

LEARNER NUMBER	51706644
NAME	Thiciane Monique Brasil de Amorim
COURSE	BA (Hons) in Marketing
DISSERTATION TOPIC	The COVID-19 crisis in tourism: A case study on Carrolls Irish Gifts' strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic
SUPERVISOR	David Smyth and Dr. Daniel O'Sullivan
WORD COUNT	6813
DUE DATE	30/11/2022

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## **Abstract**

This project aims to understand the consumption of experience in tourist destinations. Souvenirs are objects in all cities, and they can be considered the 'tangibilization' of the tourist experience. However, Ireland was closed during the pandemic, not allowing tourists to visit. This case study is about Carrolls Irish Gifts, and how the company changed its marketing strategy during the pandemic, focusing on online sales mainly to serve domestic audiences interested in Irish products.

## **Purpose**

The purchase of souvenirs is directly related to tourism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in which leisure travel was not allowed due to social isolation, borders were closed, directly impacting the tourist sector. In that regard, what was Carrolls Irish Gifts' marketing strategy to survive during this period?

## **Methodology**

Primary sources will also be used, such as qualitative and quantitative research. Both types of research aim to determine the validity of the data. The qualitative research will be directed to the managers from souvenirs shops to analyze the companies' performance during the pandemic.

On the other hand, the quantitative study will be intended to reach the general public to reveal if souvenir buying during a trip is essential, how this activity impacts the trip, and whether people are willing to buy this souvenir online.

## **Contributions of the Study**

In this way, this case study aims to contribute to the understanding of the subject and how the reactions generated by the pandemic were crucial for decision-making to allow the company's survival.

## **Keywords**

Tourism; COVID-19; Souvenirs; Consumer Behaviour; Digital Marketing, Social Media, SEO

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## **1. Introduction**

The universe of souvenirs is directly linked to tourism, as seen from a survey with 120 participants. However, souvenirs should not only have the role of consumption, as the central aspect is to make the experience in the visited place tangible. Thus, souvenirs directly affect the visitor's perception of the trip. As a starting point, it is essential to emphasize that the objective of companies is profit. Therefore, souvenir is considered consumer goods. (Horodyskiet al., 2012)

The research aims to determine how entrepreneurs have responded to challenges faced during a time of the pandemic. The impacts suffered by an Irish company and the perceptions of the marketing department during the pandemic were specifically investigated, as well as the strategies used to face the crisis, adopting the case study method. (Mangan, 2020)

An analysis will also be carried out in other markets to understand if the impact was the same and what alternatives were adopted to circumvent the crisis.

### **1.1 Research Background**

Tourism is an economic activity characterized by the offer of products and services made available to satisfy the needs of tourists, a series of related economic operations, including travel agencies, accommodation, transportation, and leisure activities. The industry is susceptible to changes in the external environment, as there are a variety of small businesses in the sector, such as local travel agencies, souvenir shops, cafes, and small restaurants, among other services. (Dunford, 2020)

As a result, this sector is highly exposed to changes in the outside environment and is susceptible to crises and natural disasters. Nevertheless, unlike the 2011 earthquake in Japan, which directly impacted that nation, COVID-19 (COVID-19 - 'CO' means corona, 'VI' the for virus, and 'D' for disease, 19 for 2019) was a pandemic that spread globally and had a catastrophic effect on the travel and tourism sector. (Dunford, 2020)

Tourism is one of the main industries in many nations. However, tourism has decreased dramatically worldwide due to limits on public gatherings that have forced people to stay at home, generating unemployment and significantly impacting the economy. In addition, COVID-19 has spread globally at an alarming rate, becoming a pandemic, and causing the most severe disruption to the global economy. (Amaral, 2021)

Carrolls Irish Gifts is an Irish company that has been in business for 40 years. It was founded in 1982 under Bargain King, selling affordable household items. Over the years, the company

has adapted to market influences. For example, in the 1990s, Pounds Shops became popular, which made the company shift its focus to toy sales, as it was a promising market then. In 1991 the company started using the name Carrolls of Dublin and opened some stores in Ireland, consolidating the Carrolls name. At the end of the 1990s, the company decided again to change the market segment, starting to work with tourism, explicitly selling souvenirs, as a potential market needed to be served. (Carrolls, 2022)

Today the company is known as Carrolls Irish Gifts, being present in some cities in Ireland and Belfast, totaling 19 stores. It has 400 employees and approximately 150 suppliers, making it one of the leading Irish gift shops in the market. The company also has a Knitwear focused store called The Aran Store in Dublin. (Carrolls. 2022)

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, with stores closed, the company has begun to focus on selling traditional Irish products, especially to domestic consumers and Irish people living abroad, and intensifying its digital marketing strategy. (O'Regan, 2020)

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

The COVID-19 pandemic's devastating impact on small and medium-sized businesses, including border closures and social isolation, resulted in the bankruptcy or closure of many of these businesses.

From a theoretical point of view, there is a need to expand knowledge in the tourism industry about responding to crises and natural catastrophes in entrepreneurial business decision-making and stakeholder communication.

In this approach, the current investigation can contribute to comprehending the phenomenon and developing relevant theoretical ideas. From a practical standpoint, the study also benefits business owners and managers by examining speedy decision-making and the methods employed to deal with crises.

## **1.3 Statement of the research objectives:**

Theme 1: Brand Awareness: How can companies positively influence consumers' perceptions of a brand?

Theme 2: Consumer Behaviour: How can consumer behaviour change consumer strategy?

Theme 3: Digital Marketing: How can companies increase sales during crises?

Theme 4: SEO: How to optimize online sales?

Theme 5: Relationship Marketing: How to improve customer acquisition and retention?

#### **1.4 Expected Outcomes of the study**

The main result is to contribute to understanding the impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on Carrolls Irish Gifts, investigating how perceptions and attitudes have changed throughout the pandemic and how these reactions have translated into decisions to allow continuity of business survival.

#### **1.5 Information gathering & data collection technique used**

Based on the information previously provided, the current study investigated the reactions of Carrolls Irish Gifts, a medium-sized Irish business, to understand better how managers responded to and sought solutions in the face of a significant external crisis. As a result, the researcher decided to use the case study method. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring new research because it enables the description of the development of a situation. These characteristics define it, the details that characterize it, the perceptions of decision-makers, and a better comprehension of the actions taken in response to the crisis.

Therefore, the method offers a deeper and more comprehensive perspective, enabling the development of insights and detailed data that will enable future quantitative research on how businesses respond to significant disruptive events.

In order to carry out an analysis of the external market, interviews were conducted with managers of souvenir shops in other countries.

Consequently, to understand how tourists perceive and choose to purchase souvenirs, also it was decided to conduct a general public online survey in Ireland.

#### **1.6 Chapter by chapter Overview**

The report is organized into five sections: The first chapter corresponds to the introduction, the second to the literature review, the third to the research methodology, results, and discussion, and the sixth to the conclusion.

Chapter 1: discusses the introduction, research background, and research rationale. The report also includes a description of the methodology and structure used in the report.

Chapter 2: is devoted to the literature review and is divided into five sections: brand awareness, consumer behaviour, digital marketing, SEO, and relationship marketing.

The research methodology discussed in Chapter 3 is concerned with research methodology. This chapter describes the research methods used in the studies: data collection methods and sample selection. The findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 4. That is, the study's

findings are presented here. Finally, here is the conclusion to Chapter 5. We present the study's findings, limitations, and recommendations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Brand Awareness and enhancing the reach of the company**

Brand awareness is a metric that measures how well a brand is perceived and remembered by consumers. The goal is to make the brand gain notoriety and differentiate it for the market. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), positioning is projecting the company's product and image to occupy a special place in the minds of the target audience.

Brand perception is how consumers perceive a particular brand. That includes all the stimuli he is exposed to, such as colours, shapes, smells, letters, sounds, prices, product quality, and services received. All this forms the opinion about this company and directly influences the buying decision. Thus, they develop a bond with the brand, relate to it as if it were a person, and communicate their values and satisfaction of needs. (Kotler, 2005).

Brand awareness means that the customers know what the company does and therefore know what to expect and are more likely to buy from you than your competitors.

They also emphasize that a brand is accompanied by quality features of the product or service and a strong image that unites customers with the company. He also tells us that brands are used as a strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors. (Kotler and Keller 2012).

The brand is one of the main assets of a company and determines the quality of the products and services it offers. Therefore, its value is used as a differentiation strategy concerning competitors, market affirmation, and conquest of new customers, and it is the company's significant asset. (Kotler and Keller 2012)

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), positioning is projecting the company's product and image to occupy a special place in the minds of the target audience. However, a brand's chances of success depend a lot on what it has. The name is highly relevant, as it is the first communicator between the brand and the customers. Brand logos communicate nonverbally. It is the image that the brand presents to the consumer that can be remembered without writing.

A brand recognition strategy seeks to position the brand in consumers' minds positively. With so much competition in the market today, a brand must find innovative ways to stand out to become recognizable. Kotler (2005) questions why brands facilitate consumer choice by acting as a shortcut for various functional and emotional attributes.



According to Kotler and Keller (2012), branding refers to the ability to distinguish a product or service from its competitors by bringing the brand's quality to it. Therefore, it is necessary to show the consumer "who the product is." That is, who is the brand behind the manufacture of this product?

Therefore, improving brand awareness focuses on actions that combine mass adoption, brand management, and brand presence in the target audience's routine. Digital marketing, by the way, can be a great ally in this mission.

## **2.2 Consumer Behaviour and the opportunity to understand customers**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's lives. Since the outbreak of the new Coronavirus, it is common to say that "nothing will be the same", this is clearer in some areas, such as distance education; students and teachers had to adapt to this new way of learning, which intensified during the pandemic. Consumer behaviour studies how and when individuals or groups choose, buy, and use products, services, ideas, and experiences to meet their needs and desires (Solomon, 2016).

According to Maslow's theory, people are motivated to act by unmet needs. In this line, individuals satisfy specific basic needs and then feel highly motivated to satisfy others. (Etzel, et al., 2001). Consumer satisfaction can be understood as assessing the gap between product or service expectations and performance. Consumers are considered satisfied when the performance they experience meets or exceeds their expectations (Strehlet al., 2019).

In this scenario, it is critical to understand consumer behaviour to understand how potential customers will respond to a new product or service and to identify new opportunities that are not currently being met. Thus, consumer behaviour is the set of all actions and habits of leads during the purchase journey. It is influenced by factors such as culture, society, needs, and life stage. For example, motivation can be the need for a particular product or service, the desire to acquire it, an unmissable offer, and other external and internal influences. (Rajagopal, 2010)

Consumer behaviour has changed dramatically since the advent of the internet. The challenge today is due to the sudden change because of COVID-19. Omnichannel, the convergence of virtual and bodily channels, is being pushed using the pandemic. Some are 100% online, and others start on the web and end in the store, for example. Therefore, the company must be present and promote its services in all channels. In addition, consumers now have much more control over where they direct their attention; as a result, businesses must create an appealing

customer experience in which all interactions are expressly tailored to the client's stage in the decision-making process. (Bommel et al., 2021)

Finally, after acquiring the product or service, the consumer experiences the acquisition and decides whether the purchase was positive or negative, according to his experience. Many companies still need to pay more attention this step, as they believe that the purchase process ends when the customer pays for the product or service. However, during the post-sale, the company can ensure the highest level of consumer satisfaction and increase the chances of loyalty. (Emerald, 2015)

### **2.3 Digital Marketing and online sales strategy**

Making quick and assertive decisions is one of the best ways to deal with crises, such as the one caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The Coronavirus pandemic has had an extraordinary impact on the entire world. As a result of this pandemic scenario, companies need to focus more on technology. Furthermore, in an emergency, companies were forced to use technological resources to maintain their operations because of the limitations on relocation and agglomeration imposed by world leaders. (Amaral, 2021)

Recently, the e-commerce industry has experienced increasingly strong growth. What may be encouraging for many should also be a wake-up call for others. While people are shopping more online, new stores are also being created. During the quarantine, e-commerce in Ireland grew by 159%. (Business and Finance, 2022)

Given this, the good news is that good digital marketing is a way to promote another online store. With active strategies to conquer new customers, in addition to preparing the environment to receive them, and thus be able to sell more. Being present, however, can be a mistake if the company considers digital presence an obligation. (Robert, 2018)

Social Media is an established channel through which organizations can create and seek to co-create value with consumers and other stakeholders. Social media data contains rich information in posts or comments written by customers. If this data can be appropriately extracted and analyzed, companies can utilize this rich source of information fully. Furthermore, once the data has been converted into information, they can formulate business strategies based on this knowledge. (Evans, 2008)

The leading social network companies currently target their brands are Facebook and Instagram, allowing companies to create and run paid advertisements that will appear to the target audience. This precise targeting is possible thanks to filters provided by advertising

platforms. For example, in both Instagram Ads and Facebook Ads, the business can define the age group they want to target, where those people are from, gender, people with specific interests (relevant to the business), and a host of other criteria. (Rindfleisch et al., 2019)

The advertising work must be strategically directed to the public to sell more. After identifying the public, the company must think about how the brand communicates and thus invest in the most important activities, that is, in the channels where the public is. (Barreau, 2014)

Therefore, companies face numerous challenges, including improving cash flow management, transforming their business models to become digital, and, most importantly, transforming their Marketing department - which is essentially an expense centre for Marketing but generates revenue in a predictable, scalable, and sustainable way. (Christopher et al., 2015)

Telecomworldwire (2020), states that companies accelerated their digital communication strategies by six years by attending COVID-19. The Digital Transformation that has been talked about for years has quickly accelerated for many companies, generating not only an opportunity to generate revenue through channels that were not used before (paid media, email, SEO, etc.) but also an increase in competition. Digital transformation is a matter of survival. Keeping the business in high performance is crucial to competitiveness and not losing ground.

#### **2.4 SEO to get the best results from search engines**

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is a set of techniques for websites, blogs, or internet pages, to improve organic positioning on Google, generating conversions and results for a business. In 1993, Architects appeared, considered the first search engine on the Internet (now Excite). With success, similar sites emerged, such as Yahoo! (1994) and finally Google (1997). (Slavio, 2016)

Regarding virtual stores, user traffic on these sites significantly impacts the results achieved. Therefore, a campaign to direct more people to the company's website is essential. For the virtual store to be easily found on Google, it is necessary to implement good SEO practices. In other words, Search Engine Optimization is a set of changes and adjustments that need to be made to web pages and content. This strategy aims to optimize the web pages to appear in the first search results on the Internet, generating organic traffic and sales opportunities. The reason is simple: Search engine optimization includes the technical requirements defined by Google to make web pages more visible on the Internet. (Ledford, 2009)

When discussing better positioning, Google prefers the pages, leaving them at the top of results in different searches with keywords on the related topic. For users to find the most assertive, complete, and authoritative results in search engines, websites, blogs, and other web pages, apply SEO techniques to ensure this positioning. It is necessary to consider three different audiences: the company which optimizes its pages, the Google search engines, and the user who performs the search. (Kristopher, 2008)

On the other hand, it is worth investing in Search Engine Marketing (SEM) - advertising on a search engine (such as Google). On the other hand, the company must rely on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques to position your website organically (i.e., not paid) in these engines. (Berman et al., 2013)

If the company understands SEO techniques and puts them into practice thinking only of Google, it will not have good results, as it is based on user needs and the services and products it offers. Therefore, keywords are essential in the SEO strategy, revealing which terms our persona has been searching for. Creating short headlines is also critical, as the company wants to avoid cuts to the Google results page. (Kent, 2014)

The Meta description is the small text located just below the page title and link on the Google results page and is undoubtedly one of the most critical elements for the best SEO of a website. Although the content and keywords in this space are not responsible for bringing a better positioning on Google, it is visible to users who found the page among many other competitors in the search carried out and should show what the site is about so that they will not click and check. In addition, user-friendly and well-structured website addresses contribute to the better positioning of a page in search results. Therefore, the SEO process of a website is not something that can be done in a short period and in a simple way. Optimizing a page in search engines is an ongoing procedure that requires adjustments and updates so that content is always considered the best result for the search for the desired keyword. (Lee, 2016)

The actions aim to highlight certain links or exciting content for the target audience. It is vital to publicize a virtual store to ensure it is appropriately optimized. Through these triggers, which attract the attention of potential consumers, they reach the links and are naturally directed to the company's pages. The idea is to create an ever-increasing flow. So, the math is simple: the more people are directed to the virtual store or to the content published by the company, the greater the chance of getting results. (Ledford, 2009)

This is undoubtedly a more time-consuming but necessary job. No matter how much money a

company has to invest in Google ads, the website must be optimized for SEO. This makes the business more sustainable in terms of an online presence.

## **2.5 Relationship Marketing: Retention of customers through relationship management**

Relationship marketing refers to the marketing strategy of cultivating more meaningful customer relationships to ensure long-term satisfaction and brand loyalty. It is a business approach to understanding and influencing customer behaviour through meaningful communications to improve customer purchases, retention, loyalty, and profitability. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a business strategy to understand and anticipate a company's current and potential customer needs. (Peppers et al., 2001)

According to Philip Kotler (2012), acquiring a new customer costs five times more than keeping an existing one. The explanations for this are simple: the current consumer already knows its services and products, their benefits, and the service. Moreover, it can be a different investment intensity to be convinced to choose the brand. After all, these people have already given the brand a vote of confidence, and the rest is easier.

According to Bogmann (2000), "Relationship marketing is essential for establishing market leadership, rapid acceptance of new products and services, and achieving customer loyalty."

The most practical thing is to delight and keep a customer, but this is only possible when there is total satisfaction that results from actions promoted by the company to generate a lasting consumer relationship and to work on loyalty. In addition, a satisfied and happy customer organically recommends the brand, company, products, and services to their friends and family members.

Loyalty means making them so satisfied with the company that they buy again and refer the brand to others. Conquering trust is the first step to gaining an audience's attention, which is what companies need to sell their products. Therefore, building this relationship of trust is something that takes time and depends on good experiences. However, during the post-sale, the company can ensure the highest level of consumer satisfaction and increase the chances of loyalty. (Emerald, 2015)

Having a sound customer service system is essential for the success of companies. Today, with easy access to information, customers have more autonomy in searching for offers. However, as market competitiveness is high, consumers will prefer those who offer the best shopping and service experience, that is, the best customer experience, which will delight

them and earn their trust and loyalty. If there is no good strategy behind it, the company will have many leads that will not advance in the sales funnel. (Bordeaux, 2021)

Investing in Relationship Marketing is the most appropriate – even more so now – and effective way to humanize the brand. It is necessary to have relationship rules with their contact base to be well-executed, making targeted campaigns and taking advantage of automation flow triggers to communicate appropriately with the company's base and customize at scale. (Kotler, 2012)

Of course, having a good website and knowing how to run the experience is essential to turn these visits into sales. The secret knows how to speak right and direct this message to those interested in what the company sells.

### **3. Methodology**

For this research, it was decided to use the case study method, which has a methodology in which the practical application of knowledge for problem-solving is sought. In addition, multiple forms of data collection can be used, such as questionnaires, interviews, secondary data, and observation of the object of study.

The Mix Method is a knowledge approach (theoretical and practical) that aims to consider multiple points of view and perspectives. Mixed methods research is a design in which the author collects, analyzes, and mixes (integrates or relates) qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or different phases of the same research program. They considered the research with qualitative methods with interviews and studies of an adequate methodological approach for allowing new research to deepen in the subject with a focus on the experiences lived by the managers of companies.

The literature review analyzes the theories and provides guidelines for qualitative research. Finally, these data will be analyzed through Triangulation that seeks corroboration through different strategies.

It was decided to study the consumption of souvenirs and souvenir companies' responses, as one study is believed to complement the other. Carrolls Irish Gifts was chosen because it met specific criteria such as belonging to the tourism industry; offering national products; and being active during the pandemic, where the Head of Marketing agreed to grant an interview. A Brazilian and a British company in the same segment will also be interviewed, in which it will be essential to know the reality in two other markets.

To complement the research, an online survey was posted on social networks and WhatsApp

groups to learn about the profile of souvenir consumers.

### **3.1 Method**

The present work uses both primary and secondary data. First, information on the consumption of souvenirs was collected from secondary sources, publications in general about the sector and other information on the internet. Then, based on these data, a script was prepared for the exploratory interviews and the literature review.

The literature review topics were chosen because they provide the theoretical basis for this project, which aims to understand the theme better and answer the research problem.

The interviews were carried out through a questionnaire sent by email to the managers of companies that work with gifts/souvenirs. In addition, an interview was conducted with Carrolls' marketing manager. Two other interviews were carried out, aiming to understand whether the impacts caused by the pandemic were the same and also to know the strategies used by these companies to overcome the crisis caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

To complement the research, an online survey was also carried out with 14 questions and 120 participants with the objective of knowing consumer behaviour concerning purchasing gifts/souvenirs. Firstly, the survey's first draft (pilot) was conducted with a group of four people. As expected, the pilot highlighted the corrections or adjustments that needed to be made in the questionnaire.

### **3.2 Justification for the adoption of a method**

This research used a case study because it was ideal for studying a phenomenon that cannot be separated from its context (the place and the conditions in which they occur). Furthermore, for it to be valid, in addition to the literature review, qualitative research was essential through interviews with managers and quantitative research to learn about consumers' preferences in the gifts/souvenir market.

### **3.3 Ethical Section**

Validity Reliability and Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The data is stored digitally, and I am the only person with access to it. No third parties are involved in the survey's development other than the institution's Independent Colleges, which require this project to evaluate their students.

### 3.4 Sample Codification

The interviewees were randomly assigned the identifiers "Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 3" to ensure the data's privacy and confidentiality.

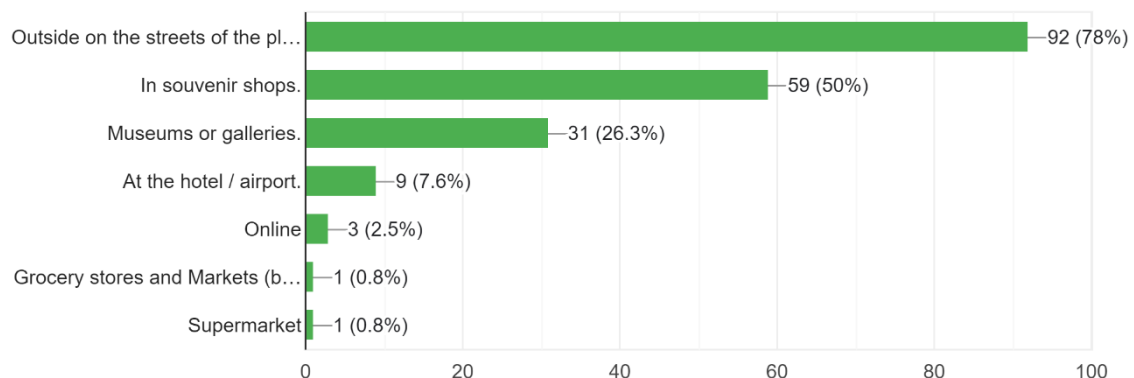
Interviewee 1	Head of Marketing at Carrolls Irish Gifts. He has extensive experience in the field of marketing in large companies.
Interviewee 2	Manager of the operation at a souvenir shop based in London, England.
Interviewee 3	Owner, Graphic Designer, and souvenir developer of a souvenir distributor in Brazil.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Theme 01: Brand Awareness and enhance the reach of the company

Where do you prefer to buy your souvenirs?

118 responses



**Interviewee 3:** Physical stores sell infinitely more than online in our niche.

**Interviewee 1:** Continue to invest in our brand positioning to differentiate ourselves online in the more competitive landscape.

Kotler (2005) questions why brands facilitate consumer choice by acting as a shortcut for various functional and emotional attributes. Brand Awareness measures how well the company's target market understands the brand, products, and services. People associate a brand with high recognition with the words popular or trending. Also, consumers recognizing the brand through its logo, colors, or voice.

According to Interviewee 3, physical stores sell more than online stores. However, this statement goes against the above graph, in which most participants say they prefer to buy gifts

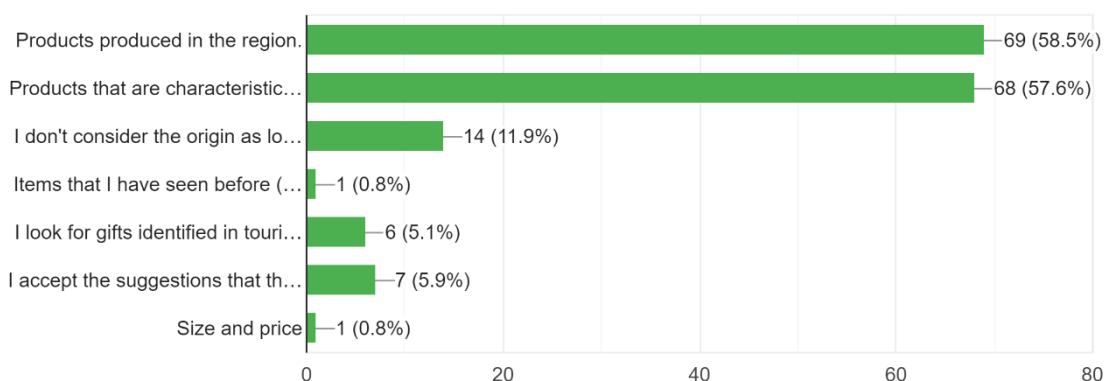


at fairs rather than specifically at specialized stores. Hence, it is necessary to promote the brand so that tourists change their consumption habits and buy more gifts in stores. Because, for Kotler, brands facilitate consumer choice. In this regard, Interviewee 1 is right when he says that he needs to continue to invest in Brand Positioning so that consumers become more aware of the brand, as investing only in the online market could leave aside a slice of the market.

## 4.2 Theme 02: Consumer Behaviour and the opportunity to understand customers

What do you prefer to prioritize while buying gifts and souvenirs?

118 responses



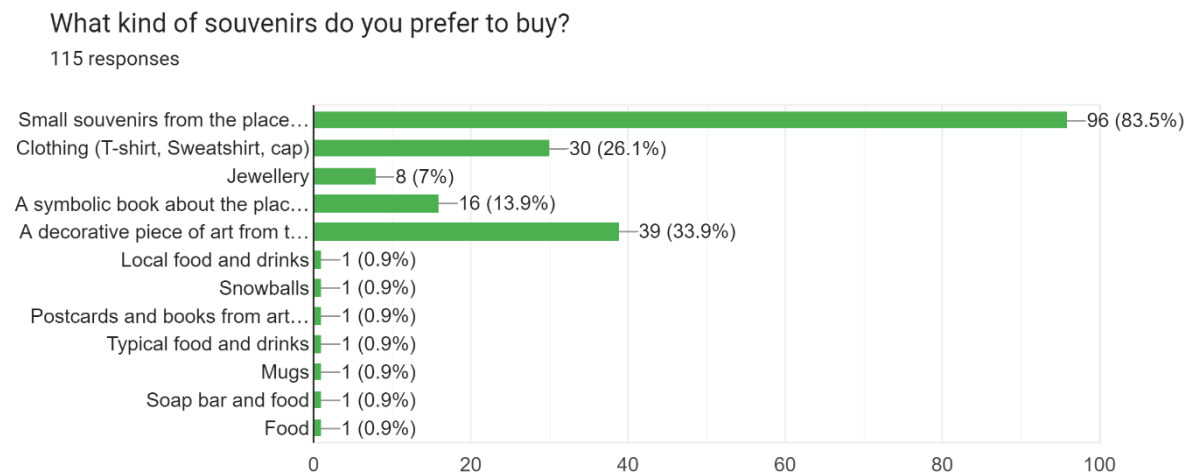
**Interviewee 1:** We invested in ecommerce (website, team, external team support). We continued to target overseas audiences but also focussed on a new audience – domestic customers. We repositioned the brand as a provider of craft Irish products to appeal to Irish based customers.

**Interviewee 3:** We don't notice significant differences. People who travel still want to take home souvenirs.(When asked about changes in consumer behaviour after the pandemic).

Engagement strategies should be founded on an empirical examination of recent customer behaviours and previous interactions with the company. During the customer journey, every touch point is an opportunity to engage the consumer and provide a brand experience. (Bommel et al., 2021). Solomon (2016) compliments that individual needs comprise the motivation, perception, and impressions that the consumer has about the good he is considering buying.

As a result of changing its focus from souvenir shops to traditional Irish products, Carrolls Irish Gifts made a wise choice since, according to the graph above, tourists prefer products

made in the locality or with regional characteristics, not necessarily those that have been produced on-site. The important thing is that it is something authentic that refers to the locality. The good side of promoting regional products is that it also contributes to the economic development of local producers, strengthening the region's economy, going in favour of Solomon's thought that tourists have impressions of what they think of buying. This preference is confirmed in the graph below, where tourists say they prefer local products.



### 4.3 Theme 03: Digital marketing and online sales strategy

**Interviewee 1:** Even though pandemic over, online traffic and sales remained higher than pandemic. It appears people have become more familiar and used to using online for browsing and buying. However, there is increased numbers of competitors now and most competitors have invested in their online offering. This all results in our target audience expecting (and demanding) a better-quality online user experience, effective order fulfilment and quicker customer care responses.

**Interviewee 3:** Yes, the plan was to add more products online and shift the stock from the physical store to online sales during the pandemic. Yes, adding more products helped as customers has more variety to choose from.

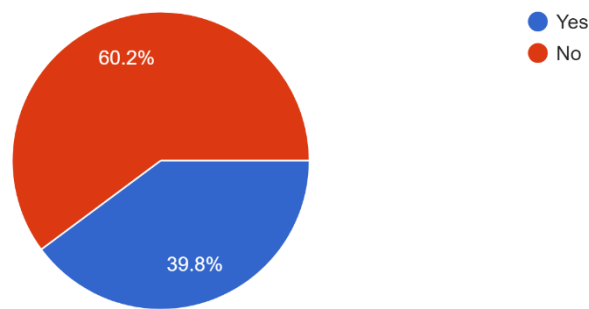
According to Peter Hyland, managing director of Carrolls Irish Gifts has been selling online since 1999, but at lower levels as tourists are not in the habit of buying souvenirs online. When the pandemic began, all stores were closed, and the only way to survive was to find an alternative. The strategy adopted was e-commerce. (O'Regan, 2020)

As mentioned before, the souvenir niche is not as strong in the online market, so it is imperative to look for alternatives to attract other target audiences. In the survey, participants were asked if they would buy souvenirs online if they couldn't find them in a physical store,

and 60% answered no. In this regard, the stores were consistent in seeking an alternative since online sales of souvenirs are not attractive to tourists. Therefore, it is essential to create strategies to win more customers.

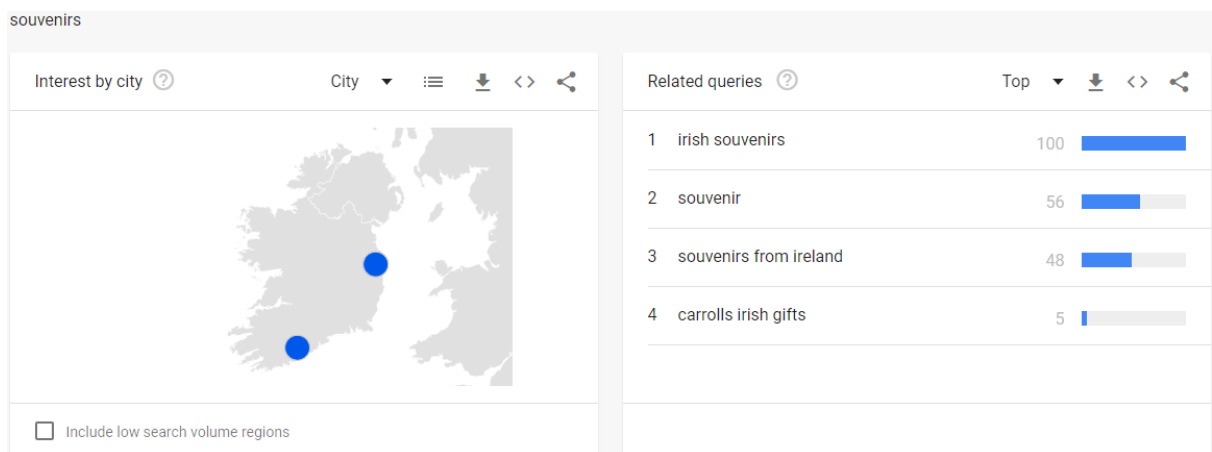
In that case, would you buy these souvenirs online?

118 responses

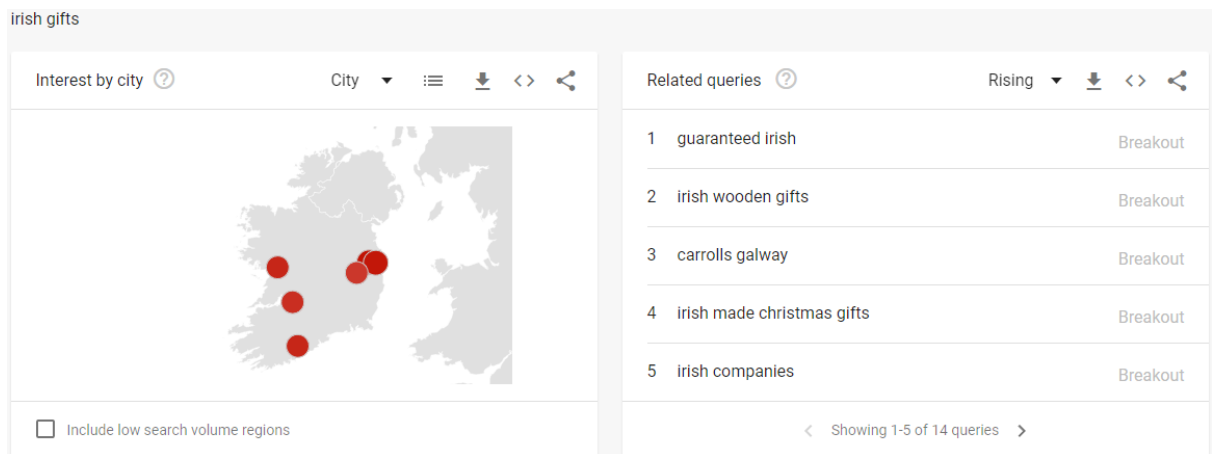


#### 4.4 Theme 04: SEO to get the best results from search engines

According to Google Trends, in searches for souvenirs carried out by users in the last five years, the Carrolls Irish Gifts is among the tracking. Such a brand like Carrolls has great importance in this market.



(Google Trends, 2022)



(Google Trends, 2022)

Interviewees emphasized the importance of intensifying their online presence when asked about their plans for the future.

**Interviewee 1:** Continue to invest in online (technology, people and fulfilment). Aim to make our offering omni-channel (e.g., click & collect, returns in-store, promote online in-store and vice versa). Target is to make online move from 10% to 30% of overall company revenues. Widen our target goes to new countries. Enter new marketplaces based on our success to date on Amazon and eBay.

**Interviewee 2:** The plan in the future is to add more products, grow our Instagram and TikTok Page. Improve our website and user experience. Start to introduce Ads as so far everything has been SEO or word of mouth. Scale this business to a globally recognised business.

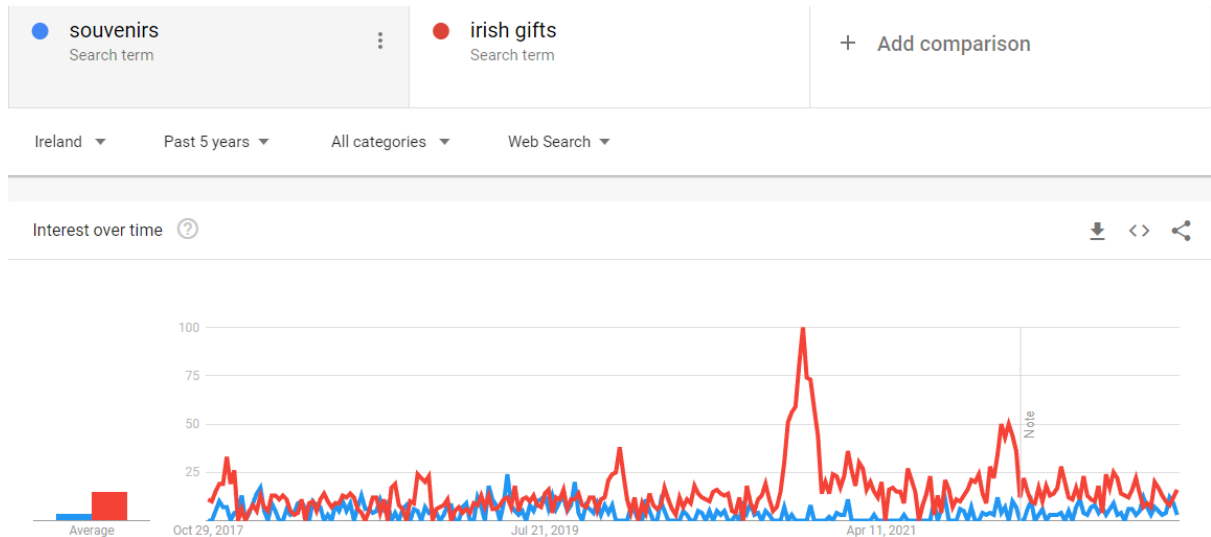
**Interviewee 3:** We plan to move from online sales to other points and open our physical store, always maintaining the store and online contact with travellers.

To increase its online presence, Carrolls Irish gifts partnered with e-commerce specialist Tryzens to develop the digital platform, which leverages the Salesforce Commerce Cloud, to leverage sales and improve the way customers can interact with products. Thus, the site is integrated with Google shopping to boost sales, which has payment, tax, and analysis services. As a result, the data shows that September 2020 sales are 53% higher than the same period last year. (Mckenna, 2020)

Given this, SEO shows how it affects search engine optimization and how it easily fits into a digital marketing plan. Prior to the actual optimization, it is essential to understand the client, the industry, and one's capabilities. The pages with the highest search engine rankings

typically have the most pertinent material. (Wall, 2015)

Carrolls' digital marketing strategy used the SEO approach to boost sales. The Google Trends graph below demonstrates that searches for Irish gifts peaked during the pandemic. This may be related to investments in digital platforms.

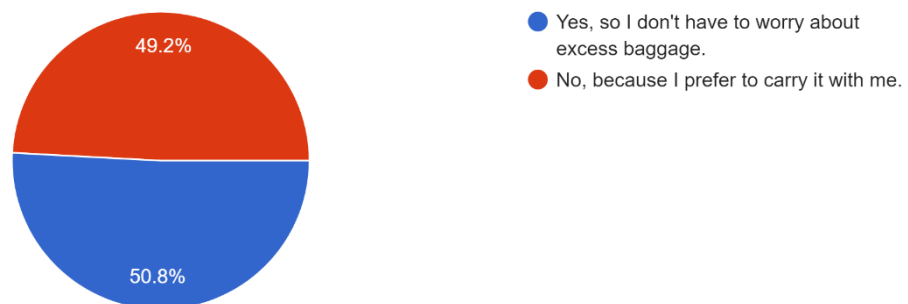


(Google Trends, 2022)

#### 4.5 Theme 05: Relationship Marketing and retention of customers

Would you consider convenient if the store offered free shipping above a certain amount?

118 responses



**Interviewee 1:** During (pandemic): An element of Irish customers started to recognise that Carrolls Irish Gifts is a source of relevant quality Irish products at great prices and not just for tourists.

After (pandemic): Irish customers have continued to buy from Carrolls Irish Gifts

online but now that all physical stores are open, keeping our brand front of mind with our Irish audiences is more of a challenge than during the pandemic.

**Interviewee 2:** Our contact has always been at events with the final public. These have not yet happened 100% again, but all tourist spots have, and online is still in effect. Today, the most important contact remains with our end customers on social networks and WhatsApp.

Customer satisfaction is essential to corporate success. A satisfied customer is more likely to become a devoted one who can help you improve sales. The customer journey can be improved by identifying crucial touch points, which will also encourage customers to continue recommending your business to their friends and family. (Bordeaux, 2021)

The interviewees know the value of keeping a positive relationship with the customer. For example, Carrols offers free shipping to physical store customers who buy over €100. The graph above shows that this benefit attracts just half of the survey participants. This action is significant for providing a good experience in the relationship between the customer and the brand. In Brazil, we say that 'the customer is always right.' One of the primary pillars on which brands can succeed is their ability to keep existing clients and attract new ones. Moreover, any business that invests in its consumers will benefit significantly since these clients will serve as genuine brand ambassadors. Any manager knows the extraordinary influence of "word of mouth" marketing.

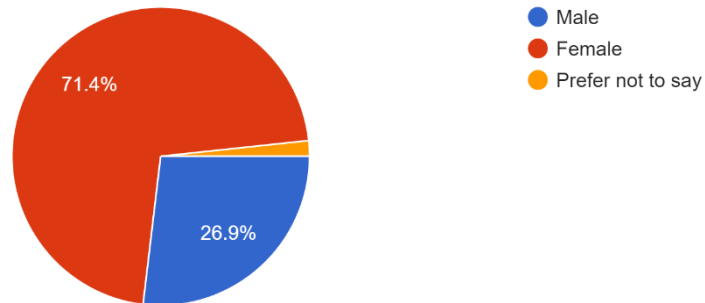
#### **4.6 Demographic Data**

Demographic data is information and statistics segment a population based on factors such as age, race, income, and gender. It is a practice widely used to study more about the community, and understanding who is on the other side of the message is essential for communication to become increasingly efficient. With demographic data, campaigns can be further segmented so that the message will reach the exact audience. (Hayes, 2022)

A total of 119 responses were received for the survey. Most women are between 21 and 40 years old and willing to spend up to €25 on gifts. Below is the data:

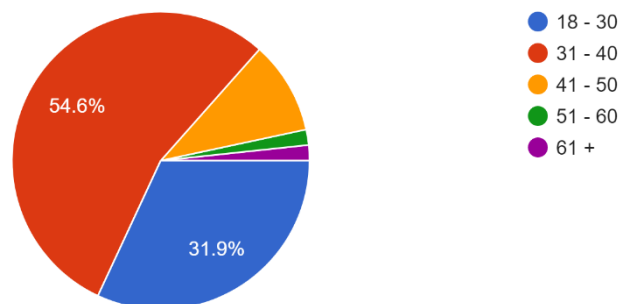
What is your gender?

119 responses



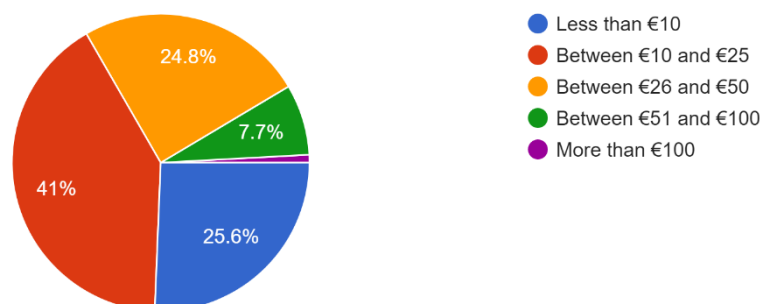
What is your age?

119 responses



How much do you consider acceptable to spend in gifts/souvenirs?

117 responses



#### 4.7 Behavioural Data

They provide valuable information about a customer's purchasing habits. Using behavioural marketing data allows the company to create more personalized and better shopping

experiences. However, it also informs brands about behavioural trends in a rapidly changing world. This marketing type focuses on individual engagement patterns and behaviour to match the ideal market's specific intentions, interests, and needs. (McGinley, 2019)

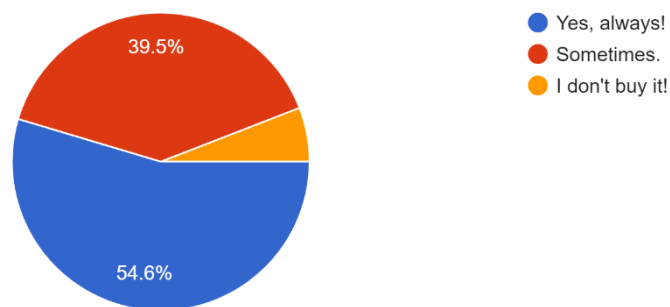
According to the survey, more than half of the participants usually buy gifts/souvenirs when travelling. Usually buy for themselves or to gift family members and friends. 76% of participants liked to receive gifts from someone close to them who was travelling.

Research has shown that object size is relevant depending on how consumers travel, but if the item is oversized, they prefer to avoid buying it.

The survey also showed the importance of souvenirs when 54% of participants stated that they set aside part of their budget during a trip to buy gifts.

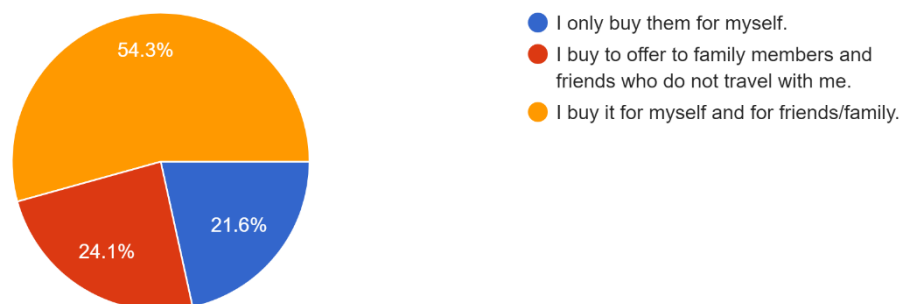
When you travel, do you usually buy gifts/souvenirs?

119 responses



Who do you usually buy gifts/souvenirs for?

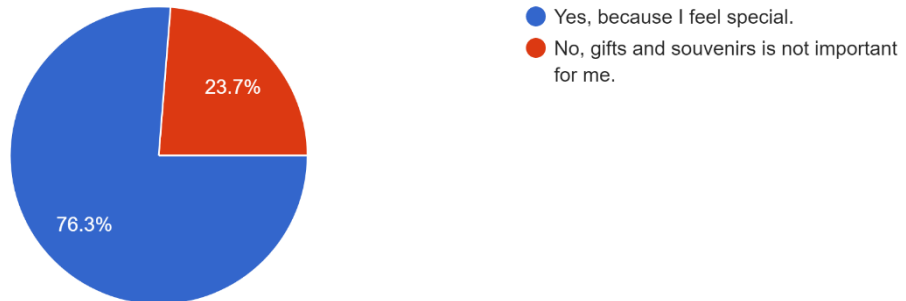
116 responses





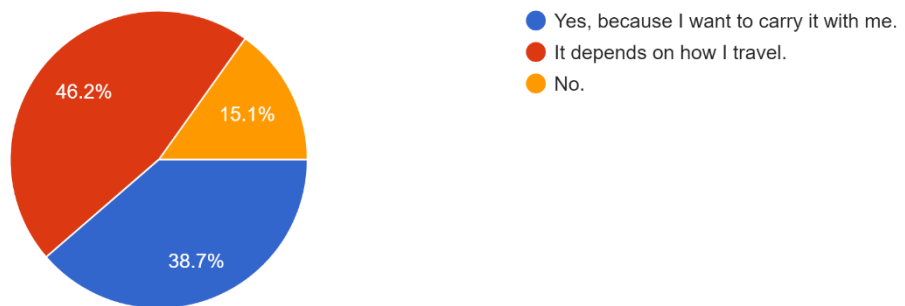
Would you consider it relevant and important if a friend/family member traveled and brought you a gift/souvenir?

118 responses



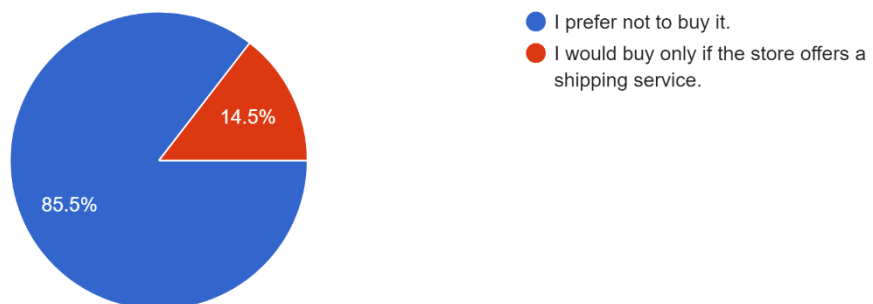
Does the size of the item have a relevance on your purchase?

119 responses



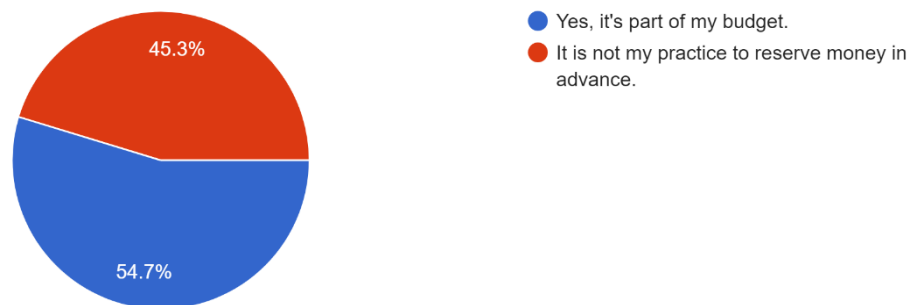
What do you do if the item is too big to carry?

117 responses



Do you set a specific budget for souvenirs when you travel?

117 responses



## 5. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Although the adopted method does not allow generalizations for the population, the study brought answers to the research questions initially posed, generating subsidies for future research.

Through the research, it was possible to confirm that there is a close relationship between tourist activity and the consumption of souvenirs, as well as to comprehend that by purchasing a souvenir, one can 'materialise' the experience lived during a trip. It should also be noted that research on souvenirs has many biases that need to be explored to understand the impact of selling these objects on the 'tangibility' of the tourist experience.

Thus, the obtained results met the objectives of this research, emphasising that the supply of souvenirs offered in tourist attractions affects the tourists' experience directly and indirectly.

They also show that people prefer shopping on the streets, in markets, and souvenir shops, rather than online. It also makes us understand that Carrolls Irish Gifts' strategy of selling typically Irish products was crucial to its survival during the pandemic.

Consumer behaviour has changed dramatically due to the pandemic, significantly bolstering internet sales growth. In addition, the study found that during a pandemic, managers respond similarly, adapting to circumstances and focusing their efforts on online sales and customer relationships.

Due to restrictions, several stores had to close, forcing the entire model that worked in person to reinvent itself for online models, using physical stores as a distribution centre for internet sales.

Companies must have an effective online presence in order to retain customers. Whether through a marketplace, e-commerce, or digital marketing services, Options that foster a positive relationship with the customer in order to increase the security of their online purchases. A well-structured company will be critical for this new business model.

The evolution of e-commerce has added credibility and security to the consumer's decision-making process, as he no longer desires the salesperson who surrounds him in stores where he can buy. Now, consumers can do whatever they want, whenever they want, with complete peace of mind and access to all available information.

When a company is online, it means that its public is too, so the company will have a dialogue with these consumers so that they become more and more loyal. Investing in the website and SEO is primordial for the company to be on the first page of Google. Only then will the company be seen. Just as investing in social media is necessary, as not only will the relationship with the consumer grow, but it will also attract a new target and consequently increase sales.

## **5.2 Limitations**

A common limitation of the case method is its generalisation. The method does not allow statistical generalisation because it does not use sampling logic criteria to select cases.

As a result, the results obtained here should not be applied to companies other than the one where the study was conducted.

Furthermore, the interviewee is biased when using primary sources such as in-depth interviews because their responses to open questions reflect their understanding and personal position on the fact under investigation.

The study covered only some of the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it began after it had already ended. Therefore, the data (online survey and interview) was collected in October 2022. Therefore, data (survey and interview) were collected in October 2022.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In this case study, the investment in SEO was visible. Organic search is always the most effective way of driving website traffic. On the other hand, knowing how much to invest in paid advertising is critical. They are effective at driving traffic and reducing it, but they must be balanced with organic content such as daily posts and audience engagement.

The issue of sustainability has gained prominence with changes in consumer behavior. People are increasingly looking for brands that share their values or with which they can identify. The company can collaborate on projects with influencers who share the exact causes and goals of the brand, establishing a connection with the public.

One way to keep customers engaged is to invest in referral programs, in which the company rewards customers who promote the brand and bring in new customers.

Sponsor events, people, and projects, or form a partnership that is well-liked by the public and has a positive influence, which can yield excellent results in brand awareness.

In the same way that a personal relationship must be nurtured through positive actions to produce positive results, the customer relationship must be viewed as an opportunity to gain trust.

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