Embracing Digitalization

A thematic and content analysis on the digital strategies of Yellow Malta

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ABSTRACT

As the physical and digital worlds collide, digitalization continually impacts the ways established companies run their business. As a result, businesses, in this case those that are business-to-business (B2Bs), need to have a solid understanding of digital business processes in order to continually support the expansion of their clients in the digital world. Even though there is a wealth of research on digitalization available, there is still a need for additional study that takes into account the distinct scenarios of particular organization's experiences as they work toward digitalization. Consequently, this study focused on the particular case of Yellow Malta, a company that specializes in digital marketing and the promotion of local SMEs. This study was related to the company's objectives and efforts as a B2B, specifically for employing digital services and technology to support the expansion of both their business and their clientele. Hence the following research question was formulated: How does Yellow Malta employ digitalization to optimize its business strategy? Qualitative research techniques were used to comprehend the how, what, and why of the specific circumstance of how Yellow Malta implements digitalization. In light of this, it was determined that qualitative research would be the best method for addressing the study question. The two distinct types of qualitative techniques used were in-depth qualitative interviews with Yellow Malta staff members and qualitative content analyses of their Facebook and Instagram pages.
These methods were deemed the most effective for obtaining an all-encompassing understanding of Yellow Malta from the staff members themselves and the portrayal of their digital tactics from their Social Media accounts. The study gave the researcher insight into how Yellow Malta implemented digitalization and how it enhanced their corporate strategy. Although the study produced a number of insights, the key conclusions highlighted Yellow Malta's commitment to implementing digitalization both inside their own organization and those of their clients. However, since they are rather customer-orientated, Yellow Malta advances less rapidly toward digitalization and the benefits it brings about with it due to the locals' tendency to be behind the times. Yellow Malta has nonetheless shown a positive vision and a willingness to integrate digitalization, suggesting that they will be able to effectively continue their transformation journey toward digital maturity. Yellow Malta has been able to benefit from digitalization in a number of ways, including the opportunity to offer new products and services, improved internal productivity, and brand visibility, amongst others. By adopting digitalization, Yellow Malta has not only been able to enhance their operations but also simultaneously build a trustworthy online presence that appeals to the local market.

<u>KEYWORDS:</u> *Digitalization, Digital Transformation, B2B, Strategy, Yellow Malta*

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Introduction

Businesses nowadays are under a constantly increasing pressure to adopt digitalization in order to boost the value of their operations and remain competitive. Digitalization refers to the growing prevalence of digital technologies and the incorporation of whatever can be digitalized in daily life (Mehdi Khosrow-Pour, 2018). Ribeiro-Navarrete et al (2021) highlights that a vast comprehension of digital processes in business operations is necessary for a company to be able to continue to foster the expansion of their clientele into the digital domain. Given the acknowledged significance of digitalization, both businesses and governments have committed to encourage the adoption of digital technologies. In fact the European Commission (2023) implemented *The Digital Europe Programme* in 2021 with a planned total budget of 7.5 billion to ensure that both citizens and businesses have access to the resources they need to advance in their digital endeavors (European Commission, 2022). One of the objectives of this program was to support Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to increase their competitiveness by utilizing new sources to increase their success rate. Through such fundings, SMEs are given the chance to innovate and expand their operations. In light of the acknowledged significance of digitalization, Malta also committed to encouraging the adoption of digital technologies. In fact, in 2022, Malta launched two programs under the European Commission totaling an expense of €15 million, in order to encourage company investment within SMEs to become technologically advanced and efficient (Balzan, 2022). The Malta Diġitali strategy for 2022 -2027 further subscribes to Malta's aspirations for digital transformation as it aims to develop programs to raise awareness and provide support to SMEs to adopt innovative technologies, and also provide digital certification programs (Malta Diġitali, 2022).

Yellow Malta (YM), a company serving local SMEs to grow their businesses through digital advertising, may be seen building on the paradigm of digital improvement. YM are known to be a local discovery search tool, and is one of the 75 worldwide Yellow Pages branches. The company was primarily known for their large yellow directory books, however, since 2018, YM focused on being a "digital first" firm, and is therefore a great example for this study in context of digital transformation. Not only is digital transformation evident within the changes of its own company operations in the past 5 years, but YM are also known to facilitate local companies in enhancing their media presence (Yellow Malta, n.d.). As YM trades goods and/or services with other businesses, it fits the definition of a B2B company (Chen, 2020a), with its main areas of expertise being that of digital marketing

and advertising for other local businesses. Through the services of YM, businesses that did not have any online digital presence before, are progressively becoming equipped with things such as a website (sometimes an E-market), a landing page on YM's website, as well as other forms of online promotion such as google search ads, google display ads, display banners on local newspaper websites such as MaltaToday and Times of Malta (Yellow Malta, n.d.). YM therefore makes a good example of a B2B company that is committed to digitalization.

This study aimed to explore the process of digital transformation within business operations. Given the obvious changes YM has implemented to enhance their own digital operation, as well as the pivotal role YM plays in digitalizing other companies, YM made an excellent case to explore how a Business to Business company utilizes digitalization to enhance their own, and others' business strategy. To increase the understanding of digitalization as a tool to optimize a company's business strategy, this study chose to focus on the particular case of YM, answering the following research question:

How does Yellow Malta employ digitalization to optimize its business strategy? Whilst there is an abundance of research on digital transformation available, there was still a need identified for research that takes into account the particular prospects and obstacles that specific companies undergo whilst striving for digitalization. Furthermore, this study intended to investigate YM's efforts and intentions as a B2B particularly, for employing digital technologies and services to support both their company and their customer's expansion. Such research on the intersection between B2B objectives and digitalization was found unprecedented.

In an attempt to answer this research question, this study built on insights regarding the various ways firms used technological frameworks and tools to enhance their performance in the past (Gimpel et al., 2018). Westerman et al.'s (2012) digital maturity model (DMM) was presented as a means for future studies to identify areas where a business may be falling behind in its digital transformation and also where they would need to devote more resources to reach the highest level of digital maturity (Teichert, 2019; Hortovanyi et al., 2023). The concept of digital of maturity was employed to understand the progressive development of digital operation into a state of companies having finalized their journey and being digitally competent (Teichert, 2019). By building on theoretical insights, new findings on the presumed unique digitalization of B2B companies was expected to add onto pre-existing knowledge and enrich the understandings already present. Moreover, this research was expected to be of scholarly interest due to its contribution to the knowledge of how firms employ digital tools and services to promote local business growth, since there is little

research zooming in on the topic of local digital entrepreneurship, let alone the case of Maltese business digitalization. Hence, the study's findings were expected to add to the body of academic literature.

Moreover, when considering societal relevance, the results of the present study were anticipated to provide useful information regarding the successes and pitfalls of digitalization to other B2B companies and digital marketeers in Malta and perhaps overseas too. This research intended to shed light on the impact of digitalization, as well as on how firms might use digital tools and services to enhance their business strategy and improve their digital maturity.

Theoretical Framework

In order to thoroughly comprehend the movement toward digitalization that may take place within a company, in this case, YM, theories and concepts drawn from academic literature were taken into consideration. The theoretical framework thereby acts as the study's foundation, incorporating several concepts that are essential to addressing the research question. In order to comprehend YM's business model better, the framework also incorporates an understanding of a B2B organization. The concept of digitalization is next explored considering it was the focus of the study topic and the impetus behind the change of YM. Following on, the notion of digital transformation was explored in order to acknowledge the ongoing efforts for change and the enhancement of business performance that comes along with it. To support the understanding of digitalization the development of digital strategies were discussed, as these tools were identified as fueling the ongoing transition towards digital business operations. Finally, the topic of digital maturity was discussed to clarify how to evaluate the level of competence in a business's transformation, here: to assess and evaluate the state of YM digital transformation.

2.1 Business to Business

The term business to business or B2B, refers to a type of business model that is solely defined by the production of goods, and delivery of services for other companies and organizations (Chen, 2020a). YM falls under this definition, as it is "committed to increasing local businesses' presence through its' digital channel" (Deloitte Digital, n.d, para. 1). A B2B company like YM can be understood and analyzed to get case study insights into the specific niche of B2B businesses which has a focus in this research; particularly whilst better comprehending the potential effects of digitalization on YM's overall strategy as an example of B2B digitalization.

Marketplaces that cater to businesses (B2B) and consumers (B2C) are significantly different from one another. However, even though Business-to-Consumer (B2C) consumers do not really play a direct role in Business-to-Business transactions, they are one of the main reasons that B2B businesses usually collaborate. This is since B2B's sole purpose is to provide some sort of value to the end customer, which are the B2C consumers. Accordingly, B2B businesses closely monitor overall economic circumstances in the markets that their clients operate in, to forecast consumer purchasing trends (Uzialko, 2019). The slightest shift in customer demand can have a significant impact on the whole supply chain of companies that provide the services and products, including B2Bs (Jenkins, 2022).

According to Dotzel and Shankar (2019), the products and services that B2B provide to their clients are often highly sophisticated as they tend to be tailor made for expert clients. Some of the services and products that B2Bs offer to clients may require specialized designs to meet clients' needs, such as YM's Platinum + package where one of the offerings is that of a "certified website complete with bespoke SEO-approved content and tailor-created design" for the customer (Micallef, n.d, para.5). Not only is the design of product and service provision by B2Bs of high complexity; B2Bs understanding of organizations' buying dynamics might be just as difficult. B2B companies cater for a broad variety of clients, and the buying process of each and every client involves a variety of stakeholders, decision-makers, influencers, and users. This causes B2B sales cycles to be lengthier than B2C sales cycles (Fauska et al., 2013). This is especially since it is often a multistage purchase journey (Gartner, n.d.), as briefly visualized in Figure 1.

Problem identification The potential client becomes aware of an issue	→	*Solution exploration* The interest in finding a solution has peaked	→	*Requirements building* The evaluation of what the client needs from the purchase
Supplier selection Evaluation of suppliers in relation to needs	→	*Validation* Ensuring the selected supplier is the right one	→	*Consensus creation* Ensuring all stakeholder are onboard

Figure 1. B2B buyer purchasing journey

Furthermore, Dang et al. (2019) argue that B2B sales are frequently relationship-driven, emphasizing the significance of trust and client loyalty in order for the supplier company to profit from recurring transactions. Two illustrations of the kinds of traits that boost loyalty and trust are the following: a seller's commitment to the customer organization, and a strong cultural fit (Almquist et al.,2018). Relatedly, it is often the case that companies who are geographically concentrated make up the majority of the company's sales in Business-to-Business. This is because the close proximity of the businesses and the attainment of the same cultural background relates to a sense of trust for more information, advice, and improvement for the company's decision-making (Dang et al., 2019).

Selling to another business requires an ample amount of information about the goods and/or services being supplied. As a result, B2B clients tend to make fewer purchases that are often of more value than a conventional buyer-seller transaction. Therefore, B2Bs are charged with the task to make abundantly clear how and why their services are superior to any other B2B competitors. This also requires giving the potential clients more time to learn about the products being offered since they are frequently more complex than those offered by B2C businesses. B2B Clients are found to need more research to decide whether the purchase from a B2B is worth it since it could also have to involve investments in modifying their operations, bringing new training for employees and a potential change in workflows (Pol, 2022).

Moreover, by 2025, studies predict that 80% of B2B contacts would likely take place digitally due to business consumers' widespread adoption of digital connections (Lundin & Kindström, 2023). Therefore in order for these companies to improve the value of their operations and maintain a competitive edge, they are under constant pressure to adopt digitalization. This is what YM decided to do in 2019 as they transformed into a full-fledged digital business and produced new services such as "Facebook and Instagram posts, news portal articles, personalized websites and other incredible marketing tools" claimed to take one's "business to new heights" (Yellow, n.d, para 2).

2.2 Digitalization

Research acknowledges the importance of digitalization to optimize modern day business strategies, including B2B operations (Ritter & Pedersen, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to have an understanding of the concept of digitalization as it will provide a conceptual lens through which one can view its effects on YM. This is especially since the research question specifically focuses on the employment of digitalization by YM and how it enhances their business strategy. To begin with, the term digitalization itself describes the usage, or increasing prevalence of digital technologies as well as the resulting alterations digital transformations cause to business operations (Gimpel et al., 2018; Kasperovica, 2019). According to Gimpel et al., (2018), something must be modified in a company's process, with the creation of value through the use of digital technologies in order for it to be categorized as being digitalized. *Digitization* on the other hand, which is often misinterpreted as having the same meaning as digitalization, is the process of analog to digital data conversion, and does

not have the same meaning as digitalization since it is the foundation for it (Rachinger et al., 2018). [1]

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the value of digitalization by exposing the widespread 'digital poverty' in Europe (European Investment Bank, 2021). That is, with businesses becoming dependent on digital communication and operations, those companies who had not yet jumped on the digital bandwagon got exposed as they struggled through the shift in online services and remote work. Productivity is typically said to be higher in those digitalized businesses, compared to non-digital businesses that do not make use of cutting-edge digital technologies (European Investment Bank, 2022). Apart from productivity, it has been proven that the use of digitalization also boosts efficiency, with the most notable impact being on service industries within B2B companies, such as YM (European Central Bank, 2019). Internal prospects include increased productivity, accuracy, and consistency of company operations while external opportunities include faster reaction times and better customer service. In addition, emerging digital technology may provide prospects for innovative customer offerings or new services (Parviainen et al., 2017). The Yellmarket (a digital carousel owned by YM to showcase images, description and prices of local businesses), banner management for promotions on local news portals and Facebook boosting campaigns were among the released services in 2019 when YM first decided to go digital. These services were unavailable before, and were developed to assist companies in communicating with their customers simply and directly, in addition to boosting their exposure (Times of Malta, 2021).

In a research done by MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte amongst 4,800 worldwide business executives, managers and analysts, 76% of the respondents stated that digital technologies are vital to their organizations, and the embracement of digital tools is a necessity (Kane et al., 2015). Findings from the European Investment Bank (2022) support evidence of the advantages of utilizing digital tools as they increase competitiveness. Moreover companies that exploit cutting-edge digital technology frequently enjoy favorable market conditions. Investment intensity is higher for digital businesses that are more developed. It has been highlighted that digital businesses will make greater investments in

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[1] Therefore, on the contrary to many other studies, the two concepts will not be used interchangeably, and digitalization will be the main focus in this section and the rest of the paper. This is due to fact that this study will be analyzing the impact of digitalization of Yellow Malta as one of its main aims, whilst keeping in mind the claims that digitalization has the power to bring about change in the business world (Hermastho & Irhamni, 2021).

innovation, bringing in new products, methods, and services such as the use of artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and other technologies. The better productivity of these businesses and the greater demand for their products and services can be used to explain this higher investment intensity (European Central Bank, 2022). In the case of YM, one could expect, a number of benefits to be associated with the digitalization of their company. For instance, with the aid of software development company OneMotion, the synchronization of the software programs HubSpot, Teamwork, and a specially created sales applications, YM can be expected to experience the advantages of automation (Clifford, 2020)

2.2.1 Digitalization of B2B companies

In turn, it is critical to understand the impact digitalization specifically has on B2B companies with the context of this paper being that of an analysis of a B2B company. Ruiz-Alba et al. (2019), in their research amongst top executives in a number of industries, point out that 75% of their participants agreed that their businesses are using digitalization to stay competitive, cut expenses, and streamline operations in order to improve performance. Furthermore, through responses from top non-financial organizations in a survey by European Central Bank (2019) it was demonstrated that utilizing digital technologies had a beneficial impact on company sales, whilst also increasing efficiency and productivity. By the advent of digitalization, B2B companies now have better access to consumer data, enabling them to have a better understanding of their consumers or potential consumer's wants and needs, but also affecting the approaches to partners and competitors (European Central Bank, 2019; Hofacker et al., 2020). Digitally collected data is therefore rather essential for B2B commerce. In the value chain, the data can be leveraged to inspire new collaborations (European Investment Bank, 2022). However, it is also possible to provide the company with analytical abilities for both current and prospective endeavors (Gray & Rumpe, 2015). This provides the capacity to more efficiently capitalize on demand peaks. This was depicted as having a positive influence since it helps generating value resulting in the implementation of data-driven decision-making (European Central Bank, 2019). According to this study, without digital technologies, organizations would not be able to perform digital analysis to the level that is currently attainable. Following on, tools like Google Analytics have helped to firmly establish the fundamentals of data analysis. Such digital platforms allow for monitoring, giving the marketer a deeper understanding of each customer. Even more details, such as where, why, and how long content was viewed, are included here to aid advertisers in correctly identifying their target market. Based on

digitalized market research, two of the most well-known advertising platforms, Facebook Ads and Google Ads, can now assist in targeting certain demographics (Factory, 2021). Not only is this more cost- efficient, it also provides more exposure to businesses and can establish an increase in brand awareness. Adding to the already observed movement toward digitalization by YM , the company has further demonstrated to be more engaged in setting up awareness campaigns on its online platforms, with the ultimate goal being to be recognized as the top-of-mind choice (Seebacher, 2021). It is through customer interactions that companies like YM have showed themselves able to promote brand awareness and loyalty, and may be done through marketing initiatives, web content, and Social Media (SM) outreach (Bernazzani, 2018).

Focusing more on the psychological aspects of marketing, according to Dwivedi et al (2021), digitalized content marketing creates a competitive advantage for B2B companies due to its appeal to people's emotions through the use of Social Media, blogs and videos which are often said to attract and engage users. With this, businesses and their clients are linked, as they may participate on online forums, and here produce and exchange content (Hofacker et al., 2020). An illustration of this may be the usage of Social Media by B2B companies with the aim of improving communication, fostering relationships and trust, supporting sales, assisting in information gathering to help identify client needs, and to participate in learning and collaboration both internally and externally (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). However, despite the acknowledged potential of B2B digitalized content marketing via SM use. B2B's in reality still underuse Social Media in their business operations. Amongst B2B owners, digitalized marketing and communication are still perceived as less effective than face-to - face interactions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As a result, B2B companies still fail to prioritize digitalized content marketing since the common belief amongst managers remains that such marketing will not have an effect on relationship building with their customers (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Instead, there is still an emphasis on some sort of face-to-face interaction in order to help build the trust necessary for such costly and timely purchases (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021).

Contrasting the observation that B2B companies still fail to embrace digitalized marketing, they have, to various extents, slowly started to conform to the digitalization of business interactions. This is where the physical and the digital coexist, and time and space take on various shapes and lead to various value-creation processes, such as through the usage of video conferencing or even virtual reality (Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021). When coming to brand communication, smaller B2B organizations are more reliant on in-person

encounters with clients, while larger companies need to rely on alternate means of brand communication. This tends to be done by utilizing digital platforms to provide a consistent brand image to all stakeholders (Hofacker et al., 2020) And so, an active Social Media profile turns out to be beneficial to a B2B as it influences the ways customers perceive a brand, and influences whether they should become or remain to be loyal customers, through for example a subscription basis making such SM platforms quite crucial (Huotari et al., 2015).

Apart from the relatively slow start of digitalized marketing within B2B businesses that has been previously mentioned, B2B E-commerce has significantly increased as a result of digitalization, leading to a number of competitive advantages. B2B E-commerce, which accounts for the largest portion of the market, can be broadly characterized as the use of the internet to conduct business (Fauska et al., 2013). With such a tool in place B2B companies can handle inventory, manage orders, and manage customer data from one location. In today's market, two-thirds rely on digital channels for the entirety of their purchase, as not only does it speed up the transaction time, but it also reduces the costs at every level (European Central Bank, 2019; Manu Bangia et al., 2022). With regards to YM, an expected outcome would be the usage of SM and analytic tools to depict what their consumer and user preferences are. By doing so, their content for themselves and local businesses may become more appealing to the public.

2.2.2 Challenges of digitalization in a B2B company

The aforementioned demonstrated that digitalization had opened up more potential to draw clients from various places that had previously not been conveniently accessible. Clients and business owners can easily connect with each other in the online domain on a 24/7 basis. This, unfortunately, disregards the reality that the boundaries of the market are becoming less clear, making it harder for companies to recognize their competitors due to the constant changes brought about by digitalization (Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021). In order to please clients, B2B's are creating online solutions, such as websites and customer care chats to increase convenience. Yet they are aware that, despite its evident advantages, digitalization is not without its challenges, dangers, and possible consequences (Ruiz-Alba et al., 2019).

Firstly, the timing, source, and method of contacting the business are all decisions made by the client. Before making a purchase, B2B buyers conduct online research and get their information from those sources, with 71% of the buyers looking at reviews during the supplier selection phase (G2 & Heinz Marketing, 2018). As such, it is essential to provide prospective customers with pertinent information on the onset of their decision-making

process and to communicate the benefits of the product or service the business will provide (Seebacher, 2021). Not informing the client sufficiently, or at the right moment in the decision process via online channels, can have detrimental consequences for potential business deals. Moreover, the whole process of B2B buying and selling has evidently grown less linear; as a result clients have numerous abilities to evaluate and select different choices. The process of closing sales has gotten more difficult as more individuals both inside and outside the company are taking on important roles in evaluating products (Huotari et al., 2015). With the struggle to properly leverage digitalization, the company may end making crucial miss-steps in the customer journey. Companies may be evaluated by clients as not being user-friendly, or clients may express that their privacy feels invaded due to the overly specifically customized journey and tailored solutions offered (Lundin & Kindström, 2023; Ruiz-Alba et al., 2019). Thirdly, marketers have also found it challenging to employ and keep up to date with the expansion of digital media platforms, both economically and practically (Hermastho & Irhamni, 2021). At the same time, businesses may also find it difficult to fully gain advantage of digitalization since it calls for excellent managerial skills (Lundin & Kindström, 2023; European Investment Bank, 2021). As a result, businesses require to engage in a process of continuous learning and adaption to change, meaning that without investing in the in-house skills and knowledge of digital marketing, company digitalization might be but an utopian scenario. This continues to shed light on one of the biggest barriers to the adoption of digital technologies, which is the difficulty of changing the organizational structure of the company towards digital operations, and the requirement to hire and retain highly skilled ICT staff, that is capable of leading a digital transition effectively and efficiently (European Central Bank, 2019; Ruiz-Alba et al., 2019). Having the right staff to execute change is pertinent since the inefficient use of digital resources causes investments in digitalization to be rather costly without necessarily providing a profit (Ruiz-Alba et al., 2019).

The previous discussion of digitalization in B2B companies has shed light on the risks and difficulties, but mostly the potential of digitalization. Given the outweighing qualities and effects of digitalization on B2B companies, the majority of research conducted concludes that it is essential to go digital. A company has high risks on starting to lag behind if it does not adapt and start to adopt modern technologies. The implementation of novel technologies is necessary, as well as developing the capacity to use them to get knowledge from clients and competitors. A company should only begin to consider digital transformation as a subsequent milestone if they have successfully implemented their digital technologies (Schreckling &

Steiger, 2018; Factory, 2021). In the case of YM, theory would predict that the company would most definitely have some sort of issues with their staff, especially considering the complete switch from print to digital which occurred in a short period of time. As mentioned by Deloitte Digital (n.d.), there has been various training sessions which have occurred with regards to digital marketing at YM. However, it is unclear whether or not the company has kept up with continuously training their employees and if the employees are able to stay on track with the constant updates and trends.

2.3 Digital transformation within the B2B industry

In the process of digitalization, Digital Transformation (DT) may be considered as a subsequent phase (Unruh & Kiron, 2017). Withal, DT is the use of modern digital technologies to drastically enhance business performance. The term transformation refers to the alterations and modifications that businesses undertake to enhance what they already have or change their operations on the whole towards digital (Gimpel et al., 2018; Westerman, 2014; Schallmo et al., 2017). Industries have been impacted by technological changes in recent years, due to market unpredictability. As a result, there is a need for a stronger ability to meet customer demands which could be answered with innovation through digital transformation (Tonder et al., 2020). With this focus on innovation, DT necessitates a cultural shift within the organization and calls for a digital approach. This is something which YM claimed to have designed and employed, and will be further explored at a later stage. It must be made apparent however, that digital transformation involves significant changes depending on numerous factors such as connective technology, communication and information, and not just a single technology.

A major point of digital transformation is the generation of enhanced value, which may comprise of enhancing customer experience, operational processes, and business models, but is most definitely not limited to this (Cichosz et al., 2020). Westerman et al. (2011) and Verhoef et al. (2021) have made the case that DT is being implemented to boost business performance. However, the introduction of DT must be done with the knowledge that one's business model will need to alter to adjust to the digital changes. Digital transformation thus encompasses more than just the welcoming of technological advancements: DT will in fact affect and completely change a business on the whole (Lozic, 2019;Tonder et al., 2020). Acknowledging the profound impact DT will have on business operations, this study defines digital transformation as the process of utilizing digital technology to develop new, or adapt existing organizational processes and customer

experiences, in order to fulfill rapidly evolving demands. It involves reducing the limitations imposed by pre-digitalization logic and utilizing technology to generate new cash flow sources, reduce expenses, and improve user experience (Cichosz et al., 2020;Lozic, 2019;Tonder et al., 2020; Westerman et al., 2011). The better a company is at embracing digital transformations, the more innovative it will become, and the more sustainable its competitive advantages will be (Ferreira et al., 2018). Deloitte might serve as a concrete example here, as it pioneered through the establishment of Deloitte Digital Today, aimed at supporting its clientele undergoing digital transformation through the advancement of design and customer orientated thinking (Deloitte, n.d.-b; Lozic, 2019). A company's digital transformation is a constant process of refining and adapting to suit the shifting needs of the business environment, therefore DT is evidently not a one-time effort. Identifying the objectives for a company's digital transformation is the outcome of this process (Parviainen et al., 2017). The businesses that prioritize the needs of their customers in all they do, are the ones that succeed in the digital space. In the understanding of Bloomberg (2018), the digital transformation of a company revolves around the customer. The companies that put the consumer first have proven to grasp the best ways to adapt to future developments, regardless of how technology progresses (Albanese, 2018). Thereupon, customer experience is only one of the three main areas in which DT produces value creation. According to Westerman et al. (2014) operational procedures, and business model are also prioritized here.

2.3.1 Customer Experience

According to Gimpel et al. (2018), digitalization affects how customers get information, assess service and/or product offerings, and make purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is possible to positively enhance the consumer experience at each and every 'touch point' within the company-customer interaction. Websites, advertisements, search engine results, and SM are all examples of touchpoints, as they involve customer interactions with a brand online (Schrader, 2023). Every communication a customer has with a company is essential to provide a full process and consistent consumer experience (Gimpel et al., 2018). If DT is applied well, touchpoints can be targeted to improve customer service by giving prompt, user-specific responses, or even adding a space for feedback on the company website to offer valuable insights to continue improving. This way, companies increase brand awareness, customer loyalty and trust via rapid and accessible problem resolution. Moreover, an improvement of the customer experience can also be established through marketing initiatives, web content, and Social Media outreach. In essence, SM and other interactive

marketing communication technologies encourage audiences to participate actively in the creation of content, bringing forth what is known as user generated content (Huotari et al., 2015). Apart from that, SM is being used for people to connect with others and share their experiences about that brand (Huotari et al., 2015). Although, companies must make sure to monitor user generated content regularly as some of these discussions on SM may be constructive and others may harm a company's image.

E-commerce is also able to optimize B2B operations and improve the user experience by offering an automated sales process between firms, providers, and distributors. E-commerce can moreover offer a tailored experience to keep clients captivated. B2B e-commerce was found to be a suitable way to cross-sell and up-sell to current customers since it offers a platform that is available and accessible to their audiences (Manu Bangia et al., 2022). Also, the adaptation of E-commerce presents a chance to diversify into other markets and draw in new clients. The ability to often monitor client behavior is one of the main benefits of having an E-commerce website. Data analytics may then be utilized to determine which aspects of the business are effective and which should be eliminated, enabling an improved user experience (BigCommerce, 2020). Such a digital tool may offer organizations new ways of gaining customer insights by collecting customer data along customer journeys. With data and analytics, firms may reconfigure the value they provide consumers across a variety of digital touch points (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). These insights form the basis for effectively forecasting consumer behavior, creating individualized products and services, and improving customer experience. Businesses are incorporating consumer purchase information to deliver more individualized sales and customer services or even to offer specialized product packages (Westerman et al., 2011). According to Westerman et al (2014), business's value chain should therefore be digitalized, taking into account each and every component of the business. The integration of customer data from diverse sources is a main challenge in this context, as many businesses struggle to keep up with the growing number of touchpoints (Gimpel et al., 2018). Moreover, the aforementioned will serve as a means of understanding to YM's ways of enhancing their customer experience through digitalization, and understanding whether this part of their transformation has been successful.

2.3.2 Operational procedures

As the physical and digital worlds continue to converge, digitalization has a significant impact on how established organizations operate. Companies are being compelled to reevaluate their supply chains, business processes, and operational methods (Fitzgerald et

al., 2014). For the purpose of providing cutting-edge services and goods, and more significantly, enhancing user experience, it is crucial to integrate systems and process data effectively. Thus, many top firms put a lot of effort into streamlining their IT infrastructure before, during, and after launching digitalization initiatives focused on value generation. While doing so, firms may also stand to gain by making this infrastructure more flexible and compatible with rapidly evolving digital technologies in order to enhance their ability to transform their operations (Gimpel et al., 2018). With flexible operations businesses are then able to individualize their products and satisfy constantly shifting customer expectations. Digital supply networks, which provide end-to-end data, services and product interchange among participating firms, serve as a counterpart to agile operations as an element of a company's digital ecosystem (Gimpel et al., 2018).

Nowadays, work has essentially been virtualized. Employees can work from home if they so choose, and when employees need to communicate with anyone else, they are able to do this wherever thanks to the collaboration and networking capabilities that companies may offer (Westerman et al., 2014). The 1559 respondents from companies across the business spectrum, in a research study by Fitzgerald et al. (2014) had the general consensus that automation has helped operations at their organizations. Automating operations allows businesses to refocus their workforce on more strategic responsibilities. Many respondents claimed that adopting digital tools had significantly improved internal communications, which had helped organizations become more adaptable and customer-focused (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). Hence, the operational procedure may incorporate automating and optimizing numerous company operations, such as that of the incorporation of HubSpot at YM to collect and keep track of information including the quantity of orders received, the quantity of goods sold, and the total amount of cash flow and revenue earned (Clifford, 2020).

2.3.3 Business model

To reap the benefits associated with the successful adoption of digital transformation, businesses must acquire the effort and cultivate specialized skills at multiple organizational and operational levels of their business models (Annarelli et al., 2021). Ultimately, there is the process of enhancing current business models or developing an entire new one (Lozic, 2019). However, it has been noted that businesses are increasingly viewing digital technologies as a means to transform their consumer experience and/or operations. Transformation of the business model is often deemed as complex, and is far less prevalent (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). In the survey that was conducted by Fitzgerald et al.

(2014), amongst executives from large companies, just 15% of respondents stated that new business models were arising as a result of digital technology. This could be the case due to resistance to change, by customers or even employees. Digital transformation requires firms to evolve, communicate with employees, and modify their work and thinking. It necessitates exposing people to digitalization and future changes and improving their expertise and perspective on it (Kane et al., 2015). Companies must not only alter how they function, but also redefine how functions interact with one another and evolve the parameters and operations of the company. This could involve developing electronic or service wrappers around existing products, incorporating digital products to enhance existing ones, finding ways to complement physical products and services with digital ones, using digital to share content throughout different parts of the organization, or even completely altering business models by restructuring through digital (Westerman et al., 2014). It would be interesting to see how the complexity of digital transformation is perceived by YM, and how willing their employees and managers are to adapt to the constant changes and keep their customers as their number one priority whilst doing so as well.

2.3.4 Leadership

Digital transformation relates to a significantly broader application of digital technologies, but also a cultural shift usually initiated top-down within the company. Such a transition therefore requires fundamental organizational changes reinforced by leaders. To transform the corporate culture, employees that understand and support the inclusion of digital technologies are important. More businesses are affected by complacency than any other corporate obstacle and so it is crucial for digital transformation to commence and be pushed by leadership with a strategic vision (Factory, 2021). The top officials of companies such as Netflix, Adobe and Amazon are leading such digital transformation as they employ significantly different leadership systems compared to those that are simply implementing technology initiatives (Than, 2022). Leadership entails communicating to stakeholders a DT vision that clarifies the organization's direction and guides employees and business partners (Cichosz et al., 2020). Not only is it essential to identify customer issues and resolve them with quicker, and more sustainable services. It is also crucial to engage employees at all levels to enhance their workplace, operations, and enable the business to keep improving for its clients (Cichosz et al., 2020). An example of this is when Deloitte provided assistance to YM in developing a variety of training sessions specifically designed to help their sales team advance in the field of digital marketing (Deloitte Digital, n.d.).

Owing to the expansion of data sources and the adoption of business strategies that are data-driven, companies may identify real-time demands by monitoring and evaluating digital traces and their contexts. They can also enhance the experience of their customers, employees, and partners to find and exploit optimization possibilities and mitigate risk. Companies would therefore be keen to maintain their consumer touch points to gather pertinent data and to thoroughly assess every aspect of their company model to find areas where data may provide a competitive advantage (Gimpel et al., 2018). In this research, managerial officials within YM were questioned regarding their DT driven leadership, as well as employees to establish an understanding of bottom-up resonance of the DT vision.

2.4 Digital Strategy

The creation of a successful digital strategy that is in line with a company's overarching corporate objectives and goals is an essential component of the ongoing digital transformation. In fact, for an organization to benefit from its digitalization, the appropriate strategies must be put into practice (PricewaterhouseCoopers, n.d.). The term strategy has transformed into an all-encompassing term that refers to a collection of procedures intended to help a business find and enter a new market, or an already-existing one or to make better use of digital technologies (Ivang et al., 2009). A business strategy also aims at assisting the achievement of goals by providing a long-term overview of the anticipated strategic course for the business. Based on the company's core values it may help by supplying guiding principles to instruct the businesses on what ought to be done. The usage of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a plan. These KPIs may be centered on financial outcomes like revenue and gross profit but also competitive advantage including media attention and brand familiarity. (IMD, 2022)

The business strategy of a firm is therefore a company's master plan which in modern days increasingly builds on digitalization. In order to emphasize that technological advances remain the primary focus of attaining company goals, a distinct digital business strategy is required (Tonder et al., 2020). To begin with, a digital strategy according to Fonstad et al (2017) is a business strategy that uses the advantages of robust, readily available digital resources to deliver distinctive, integrated company skills in ways that are receptive to the continuously shifting market situation. Such a strategy entails changing an existing strategy into a digital strategy, converting existing clients into digital clients served by digital technologies, transforming existing product offerings and resources into ones that incorporate digital technologies, and lastly generating digital capabilities (Tonder et al., 2020). By

merging the existing capabilities of their businesses with those made possible through digital tools and technologies, leaders are guided in their attempts to develop new value propositions (Fonstad et al., 2017). Given the growing number of opportunities brought on by digitalization, businesses are under pressure to reevaluate their current strategies, and continuously find new market opportunities. Research and development, which aims to foresee client requirements rather than simply address them, is what drives this kind of digital strategy (Fonstad et al., 2017). This highlights moving beyond the conventional paradigm, seeing digital as a role within businesses, and instead recognizing the omnipresence of its resources in other functional areas including supply chain, sales, management and marketing. Marketing in this context may very well be associated with the notion of digital marketing, which is related to the promotion of goods or services through the use of digital technologies. With the growing incorporation of digital platforms in marketing strategies, digital campaigns have grown to be more common and effective. For example, websites can be used by businesses to provide a positive user experience. Search engine optimization (SEO) can greatly boost traffic and increase awareness. Paid search ads can be used to appear above results from organic searches, whilst display ads can raise awareness through innovative visual and audio formats. In addition to this, there may also be the usage of SM to raise brand awareness, and email marketing to continue to provide clients with helpful and pertinent content. Among the advantages of this marketing is customization through data analysis, which provides additional consumer and potential consumer insights. Increased contact via various channels may also result in relationship development and loyalty building along with higher engagement (Deloitte, n.d.-a)

In summary, understanding the elements that support or obstruct the implementation of digital strategy initiatives is crucial given how ubiquitous and intertwined digitalization is with organizational structure. This research addressed these matters in relation to YM. Based on the observed challenges related to digital transformation, it was assumed that company digitalization was something rather difficult to achieve and might potentially be something which is still insufficient within YM. We have observed that digitalization's success or failure frequently depends on the knowledge, abilities, and mindset of the workforce, which is why company informants will be consulted to define the levels of DT within YM. It was noted that individual capabilities and mindsets are crucial factors that determine success when businesses adopt new technologies (Ritala et al., 2021). Therefore, business leaders must develop tactics along with a culture that would encourage employee creativity and support them to experimentation with novel technology in their business models (Kane et al.,

2015). In actual fact, organizations that have a defined digital strategy, a collaborative culture, and leadership that fosters innovation and supports risk-taking are those that are considered to be digitally mature (Parviainen et al., 2017). Disclosing YM digital mindset, carried through by leaders and employees provided important insights was to define the company's state of digital development.

2.5 Digital Maturity

To a great extent, a company's digital strategy drives its digital maturity (Kane et al., 2015). The concept of maturity itself refers to a condition of being finalized and competent, however digital maturity relates to the status of a company's digital transformation (Remane et al., 2017;Teichert, 2019). Knowing where a business organization stands in regards to digital maturity assists in identifying and acknowledging the degree and capacity of the organization to react to and make the most of technological changes, to transform core business processes and spur growth. According to Sammut (2020), when evaluating digital maturity in the local context of Malta, two major factors are frequently projected. These are: a recurring level of doubt about senior management's ability within local companies to be fully data-driven when making important business decisions, and whether employees have the necessary skills and technological resources to be truly customer-centric. Nevertheless, local research proves that businesses that are digitally mature are four times more likely to equip their staff with the necessary skills than businesses that are at the lower ends of the scale. A company that is digitally mature implements and effectively communicates a clear, logical digital strategy. Employees in organizations that are digitally mature also have a higher level of confidence in their leaders, which entails their ability to convey the importance of digital technology to the future of the company (Kane et al., 2015). Kane et al., (2015) also state that while businesses use digital to enhance productivity and consumer experience, businesses at a higher maturity level stand out by transforming their operations with the help of digital technology, giving them an advantage over rivals. As a result, digital maturity is considered a desired state of operating for a company.

In order to assess companies' digital transformation and work towards eventual evaluation of digital maturity, a digital maturity model (DMM) may be utilized to assist in identifying areas where a business may be falling behind in its digital transformation and also where it would need to devote more resources to reach the highest level of digital maturity

(Teichert, 2019; Hortovanyi et al., 2023).[2] Moreover, this study will not be interpreting the level of digital maturity that marks the state of the art of YM business operation. This due to the complexity of applying the model, the necessary expertise for interpretation, but primarily: its quantitative nature of approaching company data which was not part a parcel of this inductive exploratory research. However, to further categorize YM's level of digitalization in their transformation activities, additional research on the company may make use of the distinct model developed by Westerman et al. (2012) alongside the insights provided by this research.

Summary

To summarize the above, B2B companies were found to benefit from digitally transforming their business. Digitalization has become crucial nowadays as businesses fall under pressure to adopt digital technologies. However, it is not simply about the integration of technologies in business operations in itself that matters. Instead, it has been argued that it is the successful strategy *behind* such integration what defines whether companies can reach a level of digital maturity (Tonder et al., 2020).

Note that the above theoretical framework primarily provided an informative background to the study context. As the approach to the study of digitalization in the B2B organization of YM was qualitative and inductive, no concrete hypotheses were derived from the theory discussed. Instead, the theoretical framework was only brought into comparison with empirical data in the latest stage of data analysis and interpretation, when inductively coded digital content of YM socials as well as interview generated data were related to theoretical notions. It was in this stage that the researcher explored whether or not the findings from prior studies, and their predictions regarding digitalization within a B2B proved relevant to the real case scenario of YM.

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[2] A number of different models may be utilized to further understand the company's level of digital maturity such as Deloitte (2018), Forrester (2016), Valdez-De-Leon (2016) and PricewaterhouseCoopers, (2016) to name a few. However, the DMM produced by MIT Center for Digital Business and Capgemini (Westerman et al., 2012) may be the DMM deemed most suitable for this study for the reason that model has two non-linear dimensions that classify their maturity archetypes whereas other models frequently only have linear dimensions which make them inadequate to accurately portray digital maturity (Remane et al., 2017).

Method

The goal of this study, as previously indicated, was to explore the ways YM have implemented and utilized digitalization to enhance their business strategy. Qualitive research approaches were used to comprehend the how, what and why of a particular scenario, such as the utilization of digitalization by a corporation. Adhering to the principles of qualitative research was therefore deemed most suitable to answer the research question: *How does Yellow Malta employ digitalization to optimize its business strategy?* (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2020).

Two types of qualitative methods, in-depth Qualitative interviews (QI) and Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), were used to explore the extent to which YM has embraced digital technologies and the strategies they adopted to do so. The employment of a mixed-method research was deemed important as the two methods chosen (QI versus QCA) embodied different aspects of digitalization which are both pertinent to the research topic. Firstly, with QI the company's perspective on digitalization as seen from an organization's staff point of view, were explored. Secondly, via the QCA the perception of digitalization as seen from a client perspective, here operationalized as how the researcher experienced confrontation with YMs digital content, were addressed. Note that QI formed the core methodology to answer the RQ, with its focus on the employment of digital strategies. The QCA, with a focus on the perception of digitalization through the observation of YM digital content by a company's external, is rather secondary. It must be emphasized that the addition of QCA is mainly to set the stage for future research into the customer perspective and evaluation on B2B digital strategies. Yet, as theory indicated that improvement of the customers experience plays a primary role in B2Bs steps towards digitalization (Gimpel et al., 2018), a pilot investigation on the customer experience to set the stage for further explorations was considered appropriate

3.1 Sampling

3.1.1 In-depth interviews sampling

Research has indicated that digital activities are needed to compete and thrive in the quickly evolving business environment of today (Gimpel et al., 2018). Understanding how organizations like YM hope to advance in this proliferation is therefore rather important. Therefore, as a primary method, five in-depth interviews, were conducted. This data collection method was chosen as it was thought best-suited to aid in gaining a more extensive

understanding of YM's transition towards digital as seen from the perspective of their own officials and employees.

In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method that provides in-depth and detailed information about the topic, experiences, and perspectives of participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The in-depth interviews for this study took place via Google Meet and lasted between 45 – 60 minutes. Five YM staff members made up the study's participants, who were approached for interviews in order to obtain a variety of insider viewpoints and perspectives deriving from various departments. This was assumed to aid in providing a thorough picture of the implementation of digitalization and the extent of its accomplishment, without taken a singular top-down, or bottom up approach. The staff members sampled for the interviews concerned:

- Participant 1 (P1): Managing director
- Participant 2 (P2): Director
- Participant 3 (P3): Marketing and fulfilment manager
- Participant 4 (P4): Sales administration and customer service Manager
- Participant 5 (P5): Client Administrator & Content Writer (Junior Publisher)

These particular people were chosen as research participants due to the fact that they represent various perspectives and responsibilities within the organization. Each participant's insights were intended to vary according to their particular field of expertise and rank in the company's hierarchy. It is for the following reasons that the aforementioned participants were chosen: to begin with the managing director (P1), who was thought to provide an in-depth comprehension of the overall digitalization efforts, and leadership capabilities. Whilst the other participants had specifically been chosen for the reason that they were most likely to provide insights on the whole but also in specific areas like operations (P2), use of digital tools and platforms for marketing (P3), the impact of digitalization on customer relationships and sales processes (P4), and lastly insights on digital channels and content (P5).

As this research aimed to provide a sample selection reflecting diverse layers of the company structure, with the selection of such participants, it was essential to take into consideration the limitations and biases of their perspectives. The diverse participants might not have been able to provide a proper understanding of the company's digitalization process, especially since participants P3-P5 might not possess an extensive comprehension of every facet of the business's digitalization efforts due to their focus being solely on their expertise. However, as the primary reasoning behind sampling company-wide, was to disclose authentic

understandings from an organization broad viewpoint, regardless their correctness; the heterogeneous composition of the informant's group was deemed legitimate. Apart from this, the participants might not have been *willing* to provide an accurate portrayal of certain events in the process of digitalization since they would not want to put the company in a negative light. By emphasizing the anonymity of research participation and the confidential treatment of results, the risks on such conformation biases were hopefully reduced. As a result, all participants' voices were still considered valuable, especially to reflect on whether or not employees are being integrated into the company's digital strategies and endeavors for a successful DT.

Execution of interviews

The interviews' content and chronology, were not totally pre-structured since the research sought to establish an authentic comprehension of how the interviewees experienced the process of digitalization, which could be fragmented and chaotic. However, a list of questions were compiled to guide the conduct of interviews. The topic list and potential questions were created based off the research question; the theoretical framework helped in creating thematic areas which the questions were to revolve around. In effect, the majority of these pre-established questions were asked at some point within the interviews. Throughout the separate interviews, the researcher assessed per informant and interview question, whether responses were sufficiently informing or if additional inquiry was necessary. The semi-structured interview guide shown in Appendix A was designed to aid in the creation of an orderly pattern for the participants; however, the order was not mandated and was as a result occasionally changed, to leave room for original thoughts and ideas of the participants to surface (Boeije, 2010; Broom, 2005). The following table 1 illustrates the layout of the interviews with core topics of the interview.

Table 1

Interview Layout

Section	Theme
The interviewee and their role at YM	Role at YM
	Involving digital tools
Introducing digital transformation	Digital transformation within YM

	Influences of the shift to digital
Digital Strategies at YM	Strategy
	Strategy effectiveness
Seizing opportunities	Digital opportunities
	Competitiveness
Integrating digital transformation	YM and change
	Integrating employees
The future of transformation at YM	Future transformation

3.1.2 Content analysis sampling

As there is no research with regards to company profile of YM just yet, this study made use of a QCA in order to establish an understanding of the company image that YM creates with their digital strategies via Social Media (Creswell, 2014).This is particularly important as YM is a B2B company, and its communicated profile to client businesses and users is defining the attraction of the business to help foster relationships and build trust (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). The Social Media platforms taken into account for the QCA were Facebook and Instagram, since these are two of the most popular SM platforms in Malta, and also the ones which are predominantly used by YM (Gaddari, 2023). The analysis of such SM pages was considered to help provide the researcher with deeper insights on YM's presentation to the local public through its digital presence. This provided a more comprehensive understanding of their digital efforts, and the effects of digitalization on the customer experience. It should however be mentioned that the experienced evaluation of digital marketing approached by a single researcher can by no means provide a representative picture of how the general public, and particular Yellow Malta B2B clients, perceive digital content created by YM to foster the customer experience. More of an elaborate customer research would be needed to fill this knowledge gap. However, an inductive investigation of YM Social Media content was expected to help in highlighting preliminary indicators of customer experiences that could inform future research onto B2B clients' perception of digital efforts.

According to Weber (1990), the qualitative approach known as content analysis is a systematic, repeatable process for grouping an amount of text into a smaller number of categories. Puppis (2019) claims that QCA reestablish the connection between text and context by assessing the significance of certain words, phrases, or visual elements in the context in which they were formed. The patterns and meanings discovered using this qualitative approach in this study were compared to those identified in the in-depth interview transcripts. A total of 34 posts (N=34) were used in the QCA; 17 of which were taken from YM's Facebook page, and 17 others extracted from the Instagram page @yellowmalta. Furthermore, the sample included content ranging from different years, specifically between 2019 to 2023. This is since 2019 is the year in which YM fully transitioned to digital, and 2023 is the current year. Moreover, these two locations, namely Facebook and Instagram were taken into account in order to gain a holistic overview of the presentation of their digitalization strategies.

3.2 Operationalization

The operationalization of concepts that informed both the 5 semi-structured in-depth interviews with YM personnel; as well as the analysis of the 34 Facebook and Instagram posts from YM used in the Qualitative Content Analysis, is discussed in the section that follows. Addressing theoretical application is crucial since, although inductive in nature, both the interviews and content analysis are informed by and interpreted using theoretical concepts. For the interviews particularly, theories informed the creation of a thematic topic list for discussion, and theoretical concepts were used, again, in the latest part of the coding procedure. For the QCA on the other hand, theory only was referred to in the last stage of the coding procedures in an attempt to not disturb the open-minded approach to data interpretation.

For both the QI and QCA, the researcher made use of sensitizing concepts to guide the coding and analysis of data. However, even though both methods made use of the sensitizing concepts, these themes were applied slightly differently since the sources and modes of analysis differed. On the one hand the sensitizing concepts for the QI served as a guide for coding whilst for QCA certain concepts were adopted as main themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define the sensitizing concepts as ideas that serve as an organizing principle for the analysis and articulate the general themes of the research. While the researcher remained open to data-driven themes that may not suit these sensitizing principles, the following concepts provided direction as a starting point for data analysis:

Digital strategies. Pertains to topics attributing to the accomplishment of objectives that are consistent with the YM's core principles. The concept of digital strategies refers to usage of digital technologies to transform the business processes (Gimpel et al., 2018; Kasperovica, 2019). Customers' products and services change as a result of the notion, adding value to them in the process. Furthermore, implementation and development of plans such as partnerships, the usage of tools and other digital opportunities, and the integration of them into the company may also be explored here (European Central Bank, 2019; Hofacker et al., 2020; Ruiz-Alba et al., 2019).

Marketing and communication. This relates to the usage of digitalization for the promotion of its products and services, along with those of their client's businesses. This may be done through the use of marking initiatives such as SEO, Social Media marketing and web content. Along with this is the measuring of the effectiveness of such marketing through the use of data analytics or similar tools (Bernazzani, 2018).

Brand identity. This describes the ways in which YM utilizes digitalization to communicate their brand identity and values such as through their SM content and advertising. This may include the messages they communicate and the ways they communicate it such as tone and storytelling. But may also include the methods used to build brand awareness, and the potential effects on how consumers and users view the business (Huotari et al., 2015).

Customer experience. This alludes to the usage of digitalization for the benefits of the customer, such as the purchasing process including the after-sale support, and personalization of products and services across various touchpoints. This means that factors such as consumer expectations, relationships, trust, and loyalty are applicable here along with the usage of customer feedback.

3.3 Analysis

The objective for both the in-depth interviews and the content analysis was to obtain detailed information of strategies used by YM in the process of digitalization. The data collected was respectively analyzed through a thematic analysis and content analysis approach. These approaches are not only flexible through evaluation and constant improvement, but are also useful for producing high-quality data by offering a thorough analysis and identifying pertinent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They both exemplified several facets of digitalization that were relevant to the research issue on a company for QI

and client viewpoint for QCA, which helped to comprehensively respond to the research question.

3.3.1 Analysis of in-depth interviews

When the interviews were conducted they were recorded with the permission of the participants. These recordings were then transcribed in order to handle the data more efficiently. After that, the researcher conducted the analysis using pen and paper, continuously arranging the data and looking for trends by categorizing the data into pertinent groups. The research material revealed several topics that were deemed pertinent for the study and frequently appeared throughout with different terminology. This first step of the analysis had the purpose of providing structure. This process started with open coding, the first stage of interpretation, in which the data was broken up into smaller pieces such as sentences from the transcript that related to a topic. As a result of the semi-structured interviews, it was common to find many pieces regarding the same matter in various locations throughout the interviews. However, in order to avoid tunnel vision and possibly uncover new topics, this was initially done inductively. The first stage of inductive coding required the establishment and generation of concepts. The research question was always kept in mind during the phase and served as a guide for analysis. Repeating this open coding phase several times led to saturation and the evolution of 79 open codes. Additionally, axial coding was applied next to link categories together and relate them to their subcategories such as 'skills gaps' and 'financial constraints' which were placed under the code 'internal obstacles'. During this stage, codes with similar meanings were combined to form a single category. Here, separating the dominating codes from the sub-codes served as the main goal. With the elimination of any insignificant codes such as those irrelevant to the research question from the data set to make it more condensed. Finally, links were drawn between the axial and open codes to assist in making sense of what was happening through the basic categories and to ensure that they were related, a process known as selective coding. The final coding frame was then formed, as depicted in Appendix B.

In order to gain a deeper insight into YM's digital transformation initiatives, and to further corroborate the findings of the interviews, the results of each interview analysis were compared with each other by identifying the common themes and the discrepancies between them. This was done with a main focus of understanding how digital YM really are, and the ways they are utilizing digitalization to their advantage.

3.3.2 Analysis of QCA

Giving an in-depth understanding of the communication of their company profile to YM's clients, as well as getting a primary understanding of how the application of digital content is experienced by a company-externally, were the main goals of the Qualitative Content Analysis. Building a coding frame focusing on how YM communicates an image of itself and its services to other business via online media was the first step in for the QCA out. A representative sample of 5 Facebook posts and 5 Instagram posts were drawn to represent each year after the digitalization of YM took place, therefore the year 2019 through to the current year, 2023. Although this sample was small in size, all years from posts on both media channels allowed a sufficient representation. The first categories to be added to the coding frame were theoretical notions utilized in a procedure of operationalization toward the material; this is known as deductive coding (Mayring, 2014), with examples such as 'brand messaging' and 'brand partnerships'. After that, an inductive category building process was used, during which each post's component—including its images and captions— were carefully evaluated, resulting in the data-driven identification of a number of open codes. The acquired codes were compared with each other, and categories were created using them. Following this, each category was defined by giving a brief explanation of what it meant before giving examples drawn directly from the data. Once all categories were generated and defined, the structure was then looked over multiple times in order to identify any categories that were similar to one another such as 'brand positioning' and brand image' which were then merged into 'brand identity'. Trial coding then occurred next in order to continue to evaluate and modify the coding frame. Just after the coding frame was in order and reached saturation, as illustrated in Appendix C the main analysis occurred where all of the sample posts (N=34) were coded, and this was done separately twice to ensure that the codes were consistently applied to the data. The interviews' thematic analysis was then compared to QCA analysis in order to compare the themes that emerged from both data sources, and understand the alignment of the company's initiatives to their digital presence. The connections between the themes and any patterns in the data were then analyzed and interpreted in the results section in order to help respond the research question (Flick, 2014).

3.4 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity were taken into account while evaluating the research's credibility, and in order to ensure this, various efforts were made. When it comes to reliability, this has to do with how consistently the same category of codes were assigned to

different observations, therefore the ability to replicate the coding. Consequently, the study's ability to be replicated is related to both theoretical transparency and the transparency of the research process. Whilst the validity of this study, refers to how consistent and trustworthy the study's conclusions are.

3.4.1 Reliability and Validity of interviews

The way the interviews were conducted is a crucial factor in the reliability and validity of the study. Each interview began with a brief courteous conversation to establish a relationship of trust and openness as well as a clear introduction of the researcher, the study, and the purpose of the interview. Since this study focused on a particular company and its activities, it was essential to establish confidence as employees might not have wanted to disclose all the details of the situation because of a lack of trust. The pre-discussed was also done to promise anonymity. The aim here was to attempt to limit information omission and variations in how the interviewees presented themselves, or in this case, the company. In this research it was ensured to adapt to the participants during the interviews and to listen to them attentively while maintaining the interviews' natural flow. With the help of this, reliable information was to be maintained (Boeije, 2010). This proved to be successful especially when participants provided extra information even when they had been informed that the interview was over.

Additionally, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee to guarantee methodological reliability. These recordings were used to keep accurate records, which were subsequently meticulously transcribed by the author. The codes and themes that were applied do the transcripts during the data analysis were peer-reviewed after the first round of data analysis by the main researcher in an attempt to confirm the results, preserve accuracy and help take note of any bias (Silverman, 2014).

Triangulation was a further means applied to improve the study's validity. This involved regularly comparing data from different sources and at various points during the analysis, such as evaluating the different interviews in comparison to YMs Social Media accounts, specifically Facebook and Instagram. There were a few open codes that only surfaced during the analysis and that looked to fall beyond the scope of the overall direction of the study and category construction. These were not disregarded; rather, they were added to a group of 'residual codes' and later reviewed for possible applicability. Additionally, the data was examined multiple times to also make sure the analysis was logic and devoid the

risk of potential bias. To do this, multiple truths from the interviewees were taken into account throughout from a neutral perspective.

It is important to note that this method's subjectivity make reliability even harder to guarantee because each researcher may code and analyze data in their own unique way, particularly given the ongoing interaction between data collection and analysis (Silverman, 2013). However, to ensure that the study process was transparent, a thick description of the procedures were incorporated in the Analysis section. In this manner, the research could potentially be replicated.

3.4.2 Reliability and validity of QCA

The QCA focused on a reduction of data in order to create categories that linked to the research question. To do this a sequence of steps were done repetitively as mentioned previously in the analysis section, making the analysis systematic. On top of that, the method's flexibility allowed the study to boost its reliability through the use of inductive and deductive categories. The study therefore sought to provide a trustworthy interpretation, especially with the data-driven categories that revealed more about the data itself than pre-defined categories. Additionally, the continual examination and re-evaluation during the process of creating the coding frame was intended to help strengthen the reliability of this analysis by bringing about consistency. With the aim of increasing the dependability of the analysis, the coding was carried out twice, with a week's interval in order to re-analyze the data with fresh eyes. The repeated coding produced the same results as were found during the first round of analysis. After the coding frame had reached saturation to the point that no new relevant codes could be applied, and was deemed complete, it was then peer-reviewed by a fellow Media and Business student, and evaluated by an experienced professional to further guarantee accuracy and consistency. Any coding discrepancies were then examined and corrected such as 'localization' which was originally a main theme, but then placed as a sub-theme called 'local promotion' under 'brand identity'. This increased the validity by continually making sure the categories were relevant to the research problem and study (Flick, 2014).

Results

This study sought to provide insight into YM's digitalization initiatives and how they have contributed to the company's business strategy. The results of both analyses conducted, respectively the one-to-one interviews about the personnel's experiences and understandings of digitalization at YM, and secondly, the content analysis of YM Social Media presence and the efforts of digitalization permeated therein. As will be disclosed, this research offered a thorough overview of YM's digitalization ventures and the successes and challenges of them that contribute to their business strategy by using the insights from the two separate analyses.

The following categories emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews with YM staff members: digital adoption, agility and innovation, customer-centricity, challenges and obstacles of digitalization, and lastly branding and identity. These themes touched upon a range of aspects of the business's digital transition and how it has affected their digital strategy. The themes were therefore used to give a thorough overview of YM's views and insights with reference to their digital endeavors. The qualitative content analysis of YM's Facebook and Instagram pages also revealed two themes in addition to the six that had previously been identified: brand identity and strategic communication, both of which are illustrative of the unique strategies used by YM on their Social Media platforms. In order to understand how YM engages with their audience and accomplish business goals, a focus was placed throughout this analysis on both images and text (captions).

Furthermore, the findings and interpretation of the themes will be presented and discussed. This will be done alongside quotes from the interviews and relevant examples to illustrate the ways YM optimizes their business strategy through digitalization.

Interview results and discussion

4.1 Digital Adoption

The first topic of discussion in the interviews with YM staff focused on the concept of *Digital Adoption* at YM, which emphasizes the causes of the company's transformation as well as how its products and services have developed through time as a result of digital change. Whilst talking to the employees, advantages of adopting specific digital tools and software became apparent, including the capacity of such tools to boost efficiency, convenience and also streamline their processes. The following discussion will elaborate on the conversations with the participants and highlight findings that stood out in the interview sessions. This will be done whilst focusing on sub-themes within the topic of digital adoption that could help categorize findings more structurally as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Digital Adoption

Selective code 1	Axial codes
Digital Adoption	Shifting to digital
	Benefits of adoption

4.1.1 Shifting to Digital

One of the first topics brought up in the interview sessions was the understanding of YM's shift to digital, which was after recurrent noting of related references coded under the axial code of *shifting to digital*. In the interview sessions, participants self-defined this concept as factors that led YM to transition to a digital environment as well as the product developments that occurred. Participants stressed the importance of the context of the change as a means to comprehend the alignment of digitalization to business objectives.

Throughout the interviews the participants indicated a variety of factors that led the organization to make the shift to digital, however, keeping up with the times and the COVID-19 pandemic were given the most attention. To begin with P5 noted that "as the world has progressed into a more digital era, YM also saw in 2018, that it was well overdue to make a big digital step", which P1 and P2 also cited as being a driving force behind YM's development. Additionally, switching to digital would benefit Maltese companies more, for the traditional hardcopy book that used to be their main product had "served its time" (P1). It was noted that 'going digital' was required to better serve their clients but also "the rest of the Maltese business owners." (P2), which pointed out to a reserve of potential new clients. To elaborate more on the references made to the COVID-19 pandemic, P4 and P5 claimed the pandemic acted as a "catalyst" (P5) for more business interactions to occur online. In reality, P4 made clear that, prior to COVID-19, the only online meetings that would take place were those with people overseas. On top of that, remote work "was very much enforced" (P5) during the pandemic, which was the incentive for its introduction in the organization. This transition was anticipated, as indicated previously in the theoretical framework, since COVID-19 essentially gave numerous business owners no other choice than to digitalize their businesses (European Investment Bank, 2022). It was clarified by interviewees, however, that YM's decision to discontinue printing the hardcopy book in 2018 had nothing to do with the pandemic and was instead a choice the company took for the benefit of Maltese business owners. In essence, YM, saw digital as the way forwards for

Maltese businesses and pushed the digital agenda since 2018. With the help of the COVID-19 pandemic YM was however incentivized to make further and quicker changes towards digitalization.

As well as Lozic, (2019) and Tonder et al, (2020) emphasized the significance of changing the business model in order to adapt to digital changes, YM staff seemed to have recognized the need for a shift in their ways of doing business, as well as in their product offerings. Staff stated that once the company stopped printing the traditional book they "had to shift everything online" (P3). Consequently, a variety of new items had to be developed and offered. Rather than selling the single product of advertisements in the printed Yellow Pages book, YM now had an abundance of services to offer. Accordingly, as predicted by Parviainen et al. (2017) the introduction of new technologies offered opportunities for unique customer offerings and brand-new services. Respondents mentioned the employment of services such as Facebook boosts, display banners on local news outlets, Google display ads, and so on which "prior to 2018 did not exist in their current format"(P5). P3 even went so far to say that "In terms of products that we offer to clients, everything is digital, on the top of my head, I can't think of anything that's traditional." (P3). This further affirms Tonder et al' s (2020) study that a digital strategy entails updating current product offers and resources to include digital technology. The bundling of digital products and services by YM staff was regarded as the "greatest strength" in their approach to digital, and are provided on a " good till canceled" (P4) subscription. Therefore it was indicated that the intentions of YM for employing digitalization were not only to better their own digital strategy, but also to better cater for their clients which will be further featured throughout the discussion of *customer-centricity*.

4.1.2 Benefits of adoption

Apart from the ability to provide more products and services, adopting digital at YM also brought about a number of internal benefits. Throughout the interviews, a number of internal tools for business operations were mentioned, the one most frequently mentioned being HubSpot. HubSpot is a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software that brings together a company's customers, teams, and data in one place (Fell, 2022). According to P1, it has proved to be rather beneficial as it brought about efficiency since it helps "keep everything organized" such as "comments, notes, tasks" (P1). Apart from that, P4 emphasized HubSpot's efficiency in tracking the workloads of employees, "it's easier to know when people logged on, the output of people, what they're doing" (P4). Apart from

HubSpot, P5 also positively mentioned the use of Slack for communication, where employees "can schedule send certain messages and certain things for meetings". This links with the virtualization of working, as employees are more easily able to work outside of the office with the networking capabilities offered by YM. Such abilities were emphasized as a benefit of digitalization by Westerman et al. (2014).

Additionally, YM staff mentioned to use AdEspresso, a platform that streamlines the process of creating and optimizing advertisements, as P3 highlights that it may "help with the ease of the process.", whilst also making use of schedulers such as Later, allowing them to modify and preview SM posts before publishing them, as well as giving them useful information to aid in the creation of better posts (SocialPilot, n.d.). This is consistent with research by Ruiz-Alba et al. (2019), who found that one of the main advantages of digitalization for businesses is the ability to streamline operations. Apart from the aforementioned, other mentioned tools were CrankWheel, Zero, AdServer, and Adobe photoshop and illustrator.

The general consensus produced by interviews was that the utilizations of the digital tools implemented had been (1) efficient in tracking and enabling "employees and team members to communicate with each other on specific clients" (P1) , (2) had also made processes "more efficient, less time consuming and better" (P3), and (3) enabled convenience through the ability to amend and "change as you like" (P3). The last observation particularly aligns with the findings of Fitzgerald et al. (2014), as they also found that internal communications had been greatly improved by the use of digital tools, which had assisted in being more flexible and customer-oriented. On the whole, the benefits of these tools are in line with the benefits expressed by European Central Bank (2019) and Parviainen et al. (2017) who both underlined increased efficiency and convenience within a company that adopts digital. Further, the leveraging of such digital tools enabled YM to provide new products and services whilst utilizing such benefits. Hence allowing this research to create a clearer understanding of how the benefits of digitalization are strengthening YM's entire strategy.

4.2 Agility and Innovation

The purpose of this section, which relates to the second topic of *agility and innovation*, is to demonstrate the ways YM stays atop of digitalization and the constantly occurring changes. The interviews shed light on the ways YM has adapted to change, as well as the ways the company approaches integrating their employees into the alterations and the

role leadership plays to remain agile in this scenario. Furthermore, participants listed numerous ways in which the business is constantly improving whilst further including the utilization of partnerships as a means of innovation. All of this will be further elaborated on, whilst understanding each sub-theme as illustrated in table 3.

Table 3

Agility and innovation

Selective code 2	Axial codes
Agility and innovation	Adapting to change
	Integration
	Continuous improvement
	Strategic alliances and partnerships

4.2.1 Adapting to change

When it comes to being innovative and embracing digitalization, four of the participants mentioned that *Adapting to Change* is a flagship in the company strategy of YM. The managing director stated that this was something that commenced in 1996, when YM (Yellow Pages Malta at the time) became one of the first businesses in Malta to "embrace direct debit mandates" (P1) and asserted that this was their "first instance of implementation of digitalization" (P1). The Yellow Pages website, which P1 claimed to have come thereafter, is referred to as "a staple" because it acts as "the entry point" for the other YM services to build upon. "So Yellow.com.mt is basically the center of all these services and platforms." (P1). As the times evolved, YM proceeded to expand their online presence through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, the latter of which was their most recent addition. Implementing Social Media into their strategy was crucial for their brand visibility and will be further elaborated on in the QCA results and discussion.

Furthermore, based on the interviews, four of the respondents recognized that changes are endless, when it comes to staying up to date with digitalization, and that they should positively embrace these changes, whether it be in systems, individuals, products, or even the market. As P5 suggested "it's about dedicating time and effort into pursuing new things and not being scared of change, but to embrace it.", portraying a positive attitude towards change. This positivity may be seen as ongoing attitude with the company's willingness to explore new products as Neeley and Leonardi (2022) highlighted that in order to adapt to the change

and be agile in their digitalization endeavors, there should be the need to also be willing to explore new products amongst company members. As reported by the interviewees, a fair level of willingness proved present in YM's organizational culture. For example: P3 reported that YM are "always open for new products to kind of explore and offer". Apart from this, companies need to be adaptable and up to date with the ongoing developments in the digital realm (Neeley & Leonardi, 2022). Three of the participants (P1, P3, and P5) acknowledged this and indicated that they make an effort to stay up to date on the latest trends. Optimism for development is essential since it helps the business undergo a successful transformation. Similar to Parviainen et al. (2017), YM acknowledge that digitalization is an ongoing process that calls for improvement and adaptation to meet the changing demands of the business environment.

4.2.2 Integrating digitalization

Integration of staff into the digital change process is critical for digital transformation, and is something that needs to be advanced by leadership through a strategic vision in order to be innovative and consistently flexible (Factory, 2021). This is where employee training and development comes into action at YM. All of the participants agreed that training and development are important and that the organization does, in fact, provide required induction. The two managers (P3 and P4) acknowledged various methods of instructing and training their employees, further supporting the facts given by the managing director which indicated that members of management "train the subordinates". This training requires interaction with different departments as well as using seminars and informational briefings to learn about various topics within their own department. P4 did, however, admit that these encounters only took place "whenever I have time". This may indicate that integrating the employees into the transformation is not truly a top priority, which could possibly lead to obstacles in YMs digital transformation endeavors. However, it was also disclosed that new employees attend an annual training camp where they are "taught the way Yellow operates" in addition to the aforementioned specialized training done by the managers. Simultaneously, anytime a new procedure is put into place, P5 asserted that "concrete implementation and explanations by various managers on what the implementation is going to look like" occurs. This suggests that YM agrees with the viewpoint advanced by Kane et al. (2015), according to which exposing staff to digitalization and its potential changes essential for a successful digital transformation.

According to Factory (2021), a cultural shift within a company to enable digital transformation must be implemented and is typically started from the top-down. Herein lies the significance of integrating digitalization through leadership and effective communication. The managing director (P1) recognized the significance of leadership as he stated that "A leader needs to create the vision, and through the vision comes the mission" in order to successfully navigate digitalization. According to P1, the most crucial message to the staff is to encourage as many businesses as possible to create an online presence, "In whatever shape or form," . This is highlighted in YM's mission statement which is "bringing buyers and sellers together" and their vision statement which is "digitizing Malta" (P1). Additionally, the participant said that Jim Collins' book Good to Great, which champions the qualities of great leaders as those that have a great deal of ambition not for themselves but for the business and its purpose (Collins, n.d.), has had a significant influence on his leadership style.

However, not much was disclosed on what was done by leadership to integrate digitalization. Yet again this may shed light on the further need to stress the importance of digital within YM. Meanwhile, P1 and P4 indicated the necessity for systems to cooperate, making the integration of processes just as crucial as the integration of employees. Without the integration of these systems, there may be an interruption in communication that could "damage the outcome of your products and ultimately damage the end user who is your customer," according to P1. Neeley and Leonardi (2022) are seen promoting the alignment of systems and processes for companies the reach their highest potential in their transformation.

Withal, YM put effort into the integration of digital transformation. However, to further enhance their business strategy through these digital efforts there is a necessity for a further emphasis of the importance of the implementation of digital whilst also continually working to bring the employees along the transformation as the company continually evolves. Without such training and understanding employees may end up feeling frustrated and lost as further discussed in the theme "challenges and obstacles" (Neeley & Leonardi, 2022).

4.2.3 Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement within the organization formed the third axial code in the selective code of agility and innovation. The managing director emphasized the importance of the Kaizen philosophy[3] for the continuous improvement which was found to occur within

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[3] Kaizen is an essential component of continuous improvement. It is a method of thinking that enables and encourages everyone to see when and how even little changes can improve operations and the performance of their team or themselves (Chiarini et al., 2018).

YM and in fact stated "since we adopted Kaizen philosophy, continuous improvement and we have quite a dedicated team, we're always continuously improving our systems and our products". Moreover, this philosophy emphasizes that there is no finality when it comes to improvement, and that anything may always be enhanced. And so, individuals within an organization must continuously strive to improve and innovate (Hargrave, 2021).

Furthermore the participants identified five different ways to continually improve their strategies through the use of digitalization, including:

- Continuous improvement through future planning
- Continuous improvement through strategic planning
- Continuous improvement to strive for goals and objectives
- Continuous improvement through data-driven decision making
- Continuous improvement through the research, testing and implementing of new products

Accordingly, the interviews shed light on some of the company's future plans, most of which the participants could not disclose information about due to non-disclosure clauses, such as the future projects for their internal system and in-depth information about plans for their website. Both directors (P1 and 2) indicated major changes will occur on the website by adding further functionality and expanding its capabilities as they referred to it as currently being "not the best", recognizing the importance of being innovative and providing a better experience for their users.

Aside from these changes, the general ideas for the future included reducing the physical touch with their clients by improving touchpoints, whilst also preparing the company for an increase in digital processes, suggesting their intentions for improvement on what they already have and for what is yet to come. With regards to the strategic planning, P1 emphasized a focus on the company's area of competency, suggesting a concentration of effort, time and resources on improvement within their own area of expertise as stated "So what's our area of competency? And let's just focus on that" . Further to this, P4 recognized that strategies are not set in stone, but rather evolve over time, accentuating that continuous improvement and changes are necessary.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (n.d.) emphasizes that a key element of the ongoing digital transformation is the development of an effective digital strategy that is in accordance with a company's fundamental business objectives and goals. Likewise, in the accounts given through interviews, "bringing buyers and sellers together" was listed as the primary goal by

the majority of participants (P1,2,3), company goals and objectives evidently provide meaning to the company's ongoing improvement. Along with consistently encouraging local businesses to go online, YM's mission statement to "digitize Malta" further calls attention to their dedication to digitalization and small- and medium-sized local businesses. Apart from YM's mission and vision, a further mentioned objective was to "continue to push Yellow out as a brand" and to serve as the "one stop shop for advertising in Malta" (P2). Such targets will be covered in more detail in the selective code *branding and identity.*

Additionally, by utilizing digital tools and technology, the interviews disclosed that YM has been given analytical abilities for both ongoing and upcoming projects, allowing them to better understand the needs and wants of its existing, and potential customers (Gray & Rumpe, 2015). These analytical skills help YM make data-driven decisions to further enhance their plans and solutions, which plays a significant role in enabling constant improvement. As anticipated, the client administrator and content writer (P5), and the marketing and fulfillment manager (P3) both had more in-depth understandings of the subject and advocated utilizing the gathered data to further improve their future projects. For example, when planning campaigns, YM was found to look back at the data of previous projects to "see what didn't work, and make sure that what did not work is not used again". Highlighting the crucial significance of analyzing past campaigns in order to improve results in the future. P5 further proposed using the information from the data that was extracted to understand performance and offer suggestions for YM and their clients to perform better. Apart from that, P3 suggested using data to continue to understand user and client preferences while referring to colors, and the use of specific phrasing that could aid improve performance. This is in line with Gray and Rumpe (2015) who suggest that such data analytics are capable of providing the company with useful knowledge for current and future projects. P4, however, stated that analyzing data and using it to the company's advantage at its full potential is "still a work in progress," underpinning the need for improvement while also emphasizing the need for data and numbers when making decisions rather than just relying on trends as stressed by P4 "show me numbers.". Additionally, the interviews demonstrated an awareness of the significance of leveraging data to continuously enhance and build upon their work (European Central Bank, 2019; Hofacker et al., 2020). Even though YM does not seem to be using their data to its fullest potential, data-driven decisions are still an important component of the business strategy given that it provides YM the ability to optimize their performance.

Lastly, in order for YM to continuously improve their operations, there was the general consensus that constant research, testing and implementation must occur. As highlighted by Fonstad et al. (2017), who state that with the increasing number of opportunities brought by digitalization, businesses must continually seek for new market prospects. This type of digital strategy is driven by research and development in order to anticipate client needs rather than merely meeting them. From the interviews, it seems clear that YM subscribes to the arguments given by Fondstad et al. (2017), as shown in the comment made by P3 "I mean, everything we do is research based, even in terms of when we get a new clients" .

Moreover a specific example of testing new technologies, provided by P1, 3 and 4, is the experimental use of AI for content writing, which they indicated YM are testing but know they cannot rely on it at this time and practice "caution towards it. Further, apart from the aforementioned, the participants indicated the need to gather sufficient information, the usage of feasibility studies, the consulting of external stakeholders whilst also ensuring that the addition of new tools or services keeps the workload of the employees manageable. As P5 emphasized, "It's all about planning, projecting, communicating and implementing". However when it comes to the implementation of something new, the managing director questions "Is it scalable? Is it in demand and is it easy to implement internally?" (P1) whilst intensifying scalability as the as the biggest question because of Malta's small market. This suggests that YM are not complacent. Complacency is what Factory (2021) highlighted to be a the biggest obstacle for company's digital transformation. Therefore, in accordance with Parviainen et al. (2017), leadership at YM supports risk taking when it comes to adopting new digital tool and technologies, however are cautious about it especially due to small Maltese market, making their way to digital maturity rather slow.

By utilizing this approach YM demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement to ensure that they are innovative whilst maintaining suitability for the Maltese market. Here YM seem to be projecting a digital mindset, which relates to an array of attitudes and behaviors that allow individuals and organizations to understand how data, algorithms, and artificial intelligence (AI) create new possibilities (Neeley & Leonardi, 2022). When undergoing a transformation this mindset is said to be crucial in order to achieve success, suggesting that YM are on the right track to achieving digital maturity.

4.2.4 Strategic alliances and partnerships

Strategic partnerships and alliances is the final theme related to agility and innovation. This section emphasizes YM's initiatives to collaborate with external organizations to strengthen its digital strategy, which the managing director emphasizes brings about the advantages of "cross-selling and bundling" (P1). Four of the participants reported working with the digital outlets Malta Today and Times of Malta. Through these two local news organizations, YM provides their clients with "some articles or banners that can appear on their portals" in an effort to attract more attention and improve their services for their customers. Furthermore, P2 and P4 stated that YM are "strategically partnered with GO, the telecommunication company" wherein GO incorporates YM services into its offerings. Making such alliances is done, according to P1, primarily for the purpose of being "trendsetters in digitalization, in digital media buying, media buying" (P1). Through these partnerships, YM demonstrates their dedication towards innovation. Such opportunities only became available due to their digital transformation, further leading to the contribution of digital to their business model as YM are able focus on their core products and services whilst outsourcing an expansion of clientele.

4.3 Customer Centricity

According to Bloomberg (2018), a successful digital transformation revolves around the prioritization of the needs of the customers. Throughout the interviews it was made clear that YM prioritized being customer-centric in whatever they do. This focus relates to the suggestion made by Cichosz et al. (2020) to support customer centricity, as YM's digital transformation is aimed at the enhancement of the customer experience through the ability to customize products and services but also improving their customer service at various touchpoints whilst implementing an local touch in their ventures as indicated in table 4.

Table 4

Customer-centricity

Selective code 3	Axial codes
Customer-centricity	Customer-experience
	Localization

4.3.1 Customer-experience

The importance of understanding the distinctive customization required for various businesses and clients was repeatedly emphasized by the participants during the interviews.

They indicated taking each client on a "case by case basis" in order to cater their services for the wants and needs of each customer. As previously mentioned, YM also takes a data-driven approach to their decisions, keeping in mind the consumer's preferences and as P4 indicated: "strategy always has to be based on the wants and needs of the customer". With such a customer centric approach YM ensures that the solutions not only align with the consumer's expectations but also exceed them, something which Cichosz et al. (2020) also deemed as essential. In line with Suominen et al. (2013), YM sees value in comprehending consumer demands, as illustrated by P3 "we want to make sure that what the client gets with us is what they expected, if not better". Furthermore, with the growing opportunities available through digital transformation, YM's customer service has also enhanced as P4 suggested that now "if the client isn't happy with something, you can go in and change it there and then", and easily compensate the client if they are unhappy with a service. However, they believe they can continue to improve the state of customer centricity as P4 highlights the attempt to apply "a less rigid sort of approach where the client can pick and choose whatever he wants".

Overall, the participants demonstrated a commitment to their clients through a customized approach and high quality customer service which P5 indicates that doing this builds a relationship with their customers fostering loyalty over a long term. This was deemed crucial by Dang et al. (2019) and YM, due to the value of trust and customer loyalty necessary for the business to profit from subscribing/ returning customers. Yet again, digitalization has improved YM's abilities within customer service, allowing them to better serve their clients and bring further value into the company (Parviainen et al., 2017).

4.3.2 Localization

The second sub-theme of customer-centricity which was observed was that of *localization*. YM was found to recognize the importance of tailoring their solutions and services to the local community in order to have a successful customer centric approach. From the interviews it was made abundantly clear by all the participants that the preferred way of doing business in Malta includes a face to face interaction. As the sales administration and customer service manager noted:

> "we realized that Maltese clients do not like dealing with business over the phone, but prefer that face to face interaction where they're getting to know the person. Umm, you know, where they talk about their business and their children and you know, when they feel that just personal touch, they tend to be a little bit more loyal and feel a little bit more comfortable spending their money" (P4)

This is consistent with previous research that demonstrated the significance of face-to-face interactions in B2B transactions in order to foster the confidence required for purchase (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Corsaro & Anzivino, 2021). It is for this reason that even though having such interactions is "a driver of costs" for YM, as P1 stated "it eats into our margins", they still provide face-to-face interactions for comfort and building of customer relationships and therefore loyalty, further intensifying their customer-centric approach. However, for those customers who do not have the time or do not require such in person interactions "over the phone conversations and meetings, email correspondence (…)" (P5) are offered was well. This was an expected outcome as Corsaro and Anzivino (2021) indicated that the digitalization of business interactions is where the physical and the digital coexist, allowing time and space take on various shapes leading to a creation of value for the clients.

An aspect which was continually brought up by the informants, which les to the identification of a rather unexpected residual theme, was localization. Referring to the customization of YM's goods and services to fit the needs of the Maltese market for the fact that local businesses were said to be "behind in comparison to other sort of Westernized countries that utilize marketing as a as a form of business promotion" (P5). In fact, P5 further emphasizes that in comparison to other Yellow Pages businesses abroad, YM continues to "offer a physical sales force that go out and build real relationships with our customers in person" (P5). Contradicting the trend towards progressive digitalization that is globally embraced, Ger (1999) assures that local businesses can indeed succeed by availing use of the wants and needs of the locals. In this case, YM emphasizes the significance of trust and client loyalty in order for the company to profit from recurring transactions. Regardless of technological advancements, Albanese (2018) stated that a company like YM that put the needs of the customer first have learned the best ways to adapt to upcoming changes.

In line with Dang et al. (2019) who argued that B2B sales are frequently relationship-driven YM are seen to be accommodating their digitalization strategies to their consumer's preferences within the local market. This is done by utilizing digitalization for the clients that require it and continually supporting small to medium enterprises and educating them to understand that digital is the way to go: "We want to make sure that as many businesses get online as possible. In whatever shape or form." (P1). YM makes use of digital to increase value for their clients through good customer-service but even through the utilization of a local touch, bringing value to YM though a close connection to the local mindset (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004).

4.4 Challenges and obstacles of digitalization faced by Yellow Malta

The most prominent issues associated with YM's digital transformation will be addressed when discussing the fourth selective code of *Challenges and Obstacles*. The overall achievement of YMs digitalization was impacted by these difficulties and/or obstacles which appeared internally as well as externally.

Table 5

Challenges and obstacles

Selective code 4	Axial codes
Challenges and obstacles	Internal obstacles
	Barriers and disadvantages of digital tools and software

4.4.1 Internal Obstacles

As previously discussed in the section on agility and innovation, a company's digital transformation must successfully integrate its workforce into its digital strategy. However, it does not take into account potential frustrations and skill gaps that may be involved with it. Despite YM's assertion that training does place and is indeed essential, P1 contends that "there's always a challenge to ensure that our employees are, you know, dynamic to the system." (P1). As P4 stressed that older generations "find it difficult to actually overcome" the use of new systems and technologies. Ruiz-Alba et al. (2019), underscored the importance of having the correct personnel to implement change for the reason that inefficient use of digital resources makes investments in digitalization relatively expensive without necessarily yielding a benefit. In essence, the employees at YM "could not understand the shift internally" (P2). Recognizing the impact of complacency on their digital transformation objectives, as also emphasized by Factory (2021), the company made the decision "to let those people go" (P2) and instead employed new individuals that were "specialized with certain skills" (P4). Because organizations need to invest the time and develop specialized skills in order to gain the benefits of successfully adopting digital transformation, (Annarelli et al., 2021). Nonetheless, they still feel as though they do not have many experts and P4 indicates that "most of the times it's trial and error.", whilst also admitting that their systems such as HubSpot "does a lot of things that we're not aware of." (P4) revealing that they may not be using their tools and software to their full potential. Such a lack of knowledge is the

cause of frustrations for many employees as P1 pointed out that "a lot of employees like to complain about the systems".

Other than that, P4 also calls attention to the stress that employees feel when "they're still trying to get used to this new system" (P4) and then more changes occur on top of that because of the fast pace that digital technologies and software moves at. Such frustrations and stress according to Neeley and Leonardi (2022), are a result of low confidence in the employees knowledge of the technologies and tools. An intensive effort must be made to continually upskill current talent in order to overcome this (Neeley & Leonardi, 2022). Additionally, because the employees are still unclear of the full capabilities of their technology and tools, this may be perceived as undermining the success of their digitalization. Therefore, YM must continuously expose their staff to digitalization and anticipated changes in order to increase their knowledge and perspective on it, as Kane et al. (2015) pointed out.

Another internal obstacle mainly communicated by P1 and P2 were financial constraints. To begin with, YM had a major change in their systems when they shifted to digital and because of this as they went from their own "bespoke custom made system" to a cloud based software. P1 pointed out that it would have been rather costly for them to create a new bespoke system, however emphasized that adopting the cloud based system sill "cost the company hundreds of thousands" towards what was admitted to being "wasted communication, human labor, and in general confusion." (P1). P1 further admitted "We wish we could have gone with Salesforce, but they are super expensive, so we went with HubSpot". Given that the European Central Bank (2019) emphasized that increasing investment intensity results in higher production, these financial constraints could therefore be interpreted as having a negative impact on YM. This may be accurate given the stress and frustration YM employees have experienced, as their inability to acquire better technologies has hampered their productivity.

4.4.2 Barriers and disadvantages of digital tools and software

Apart from the preceding internal issues, there were also other disadvantages which came about regarding the implementation of the digital tools and software at YM. Namely, the disadvantage of such software as identified by P1 and P4, is that they "still have a lot of manual intervention". Both participants indicated that there is a number of things that still need to be done such as having to "input the data, curing the data, communicate with customers." (P1) and also ensuring the data is accurate and performing cleanups as declared

by P4. This is for the fact that their "CRMs aren't really tailor made" to their requirements of YM, causing such systems to be rather inconvenient. Yet P1 asserts that employees have started to get a hang of it and could not imagine changing the system again due to "the amount of associated costs and time wasted." (P1) that came with the previous change. With regards to time, it was also mentioned by P4, that "we're spending much more time collecting information and fulfilling than we would like to do". An issue which arose from the lack of consideration on the time it would take the fulfil their digital products. Furthermore P1 and P3 also identified the dependency on such products as a disadvantage as P1 stated "you become so hooked on to these cloud based systems", to which these systems respond by raising their prices.

On top of that, another issue which may be defined as a barrier to a successful transformation at YM is the need for a shift in the local mindset as P2 stated that "the shift has been quite challenging to get people to understand that online presence is truly the way to go, especially in Malta considering we're so far behind". In fact P4 goes as far as saying one of the biggest struggles YM has had "was the perception of people". Therefore, the local context does not encourage digitalization, and in order for YM to continue to be client-centered the company is under the pressure to take a rather slow pace in their digital transformation endeavors. As P2 stated

> "there have been huge advancements in the world of technology that we would love to take on, but we know timing wise in Malta it just doesn't make sense. People won't buy it, and people would not know how to use it"

Moreover, when coming to pushing forwards the digitalization of local businesses YM also find that they must strike a balance with certain clients who are not really interested in having an online presence, and begin by simply providing them with a landing page on the YM website where their contact information is made available says P5. With regards to this research, such disadvantages play a role in understanding how far digitalization at YM has come. Such disadvantages as the lack of interest in digitalization by their clients is most certainly damaging, however throughout it has been communicated by the participants that digital is certainly the way forward and they continue "trying to be trailblazers and bluebirds into that transformation in mindset" (P1).

4.5 Branding and Identity at Yellow Malta

This final theme of *Branding and Identity* came about as a result of participants overall acknowledgement of YM's low brand recognition, feeding into the sub-theme of

brand awareness. Apart from this, the participants also made clear their intentions for their online presence which was noted as upholding certain a *brand image and reputation*, as demonstrated in table 6 and further discussed below.

Table 6

Branding and identity

Selective code 5	Axial codes
Branding and identity	Brand awareness
	Brand image and reputation

4.5.1 Brand Awareness

A common issue at YM which arose among all of the participants was the low brand recognition that came along with their rebranding from 'The Yellow Pages' to 'Yellow Malta', when they made their transition from print to digital. P1 in fact admitted "people still call us The Yellow Pages which we're not.", and P4 goes on to say "unfortunately we are still living in the shadow of the book". P4 adds that clarification is frequently required when individuals inquire about the company and stated the necessity to respond with "Yes, we're still open, we're still fully functional, we're fully digital now we're still offering like the same services but totally, totally digital". The director insisted that this is something they "haven't been able to do due to financial restrictions" (P2) but wish to amend. This is for the reason that despite having a sizable clientele "users are equally as important" (P3) to them. Through brand awareness, they would be better able to determine how well the target audience knows and recognizes the brand. Brand awareness campaigns provide the company with a personality, a channel for feedback, and a way to convey a narrative which creates sense of trust with their audience, and potentially positive word of mouth (Decker, 2022). And so, it is essential for them to make an effort to increase their awareness.

4.5.2 Brand image and reputation

Moreover when coming to their online presence, P5 provided the majority of the insights. However, it was both P2 and P5 who declared that their major goal is to remain non-controversial by refraining from engaging in "politics or into clickbait" in order to keep the business appealing for potential and existing customers. Additionally, as Bernazzani (2018) noted, boosting brand recognition and loyalty may be accomplished by utilizing marketing initiatives like blogs and SM posts. Through the interviews it became clear that YM does so by promoting "Malta in a positive light", "Malta's beauty" , and shedding light on "different

things that are happening locally in Malta" (P5) on their Social Media channels. As P5 stressed that "As such, it's all about localization when it comes to Yellow Malta and most Yellow Pages and Yellow brand companies abroad." (P5).

In accordance with Almquist et al. (2018), who illustrated that having an appealing cultural fit can foster loyalty and trust. In this case, brand identity is essential since the company has clearly established a distinctive set of brand associations that the company wishes to maintain for a clean reputation, whilst being as relatable as possible the local sphere through its localized SM media content (Essamri et al., 2019). This localized content will be further discussed in the results and discussion of the QCA, however it is clear from the discussions with the participants that YM have leveraged their Social Media to create a relationships with their audiences to further enhance their image. This section is in contrast to the work of Dwivedi et al. (2021), which highlighted that B2Bs underuse Social Media due to the thought that it is less effective. YM highlights the importance of their Social Media content as they make use of it to connect with people and send across the message that they "care about digitizing local businesses and how we're not just a, you know, a giant marketing agency in the local sphere. We're also a business that promotes locally" (P5)

QCA Results and Discussion

4.6 Brand Identity

The emerged theme of *Brand Identity* came about in both the interviews as previously mentioned, and the content analysis of YM's Facebook and Instagram pages. Within the context of the QCA, this theme pertains to the way in which YM expresses an identity through visual components, their type of messaging, the use of collaborations and the expression of localization. This is done to communicate the values associated with the company and, more crucially, what they want their consumers and users to associate YM with (Phillips et al., 2014).

Table 7

Brand identity

Main theme 1	Sub-themes
Brand Identity	Visual branding
	Brand messaging
	Local promotions

4.6.1 Visual Branding

The employment of visual stimuli, such as the use of particular colors, images, and emojis, that might in any way, shape or form be associated to the image that YM seeks to construct, led to the emergence of this initial sub-theme of *visual branding*. Throughout the sample of posts collected (N=34), the color yellow was often utilized within the images, symbolizing their brand color (N=13). This was often done so people could become accustomed to the identity of the brand by using repetition to create an identity (Coleman et al., 2011). However, Facebook (N=9) saw more instances of this in comparison to Instagram (N=4). This is due to the fact that their visual branding on each platform serves different purposes. YM attempts to appeal to businesses on Facebook more frequently; while Instagram tries to appeal a more general audience. Simple graphics with a yellow background that frequently connect to their blog entries, such as that in Figure 2, are used to do this.
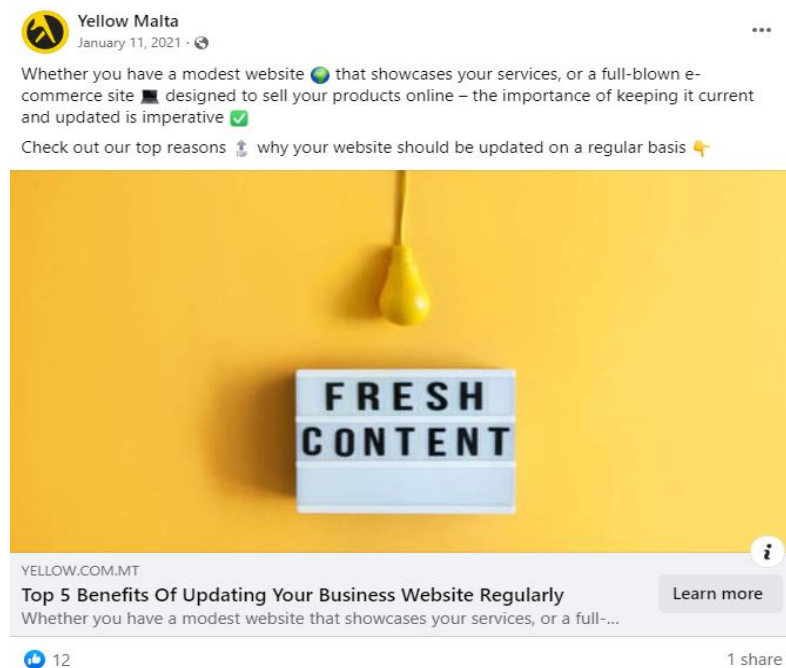

Figure 2. Yellow Malta on January 11th, 2021

Using their own house color was central to the recognition of their brand. According to Labrecque and Milne (2012), color attracts customers and shapes their views by having inherent significance that becomes essential to a brand's identity. In this case the color yellow, often associated with positivity (Houraghan, 2022). By the consistent usage of the color yellow, YM compels a visual identity and establishing lasting ties with their target audience. Furthermore, associations to the brand were not only evident in the images

themselves, but frequently portrayed in the captions of the posts often with a yellow heart emoji (N=9).

Another key element of their visual branding was the use of aesthetic images of Malta and its nature, most often blue skies and the sea, providing the viewers with a serene and soothing image of Malta (N=10). This confirms what P5 had to say about their SM posts in section of 4.5 of branding and identity at YM, where the company uses its Social Media platforms to promote Malta in a positive light. Doing this enables interaction with the regional target market and increases the credibility of the brand as they continue to make themselves more appealing as a local brand (Kapferer, 2002). In contrast to the usage of the color yellow on Facebook, Instagram was more often utilized to create an appealing image of Malta for their users as illustrated in Figure 3. This was done to create further connection with the local community and therefore generate brand awareness.

Figure 3. @yellowmalta on 10th January, 2022

4.6.2 Brand Messaging

The second sub-theme within brand identity is that of *brand messaging* and relates to the tone of voice which is often utilized by YM. This pertains to the ways YM interacted with their Social Media audiences and was essential for the brand to be recognizable and consistent (Phrase, 2023). Here, aspects such as their tone of voice and the style used to communicate and engage with their audiences are depicted. The efficacy of brand recognition strategies are demonstrated when a brand is able be recognized by its content without paying attention to who uploaded it (Chen, 2020b). Throughout YM's Facebook posts there was often the use of an educational tone, as evident in Figure 4, with words such as "discover" and "tips on how to promote".
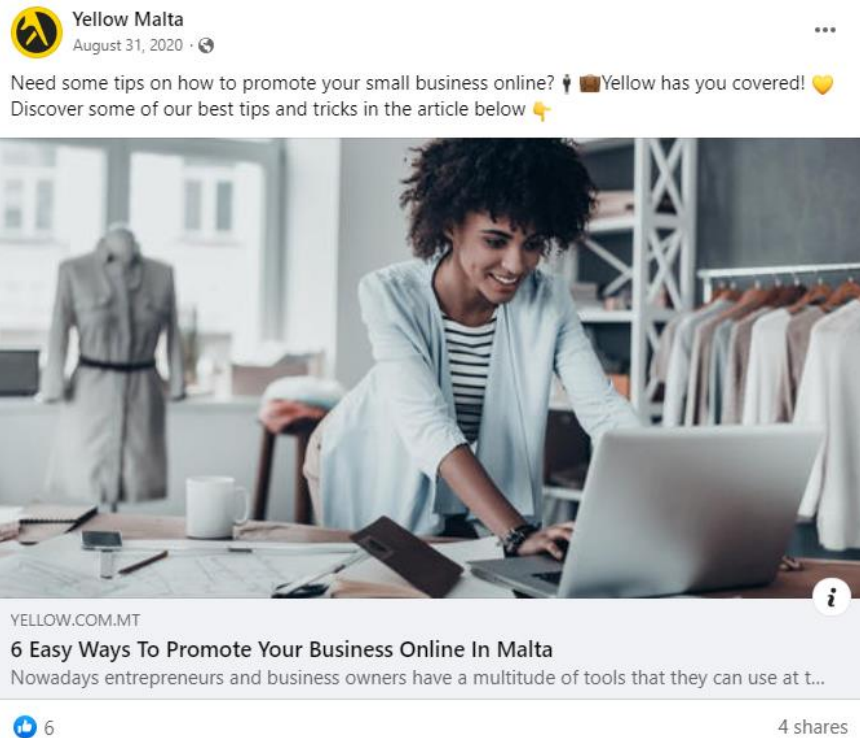
Figure 4. Yellow Malta on August 31st, 2020

Within this type of posts on Facebook, the main aim was to provide users with knowledge and informational resources about things such as advertising strategies for companies, Maltese history, the importance of buying locally, or tips on how to become more sustainable (N=9), which aimed at providing value to their users (as will be further discussed in the theme of strategic communication). Additionally, there was the reinforcement of a promotional and informative tone to engage and inform businesses about the products and services offered by Yellow (N=3). This can be seen in Figure 5 with a caption that is not only promotional but also friendly as they made use of multiple emojis to indicate the effortlessness and comfort of working with YM.

Figure 5. Yellow Malta on November 16th, 2020

As for Instagram, the tone of voice in the captions were more light hearted, through the use of phrases such as , "a fantastic site", "so pretty" and "let's show some appreciation". And so, just like its visual branding, produced an emphasis on the promotion of Malta and its beauty. As encapsulated in Figure 6, with a visually appealing image of a sunset within the nature of Malta, and a caption that portrays a sense of awe for the beauty within the image. Frequently, emojis were also utilized in their Instagram posts in order to contribute a casual tone to its light-hearted content, such as the usage of the heart-eyed emojis, colorful heart emojis, and emojis which were related to the image in the post such as the sunshine and a wave emoji in Figure 6 to connect to what Malta is usually associated with (Phrase, 2023).

Figure 6. @yellowmalta on December 6th, 2022

4.6.3 Local promotions

The final sub-theme, labelled as *local promotions,* encompasses the usage of their SM pages to showcase anything that is local. As previously mentioned in visual branding, YM consistently posted images of the Maltese islands and their beauty. To contribute to this, they also made use of the national flag emoji and hashtags such as #lovemalta and #visitmalta. Arguably, local promotions made the company the most authentic with the use of their platforms to showcase the beauty of the Maltese islands as well as Maltese culture. They presented content that highlighted Maltese culture, such as details of historical occasions, traditional homes, vehicles, and celebrations, like the example shown in Figure 7, rendering their content more recognizable among Maltese people. Ger (1999) had emphasized that this gives local firms as YM a competitive edge over global firms, since it places them in a position where they can create a stronger bond with the community.

Figure 7. Yellow Malta on March 22nd, 2022

Apart from the promotion of the Maltese islands and its adjacent culture, YM were also seen putting an effort into the promotion of local artists and talents as demonstrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. @yellowmalta on July 15th, 2020

With these posts they were seen featuring local talent whilst also recommending looking up the individuals and supporting their talents. Captions such as "Artistic Monday" and "Sports Wednesday" suggested that this is done on a weekly basis. This further strengthened their

localization strategy and brand image as they promoted a stronger link to the Maltese community. Such a localization strategy guided YM in adapting all that they do to the local context of Malta. Within their Social Media frame, YM's positioned themselves through cultural alignment, where they are able to achieve a connection with their audience (Phrase, 2023).

Ultimately, the theme of branding and identity came about through their usage of Social Media. Such strategies as the aforementioned, visual, messaging and local promotions would have not been possible without their venture into digital transformation. Through their digital platforms of Instagram and Facebook, YM have been able to present a consistent image to stakeholders (Hofacker et al., 2020). By presenting a consistent appreciation for Maltese beauty, culture and talent they are likely to have built a local connection and influenced how individuals perceive their brand, whilst also building customer loyalty (Huotari et al., 2015). Accordingly, creating such a brand identity would most likely increase their brand performance and therefore positively contribute to YMs business strategy (Coleman et al., 2011).

4.7 Strategic Communication

The final theme which emerged within the qualitative content analysis was that of *strategic communication*. In this theme the researcher acknowledged that YM utilized different *engagement tactics* and *informational resources* in order to communicate with their audience. Such communication supported the claim made by Gimpel et al. (2018) that interactions with a company's communication channels are crucial for delivering a comprehensive process of consistent customer experience.

Table 8

Strategic Communication

Main theme 2	Sub-themes
Strategic communication	Engagement tactics
	Informational resources

4.7.1 Engagement tactics

Huotari et al. (2015) argued that user-generated content is produced as a result of audience participation fostered by SM and other interactive communication technology. This was evident when YM made use of call-to-actions to encourage such content. For instance,

on a number of their Instagram posts from the sample (N=7), YM used the following caption "Tag @yellowmalta on your posts and use #YellowMalta" as evident in Figure 9.

Figure 9. @yellowmalta on August 18th, 2021

Whilst this continued to create a sense of community around the brand, it may have also increased their brand visibility (Phrase, 2023). The consistent usage of hashtags, evident on all of the Instagram sample posts contributed to this increase in visibility as they added broader topics within the hashtag such as #instadaily #malta and #maltalife to gain a wider audience. Additionally, other call-to-actions such as clicking the link in their bio, or learning more by selecting to read their attached blogs, or even encouraging the audience to follow them on a platform such as TikTok were also consistently done by YM on their Facebook page, and seen throughout all of the sample posts (N=17). The usage of Social Media by YM in such a way suggested the improvement of communication between the company and the audience whilst also resulting in relationship and trust building (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Deloitte, n.d.-a). Interactions such as giveaways and promotions further strengthened this, as YM have showed themselves able to promote brand awareness through Social Media campaigns like that of 'Win Big With Yellow". Concrete examples of this occurred both on Facebook (N=2) and Instagram (N=1). In order for an individual to win any of the competitions, steps such as liking their Facebook page and commenting on the posts were often present, as represented in Figure 10. Bernazzani (2018) highlighted that this need for participation generates brand awareness, whilst also bringing an element of excitement to the audience, fostering a positive image.

Figure 10. Yellow Malta on January 29th, 2021

4.7.2 Informational resources

As briefly mentioned in the sub-theme of brand messaging, YM provided their audiences, both businesses and users, with informative resources. On Facebook, such content refers to information regarding Yellow Malta's products and services, Maltese traditions, local produce, marketing strategies for businesses and event information. Within this context, YM recognized the customer's desire for a company they can depend on for assistance, information, and enhancing their company's decision-making, as explained by Dang et al. (2019). On the flipside, their Instagram posts were informative in the way that they introduce users to locations around Malta and the beauty of these, as can be seen in Figure 11 where the audience is informed that if they are looking for paradise on earth, Blue Lagoon is the place to go.

Figure 11. @yellowmalta on January 28th, 2020

Such informational resources on both SM platforms shape the perception of YM as they positioned themselves as a trustworthy resource that not only promotes Maltese culture and place but also educates and shares knowledge with its followers. This may also be beneficial in producing engagement as the audience may wish to reach out to ask further questions with regards to the information in the posts. Such engagement increases visibility and sheds a positive light on the company. In line with that which was mentioned in the interviews, YM's Social Media content revolves around the attraction of both businesses and a general audience too, enhancing their brand recognition.

Conclusions

To conclude, this study explored how Yellow Malta employed digitalization throughout their business, which in turn enhanced their business strategy in various ways. To do this, a theoretical framework was initially created in order to identify notions that the researcher believed to be essential for comprehensive results such as 'B2B', 'digitalization' , 'digital transformation', 'digital strategies' and 'digital maturity'. After this, the study focused on analyzing data obtained through interviews with YM personnel, and from the content analysis of their Facebook and Instagram pages. This was deemed most appropriate in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of YM from the staff themselves, but also the ways digital tactics were portrayed on their Social Media. Through these analyses, the researcher was able to develop an understanding on YM adoption of digitalization and the ways in which it has enhanced their businesses strategy. Thus, it can be concluded through both analyses that YM do indeed make use of digitalization to optimize their business strategy.

Through the thematic analysis of the interviews, the motivations for YM's transformation were indicated as being able to keep up with the evolvement of society but also the COVID-19 pandemic. With the efforts to digitalize, and the understanding of its importance, YM began to recognize the ways digitalization may contribute to the business strategy. Furthermore, the interviews shed light on the benefits that came along with their digital transformation, which all helped optimize their business strategy. This consisted of the ability to introduce new products and services, which prior to their digitalization did not exist. But also provided capabilities for being more efficient and organized in their work through the use of technological tools and software. Another crucial component of a company's business strategy is that of customer service. Through digitalization, YM have been provided with the ability to better serve their clients by improving the different touchpoints, but also being able to make quicker amendments on any issues, whilst also being able to easily compensate their clients. However, they do recognize a need to take a step back and adapt to the local business community, which at times are not quite in favor of digitalization. This was one of their main challenges among others which produced an understanding of the areas in which YM's digitalization may be lacking. Lastly, the interviews portrayed a brief understanding of their branding and identity, which through their SM pages they express their ability to depict Malta in a positive light as they promote YM as a company that surrounds itself with local values.

Further, the QCA helped provide a greater understanding of how YM presents itself to the local public through various digital initiatives while also shedding light on the communication techniques utilized by YM on Facebook and Instagram to engage with their audience. Two main themes arose from this analysis: brand identity, and strategic communication. Through these themes it was made evident that YM uses their Social Media platforms to build relationships and form trust, increase brand awareness and create visibility. This was achieved through strategies such as 1) visual branding, the use of colors and aesthetics of both YM and Malta 2) the tone of voice employed on the posts 3) the use of localization with the promotion of local culture, history and locations 5) and the engagement tactics and informational resources employed by the company the strategically communicate with their audience. Through their digital presence YM have placed themselves in a favorable position within the local community, presenting themselves not only as a promotor of local culture and values but also as a reliable resource of information and a trustworthy brand to work with.

The overall findings encapsulate YM's commitment to the adoption of digitalization within their own company but also within those of their clientele too. Even though the local mindset requires YM to take a slower pace in digitalization and the opportunities that come with it, there is still an optimistic mindset and openness to adopting digitalization displayed by YM demonstrating that they will be able to effectively continue their transformation journey. YM has been able to benefit from their digital strategy in numerous ways through the implementation of digital tools and technologies, including, among others: the opportunity to provide new products and services, internal efficiency, and brand exposure. By embracing digitalization, YM has not only been able to improve operations but also build an established online presence that appeals to the local market.

Limitations and Future Research

With regards to the study's limitations, it is possible to take into account the QCA's limited sample size given that exclusively 34 posts from Facebook and Instagram were combined for the analysis. Even though the sample may be indicative of their objectives, a larger sample size could have made it possible to analyze their SM behaviors in greater detail. Therefore, future research may consider an analysis solely on YM's Social Media pages to achieve further knowledge about their digital strategies. Along with this, further studies may also attempt to take a larger sample of employees in order for the results to be a more accurate representation of YM as a whole. This may be done though anonymous surveys

among YM personnel to also increase confidence and make it easier for them to express the truth about what really happens within the company. Apart from this, the QCA may be further extended with the inclusion of client and user reviews of YM's Social Media channels in order to disclose an actual consumer perspective. Within this context a future study may question whether or not their SM strategy is effective, and if clients enjoy the content they are presented with.

Moreover, a considerable amount of research has been published with regards to digitalization and digital transformation. However, the knowledge of digitalization within B2Bs, especially within the local context of Malta was limited. This study thus provides insights of a real scenario of digitalization within a Maltese B2B company. However, this may also come with its limitations. Due to the study only revolving around the company of YM, results may not always be applicable to other B2B companies. Therefore, further studies on other local B2B companies may help present more generalizable insights for Maltese B2Bs on the implementation of digitalization and its effect on business strategies. Future researchers may also take the digital maturity of YM into consideration, utilizing MIT Center for Digital Business and Capgemini (Westerman et al., 2012) model in order to identify their level of maturity and providing recommendations on how to improve the digitalization endeavors.

Lastly, it is also essential to consider the potential bias and preconceptions of the researcher which may have influenced the interpretation and final results. Different researchers may have portrayed results differently due to their different perspectives, however measures such as peer reviews by two separate researchers were taken to limit this as much as possible.

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Appendices

Interview guide

Section 1:The interviewee and Yellow Malta	Role at YM	What is your role at Yellow Malta?
		What would a typical working week look like for you, and could you elaborate on your day to day tasks?
	Involving digital tools	Does digitalization (the increasing use of digital tools and technologies) play a role at Yellow?
		What about in your role?
Section 2: Digital Transformation General	Digital transformation at YM	How would you say digital transformation (digital shift) has changed Yellow?
		How much change, if any (with regards to DT) would you say you have seen in your time working at Yellow?
	Influences of the shift to digital	To what extent are external stakeholders influencing your organization's DT? (e.g., Clients, partners or customer demands)
Section 3: Digital Strategy	Strategy	In your own words, what does YM's digital strategy (approach to digital) include?
		Are partnerships used?

	Strategy effectiveness	How successfully does (this approach) the strategy extract value from data?
		To what extent has the digital shift steered the organization's strategy?
		What do you think has had the most significant impact?
		What are the main strengths to your current approach to digital?
		Could you identify any weaknesses?
Section 4: Seizing Opportunities	**Digital opportunities**	How does Yellow Malta determine what digital opportunities to pursue? (How well do you know where change is occurring and where digitization is having the greatest impact?)
		Could you give some examples of new technologies or digital innovations that the organization has implemented? And how did this change the organization?
	Competitiveness	How does your organization try to stay competitive through digital technology?
Section 5: Integration of DT	**YM and change**	How flexible to change is YM? (when new tech/ tools are implemented?)
		How does YM ensure that its DT goals are in line with its core values and objectives?

	Integrating employees	How have digital transformation initiatives undertaken by YM changed the way you or your colleagues work?
		What methods are implemented to include employees in the digitalization process?
Section 6: Future transformation at YM	**Future transformation**	Could you describe YM's vision for the next steps in its digital transformation?
		Are there any challenges that come along with this? And how is the company addressing them?

Appendix B

Thematic analysis coding frame

Selective	Axial	Open
Digital Adoption	Shifting to digital	Causes (COVID-19/others)
		Evolution of change bringing an expansion of products and services
	Benefits of the adoption	Use of internal tools in business operations
		Efficiency optimization
		Convenience
		Streamlining processes
Agility and innovation	Adapting to change	Embracing digital
		Willingness to explore new products
		Staying up to date
	Integration	Employee training and development
		Leadership and effective communication
		Processes

	Continuous improvement	Future plans
		Strategic planning
		Goals and objectives
		Data- driven decision making
		Research, Testing and implementing
	Strategic alliances and partnerships	Collaborations with external organizations
Customer-centricity	Customer-experience	Customization
		Customer – service
	Localization	Tailored solutions and services
		Consumer preferences
		Supporting SMEs
Challenges and obstacles of digitalization faced by Yellow Malta	Internal obstacles	Skills gaps and frustrations
		Financial constraints
		Need for manual intervention

	Barriers and disadvantages of digital tools and software	Inconvenience
		Dependency
		Shifting the traditional mindset
Branding and identity	Brand awareness	Low brand recognition
	Perceived image and brand reputation	Keeping up appearance

Appendix C

Content analysis coding frame

Main theme	Sub-theme	Open Codes
Brand identity	Visual branding	Colors
		Imagery
	Brand messaging	Brand voice
		Brand tone
		Emojis
	Local promotion	Promotion of Maltese islands
		Promotion of local culture
		Promotion of local talent
Strategic communication	Engagement tactics	Call-to-actions
		Hashtags
		Promotions and giveaways
	Informational resources	YM's advertising solutions
		Informative/ educational posts