nossa cozinha de fusão mediterrânica.
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Source: Joshua's Website, 2023

### Exhibit 2: The four "Chef em Casa" Baskets

Para quem gosta de cozinhar, quem sente que tem um **Chef em ascensão** dentro de si ou para quem nem pode ver a cozinha, este novo serviço permite criar e recriar verdadeiros manjares de **comida deliciosa, saudável**, com ingredientes equilibrados, cheios de sabor e ao verdadeiro **estilo mediterrâneo**.

São **quatro cabazes** pré-definidos com tudo para a preparação de diferentes pratos mas que podem ser personalizados, dependendo do gosto: **carnes grelhadas exclusivas, petiscos, lanches, saladas, opções vegetarianas e veganas, sobremesas e bebidas caseiras**.



#### Cabaz Misto de Carnes

Ideal para Meat Lovers

OFERTA: Molho d'Alho Frasco 300ml

Coxa de frango 625gr | Shoarma (suíno) 625gr | Peito de Frango à Chef 625gr  
Kofta de Vaca 500gr | Kofta de Borrego 500gr | Pão Pita 10 unidades  
Hummus 250gr | Bolo Maçã inteiro (10 Fatias) ou 5 Brownie  
Aloe Vera 1,5L

€49,00 (IVA incluído)

1

Adicionar



#### Cabaz Grill & Vegetariano

Para quem adora um mix de Grelhados e Vegetais

OFERTA: Molho d'Alho Frasco 300ml

Coxa de frango 625gr | Shoarma (suíno) 625gr | Veggie Burger 12 un. | Falafel 30 un.  
Pães Pita 10 un. | Brownies 5 un. | Hummus 250gr | Beringelas com tomate 250gr  
Queijo Feta 250gr (queijo feta cortado em cubos) ou Tahina 250gr (creme de sementes de sésamo) | Aloe Vera 1,5L

€44,00 (IVA incluído)

1

Adicionar



### Cabaz Veggie & Vegan

Perfeito para Veggie Lovers

OFERTA: Molho d'Alho Frasco 300ml

Falafel 30 un. | Veggie Burger 12 un.  
 Kibbi de Queijo e espinafres ou Kibbi de legumes – 5 unidades | Pão Pita 10 un.  
 Hummus 500gr | Tahina 250gr | Beringelas com tomate 250gr  
 Brownies 10 un. ou Embalagem de wraps 18 un. | Aloe Vera 1,5L

€41,00 (IVA incluído)

1 Adicionar



### Cabaz Experiência Autêntica

Recria a experiência dos Sabores do Mediterrâneo

OFERTA: Molho d'Alho Frasco 300ml

Hummus 250g | Labanne 250g | Beringelas com tomate 250g | Tahina 250g  
 Folhas de videira | Kibbis de carne 2 unidades  
 Kibbi de queijo e espinafres ou Kibbi de legumes – 5 unidades | Veggie Burger 6 un.  
 Falafel (bolinhas) 30 un. | Pão pita 10 un. | Aloe Vera 1,5L

€39,00 (IVA incluído)

1 Adicionar

Source: Joshua's Website, 2023

## Exhibit 3: "Chef em Casa" on UberEats

### Chef em casa by Joshuas (Alegro Montijo)

Turca - €€ • [Mais informações](#)  
 Aberto até às 10:30 PM

Carrinho - 0

Pedido de grupo Agendar

Entrega Demasiado longe Recolha 5-15 min - 20,5 KM

#### Escolhido para si

- Carnes
- Vegetariano/ Vegan (sem glúten)
- Cabazes
- Entradas e Complementos
- Molhos
- Doces
- Bebidas

#### Escolhido para si



Kibbi Legumes 5 unidades (salgado caseiro de Burghal (trigo partido) crocantes por fora e recheados de legumes)  
 5,80 €



Kibbi Espinafres e Queijo 5 unidades (salgado caseiro de Burghal (trigo partido) crocantes por fora e recheados Queijo feta e espinafres)  
 5,80 €



Beringelas com Tomate 500g (beringelas estufadas com tomate)  
 8,70 €



Embalagem Pão Pita 10 unidades (de origem árabe, este pão tem uma forma redonda e achatada)  
 5,30 €

Source: UberEats, 2023

Exhibit 4: “Ideias para cozinhar” webpage



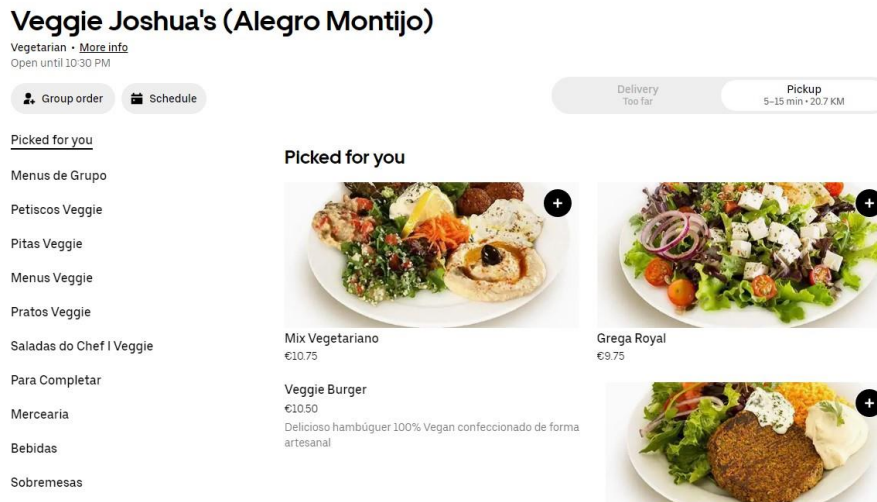
Source: Joshua’s Website, 2023

Exhibit 5: “Chef em Casa”: Easter Basket Campaign



Source: Joshua’s Website, 2023

## Exhibit 6: “Veggie by Joshua’s” on UberEats



Source: UberEats, 2023

## Exhibit 7: Food Delivery Platforms promotions on Joshua’s social media





Source: Joshua's Instagram page, 2023