



STRATEGIES FOR DIGITAL RETAIL TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF A SHOE STORE LARGE CHAIN

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Summary

Aim of the study: This article evaluated the process of developing strategies for the digital transformation of a footwear retail organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new strategies may have contributed to the development of new digital capabilities.

Methodology: Qualitative research using the case study method was used. Data was collected through interviews and documents, and content analysis was applied, defining mixed categories.

Originality/Relevance: The article proposes an interpretative framework for understanding the processes and practices of formulating and adopting Digital Transformation strategies.

Main results: The research shows that coping with the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a change in the organization's positioning, adopting new strategies (emergent and deliberate), new capabilities, and the development of digital transformation.

Theoretical/methodological contributions: the article addresses potential gaps in the specific domain of strategy-as-practice research through an empirical case in a crisis and accelerated digital transformation context.

Social contributions to management: The researched organization promoted strategic changes with economic results by adopting new methodologies, such as using OKRs in its existing strategic process. This understanding can help retail businesses accelerate their digital transformation to face contingencies.

Keywords: deliberate and emergent strategies, digital capabilities, digital transformation, OKR (Objectives and Key Results)

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Estratégias para a Transformação Digital do Varejo: um estudo de caso de uma grande rede de lojas de calçados

Resumo

Objetivo do estudo: Este artigo avaliou o processo de desenvolvimento de estratégias para a transformação digital de uma organização do varejo calçadista, durante a pandemia do COVID-19. Considera-se que as novas estratégias podem ter contribuído para o desenvolvimento de novas capacidades digitais.

Metodologia: Utilizou-se pesquisa qualitativa com o método de estudo de caso. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas e documentos, aplicando a análise de conteúdo com definição de categorias mistas.

Originalidade/Relevância: O artigo traz uma proposta de esquema interpretativo para entendimento dos processos e práticas de formulação e adoção de estratégias para a Transformação Digital.

Principais resultados: Os resultados da pesquisa demonstram que o enfrentamento da pandemia do COVID-19 contribuiu para uma mudança de posicionamento da organização e a adoção de novas estratégias (emergentes e deliberadas), novas capacidades e desenvolvimento da transformação digital.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas: o artigo contribui para endereçar potenciais lacunas do domínio específico da pesquisa da estratégia como prática por meio de um caso empírico em um contexto de crise e acelerada transformação digital.

Contribuições sociais para a gestão: A organização pesquisada promoveu mudanças estratégicas e com resultados econômicos expressivos, adotando novas metodologias, como o uso dos OKRs ao seu processo estratégico existente. Esta compreensão pode auxiliar negócios do varejo na aceleração da transformação digital como forma de enfrentar contingências.

Palavras-chave: estratégias deliberadas e emergentes, capacidades digitais, transformação digital, OKR (Objectives and Key Results)

Estrategias para la transformación digital del comercio minorista: un estudio de caso de una grande cadena de zapaterías

Resumen

Objetivo del estudio: En este artículo se evalúa el proceso de desarrollo de estrategias para la transformación digital de una organización de venta minorista de calzado durante la pandemia de COVID-19. Se considera que las nuevas estrategias pueden haber contribuido al desarrollo de nuevas capacidades digitales.

Metodología: Se utilizó la investigación cualitativa mediante el método de estudio de casos. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas y documentos, aplicando análisis de contenido con definición de categorías mixtas.

Originalidad/Relevancia: El artículo propone un marco interpretativo para comprender los procesos y prácticas de formulación y adopción de estrategias de Transformación Digital.

Principales resultados: Los resultados de la investigación muestran que el afrontamiento de la pandemia COVID-19 ha contribuido a un cambio en el posicionamiento de la organización y a la adopción de nuevas estrategias (emergentes y deliberadas), nuevas capacidades y el desarrollo de la transformación digital.

Aportaciones teóricas/metodológicas: el artículo contribuye a abordar posibles lagunas en el ámbito específico de la investigación de la estrategia como práctica a través de un caso empírico en un contexto de crisis y transformación digital acelerada.

Contribuciones sociales a la gestión: La organización investigada promovió cambios estratégicos con resultados económicos mediante la adopción de nuevas metodologías, como el uso de OKR en su proceso estratégico existente. Esta comprensión puede ayudar a las empresas minoristas a acelerar su transformación digital como forma de hacer frente a las contingencias.

Palabras clave: estrategias deliberadas y emergentes, capacidades digitales, transformación digital, OKR (Objectives and Key Results)

Introduction

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an accelerated trend towards the Digital Transformation (DT) of businesses, with a notable transition of commercial activities from predominantly offline outlets to online driven by the health restrictions in place. Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) raised whether DT benefited a broad spectrum of companies or only a few could use technology to survive and grow after the crisis. This concern highlights the need to understand the distribution of the effects of this forced transformation. It has become essential to understand how different sectors have responded to this scenario, the pace of adaptation, and which strategies have been most effective.

Faced with the need to adapt, driven by a volatile external environment, companies have been compelled to seek technological innovations. Digital transformation is not a recent concept for academics and practitioners (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020); however, developing digital strategies (deliberate or emergent) is a territory that has yet to be explored. Bradley et al. (2020) and Lozada (2020) discuss the 'great acceleration' of the pandemic in adopting technologies to facilitate remote working and online shopping. However, an in-depth analysis of these effects is still pending. Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) explores companies' reactions to the pandemic and provide a critical comparison, making it possible to identify patterns and innovative strategies that have emerged during COVID-19.

In Contingency Theory, a highly complex crisis, such as a pandemic, may require significant restructuring of the internal environment to adapt to external changes, impacting strategies that will shape the company's future (Abreu, 2006). The economic performance of companies is directly influenced by their organizational structure, technology, and external environment (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Donaldson, 2007). Morgan (2007) expands on the seminal studies by Burns and Stalker (1961) and Woodward (1958),

pointing out that organizational effectiveness depends on the alignment between strategy, structure, technology, and the external environment, including customers, competitors, suppliers, unions, and government. In this way, contingencies and organizational structure can positively or negatively affect business performance, and no single formula applies to all organizations (Donaldson, 2007).

The pandemic has generated an accelerated wave of investments in technology and innovation as a response to the external environment to survive an unprecedented health and economic crisis. Understanding how to formulate and adopt digital strategies in response to the health crisis may have led to a competitive edge in the market for some organizations. Organizations aim to gain competitive advantages through digital transformation (Sia et al., 2016), which can be achieved by implementing layers of digital strategies and fostering new digital capabilities, as suggested by Subramaniam (2021), Kane et al. (2015) and Carvalho et al. (2021).

According to the view of Contingency Theory, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the implementation of new digital and emerging strategies by organizations, in addition to provoking the development of new digital capabilities, considered a specific type of dynamic capabilities (Sia et al., 2016; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Teece et al., 1997). These capabilities are essential for adaptation and innovation in crisis scenarios, allowing organizations to reconfigure and renew their competencies to respond to constantly evolving business environments (Burisch & Wohlgemuth, 2016; Magistretti et al., 2021; Moura & Saroli, 2021).

This study was designed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which catalyzed digital transformation in a footwear retail company. The following central question guided the research: How did the development of deliberate or emergent strategies for Digital Transformation occur in the context of the pandemic? This article investigated whether these strategies expanded or restricted the company's digital capabilities.

Based on a qualitative case study and taking the conceptual model of Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) as a theoretical reference, the article sought to contribute to increasing understanding of the emergence of strategies from external shocks, in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. This understanding can help retail businesses accelerate their digital transformation to deal with contingencies.

The originality of this work lies in the search for an understanding of the processes and practices of deliberate or emergent strategy-making as a response mechanism to external threats through empirical research in a context of crisis and accelerated Digital Transformation. Such

an approach can address potential gaps for future studies in the specific strategy domain as practice (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 2006). It is justified by the need to understand how organizations can reshape their internal structures and processes to remain resilient in the face of severe environmental shocks through an updated framework.

The research did not delve into detecting threats through competitive intelligence, which could be considered a trigger for the episodes. It did not emphasize identifying the effects of adopting digital strategies and developing digital capabilities through digital maturity (Salume et al., 2021). The study's more specific focus was on understanding the process and practices of formulating, adopting, and developing digital capabilities.

The findings of this study are not restricted to a single geographic region or segment, as the challenges of digital transformation are global (McKinsey, 2019). Thus, the insights derived from this work could contribute to the academic debate and organizational practice in different cultural and economic contexts. The practices and processes for developing the strategies identified could serve as a model for companies that face or will face similar challenges.

In addition to this introduction, the article is divided into five more sections. The next section contains the theoretical framework, covering the topics of structural contingency, deliberate and emergent strategies, and digital transformation. The next section details the research methodology used. The results found are first analyzed and then discussed in the light of the literature, and finally, the final considerations are presented with limitations, contributions, and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical referential

This section provides the theoretical basis for creating the interpretative model. This framework allowed us to assess how the process of developing deliberate and emergent strategies for DT took place in the empirical object. At the same time, the framework also made it possible to find the conditions for evaluating whether these strategies contributed to expanding or restricting their digital capabilities.

Structural contingency

Structural Contingency Theory emerged in the mid-1960s and, according to Donaldson (2007), is one of the primary theoretical lenses for organizational studies, as it provides various ideas and empirical support. According to the author, it supports the relationship between organizational structure and contingencies that positively impact performance. It is a central



field in organizational and strategy studies, exploring how organizational structures must adapt to environmental contingencies to optimize performance.

Lex Donaldson, one of the leading proponents of Contingency Theory, argues that organizations must adjust their structures according to contingencies such as uncertainty, strategy, and size. In his 1987 study, Donaldson proposed that structural adaptation is crucial to regaining fit and improving organizational performance. He suggests that Contingency Theory should not be seen as static but as a dynamic process where structural changes are often necessary to maintain organizational effectiveness. In subsequent articles, this view is exemplified in his defense of Contingency Theory, in which he argues that the functionalist approach and quantitative methods can explain structural changes if applied correctly (Donaldson, 1987).

Pennings (1987) reinforces the importance of the interrelationship between structure and environment in his multivariate analysis. His studies indicate that effective organizational units exhibit strong interrelationships between these elements, suggesting effectiveness-induced constraints on the choice of organizational design. This implies that the organizational structure must be flexible and adaptable to changes in the environment to maintain high performance (Pennings, 1987).

Ginsberg and Venkatraman (1985) also address the methodological and theoretical critique of contingency theory. They propose a two-level review scheme to address the gaps in empirical research on Contingency Theory, highlighting the need for a more robust analytical model to delineate the domains of organizational strategy research. This approach is vital to understanding the complexities and dynamics of applying Contingency Theory in different organizational contexts (Ginsberg & Venkatraman, 1985).

More recent contributions, such as Donaldson (2015), highlight the relevance of Contingency Theory, especially when discussing how different contingencies, such as uncertainty and strategy, determine the most suitable organizational structure for performance. In addition, Yan (2010) proposes an integrative model of the evolution of the fit between organizational structure and context, dividing the context into external (environment and technology) and internal (strategy, size, and IT). This model has been validated by multiple Chinese companies' case studies, modifying the current Structural Contingency Theory and offering valuable insights for designing organizational structures. Although individual companies cannot change the external context, they can adjust their internal context and organizational structure to achieve a higher level of performance (Yan, 2010)

The main objective of this theory is to understand how companies establish their relationships with the environment to achieve their goals. It identifies the links between environmental conditions and strategic practices to adapt their structure, administrative procedures, and business models. In other words, the environment determines organizational characteristics (Abreu, 2006).

Based on the assumptions of Contingency Theory, the environmental school of strategic thinking was revisited by Mintzberg et al. (2010), who point to four dimensions that impact and alter the environment in which organizations are inserted - and, consequently, their strategy. These are (i) stability of the environment, which ranges from stable to dynamic, changing according to situations that are beyond the organization's control and are unpredictable, with no recognizable pattern; (ii) complexity of the environment, which impacts the level of knowledge needed to deliver value; as the organization accumulates knowledge, the level of complexity of the environment changes and decreases, and can vary from simple to complex; (iii) diversification of the environment, which is related to the markets in which the organization operates, and can vary from integrated to diversified; and (iv) environmental hostility, which depends on competition, working relationships, availability of resources, among others; varying from favorable to hostile (Mintzberg et al., 2010).

Contingency Theory argues that the organization's environment shapes strategy. In this context, each environmental dimension will influence the formation of a strategy (Duncan, 1972; Mintzberg et al., 2010) and, consequently, how this strategy is opened (Hautz, 2017).

Rosa et al. (2023) highlights the impact of adaptive evolution on business cycles in times of crisis. The authors state that, in a crisis context, companies compete in an environment where organizational routines must adapt to survive and prosper. Those who adjust their strategies can emerge from recessions with a competitive advantage.

This strategic adjustment is fundamental to understanding how many organizations' digital transformation processes were triggered when deliberate and emerging strategies were developed and new digital capabilities were created to respond to the dynamic and uncertain environment. This research sought to investigate how these strategies, driven by the pandemic, expanded or restricted the digital capabilities of a large shoe retailer, reflecting the adaptation and innovation needed to thrive in times of crisis.

For constructing the interpretative model, it was considered that an organization's competitive intelligence process allows it to monitor potential crises, changes in the environment, and technological changes. This assumption enables new deliberate and emerging strategies to be developed, consequently triggering DT (Fuld, 2003). In highly volatile and

inflexible scenarios, where organizations cannot adequately predict the future or influence the environment, the ability to adapt through cycles of continuous experimentation may be the only option (Reeves & Haanaes, 2015). However, it should be noted that understanding this relevant process in the organization under study was not the focus of this research.

Deliberate and emergent strategies

Learned et al. (1969) define strategy as the elaborate compilation of goals to be achieved, detailed proposals, broad guidelines, and plans outlining the steps to realize these goals. This definition highlights the importance of clearly establishing a company's direction, defining its identity in the market, and visualizing its future aspirations.

Regardless of the sector or size of the company, all companies need strategies to make them competitive in the market and differentiate themselves from others. Most companies prepare their strategic planning annually or every two to five years through a formal and bureaucratic process, creating goals and objectives that guide the company's decision-making in the market. This classic form of strategy formulation is described by Ansoff (1965) as a process in which the general objectives of the organization are defined by top management and then developed by lower-level management through detailed plans. These must be sanctioned by senior management before any commitment is made or any action taken. This way, lower-level managers are left with little importance in deciding, inhibiting strategic initiatives (Mariotto, 2003).

In the context of strategic planning, deliberate strategy is adopted. According to Prado Júnior (2003), this involves an analytical process focused on top management supported by competitiveness analysis techniques with a rational and economical approach. In addition, these strategies are developed based on available knowledge (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021).

However, in March 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic becoming official, a scenario of change unfolded worldwide, showing that being strategic was no longer a competitive advantage for companies. Fernandes and Berton (2005) emphasize that the need to learn from change has become essential for companies to adapt to social, political, and economic transformations. In this context, learning to maintain a competitive position and guarantee future space in the market is no longer an option but a matter of survival. With the advent of the pandemic, companies were forced to revisit and restructure their strategic planning to adapt to the uncertain world scenario ahead.

Companies began to be required to be flexible to adapt to the external environment and to mold themselves internally to meet the requirements of a changing market. This molding required new strategies, and Mintzberg (1978) admits that strategies can "emerge" in organizations without necessarily being a formal method. The fact that it is not formal does not mean that management is out of control; only in some cases is it open, flexible, and agile. Such behavior is significant when an environment is too unstable or complex to understand or too imposing to challenge (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Given the difficulty of predicting changes in the environment, the emerging strategy corrects the organization's course, recognizing this limitation and not getting stuck in outdated planning, which would lead the company to swim against the current. Therefore, the importance of the environment is taken to the maximum, considering the evolution of organizations because of their relationship with the environment and the constant challenges it imposes (Borges Jr & Luce, 2000).

Therefore, there are differences between the two strategies, with the deliberate strategy being focused on planning, direction, and control. Emergent strategy, on the other hand, is focused on strategic learning, as the organization becomes able to respond to the environment and interact with it dynamically and flexibly, not limiting itself to previously established plans as the competitive environment generates new scenarios for action (Mintzberg et al., 2010). Adaptive strategies include market and product development, advertising, personnel management, and investment decisions (Rosa et al., 2023). The authors consider the importance of implementing distinct actions to adapt to intra- and post-recession periods, focusing on attributes contributing to resilient performance. However, Mintzberg and Waters (1985) suggest that combinations of deliberate and emergent strategies are closer to reality than perfect forms of each.

Combining deliberate and emergent strategies can be supported by developing new digital capabilities essential for adaptation and innovation in crisis scenarios (Sia et al., 2016). Contemporary academic literature recognizes the development of dynamic capabilities in organizations as an extension of the resource-based perspective, being crucial for facing challenges and promoting adaptive and innovative change (Burisch & Wohlgemuth, 2016; Magistretti et al., 2021; Moura & Saroli, 2021).

In this context, digital capabilities are considered a specific type of dynamic capability, defined by the ability of organizations to reconfigure and renew their competencies to respond to constantly evolving business environments (Teece et al., 1997). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the inability to digitize quickly was a crucial factor in the failure of many companies,

highlighting the need for robust digital capabilities for business sustainability (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

Digital capabilities can, therefore, be defined as the set of skills, knowledge, and technologies that enable companies to interact effectively with customers online and via mobile devices (Westerman et al., 2014). These capabilities are essential for executing a successful digital business strategy and effectively developing the digital transformation process (Sia et al., 2016).

To develop these capabilities, companies can adopt new technologies, such as mobile platforms for transactions and payments, improving customer interaction and operational efficiency (Kane et al., 2015). Collaborating with strategic partners and technology startups is one way of keeping updated with digital innovations, strengthening data analysis, and continuous learning (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

Digital transformation

COVID-19 has caused fundamental changes in how many organizations operate; one likely consequence has been the rapid digital transformation of business. Predominantly offline business activities, such as points of sale, have migrated to the online world (Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2021). Digital transformation may have been decisive for companies' survival and sustainable growth in this adverse context (Kim et al., 2021). It is assumed that the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered a major catalyst (Bradley et al., 2020; Lozada, 2020) for accelerating the trend towards adopting new digital technologies and platforms.

Oliveira et al. (2022) revealed that digital transformation played a crucial role in defining the adaptive strategies of micro and small food companies (MSEs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. MSEs have shown resilience and proactivity by using digital tools and platforms, ensuring operational continuity, and expanding their presence and reach in the market. Initiatives such as adopting e-commerce platforms and digital marketing strategies highlighted these companies' commitment to innovation and adaptation to the evolving market. The degrees of success in implementing digital transformation measures varied due to technological readiness, resource constraints, and organizational culture. The digital transition allowed MSEs to optimize operations, improve processes, and interact with customers more efficiently and personally, while multichannel marketing strengthened their market position. Overall, according to the authors, digital initiatives have had a transformative impact on the resilience and competitiveness of MSEs in the face of the adversities of the pandemic.

In the view of Carvalho et al. (2021), digital technologies can be of considerable importance to businesses. However, developing digital transformation strategies is challenging. One challenge is figuring out how to capture the different types of value that these technologies can offer. The authors consider a comprehensive assessment of these technologies fundamental to developing digital strategies.

Bharadwaj et al. (2013) consider that the fusion of business strategy and Information Technology (IT) strategy constitutes the so-called digital business strategy. However, most organizations respond simplistically to new digital threats and opportunities, creating only a few functions and organizational structures (Sia et al., 2016).

Some factors can also drive digital transformation, such as improved business processes, cooperation between teams, customer involvement, and a faster pace of innovation (Adomako et al., 2021; Racher et al., 2019). For these factors to occur, companies must develop various leadership, operations, customer needs, and innovation capabilities. To face the external threats caused by digital disruption, organizations need to build strong leadership prepared for digital transformation, develop agile and scalable digital operations, use data abundantly to create value for customers, and continuously explore new digital opportunities in a dynamic and emerging landscape (Sia et al., 2016). The authors understand these capabilities can be summarized as process automation, data analytics, and continuous exploration.

In the context of new capabilities, process automation is a solution to the challenge of efficiency and productivity. It allows companies to optimize operations and free up human resources for more strategic tasks. Data analysis is another critical digital capability in which organizations use large volumes of data to generate insights and guide strategic decisions. Continuous exploration emphasizes the need for a persistent innovation process through which organizations constantly seek new opportunities and learn from the environment, an aspect highlighted by Gassmann and Enkel (2004).

As a result, in addition to developing new capabilities, the DT process can evolve an organization's digital maturity. By researching the dimensions of digital maturity in companies in the retail sector in Brazil, Salume et al. (2021) identified that it contributes positively to the development of strategy, market and customer, operations, culture, and technology capabilities. The study did not prove the hypothesis that digital maturity can contribute positively to developing leadership, people, and governance capabilities.

However, the research's focus was not to ascertain the organization's digital maturity evolution but to understand the processes and practices for developing deliberate and emerging DT strategies. At the same time, the framework also made it possible to seek out the conditions

for evaluating whether these strategies have contributed to expanding or restricting their digital capabilities.

To make it easier to understand the types of strategies, Subramaniam (2021) proposes a model for understanding how companies can benefit from digital technologies based on four strategic *tiers* that indicate the degree of digital transformation. This model identifies a first tier proposed by Subramaniam (2021) with a focus on operational efficiency; the second tier, which aims to promote excellence in product development; the third tier in which companies understand that they can generate data-based services from products and value chains (Brynjolfsson & Hitt, 2000); and the fourth tier in which companies create virtual communities to promote interaction between users and producers or sellers. The authors believe that the third and fourth layers represent the development of new businesses.

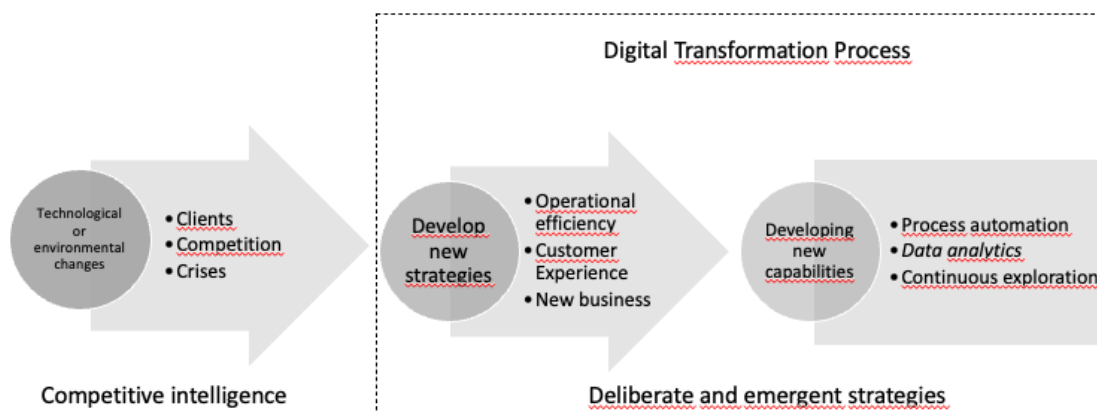
The contingency factor caused by the environmental hostility promoted by the COVID-19 pandemic may have facilitated the digital transformation of organizations, which may have been an effective strategy to face the challenges (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). The study by Sia et al. (2016) points to elements that can make up organizations' digital capabilities.

Figure 1 presents a new proposal for an interpretative scheme for understanding the processes and practices of formulating and adopting strategies for DT, focusing on the representation of the dotted box. It is based on the model proposed by Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021), the digital capabilities dimension (Salume et al., 2021; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021), and the layers of digital strategies (Subramaniam, 2021).

The proposed model highlights that technological or environmental changes can trigger the start of an organization's digital transformation (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). These changes can be monitored through a competitive intelligence process, which is not the focus of this study. At this point, a cycle of business adaptation begins, and the company seeks to develop new digital and emerging strategies, according to the layered model adapted from Subramaniam (2021), identified as operational efficiency, customer experience, and new business. At the same time, as proposed by Sia et al. (2016), new digital capabilities are developed (process automation, data analytics, and exploration). During the digital transformation process, the organization can look for opportunities in the value chain, review its business model, or develop new digital businesses. This process can contribute to increasing its digital maturity (Salume et al., 2021) by developing strategy, market and customer, operations, culture, and technology capabilities, but this will not be the focus of this research.

Figure 1

Interpretative scheme



During the process, barriers can prevent the development of digital transformation in organizations. These barriers are called barriers to digital transformation. They are made up of factors such as technological infrastructure, institutional restrictions, security and privacy concerns, and restrictions at the organizational level (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021), which are not covered in this model.

In this study, integrating Contingency Theory, emerging strategies, and digital transformation is crucial. Contingency Theory provides a basis for understanding how organizational strategies adapt to different environmental conditions. Emergent strategies offer insights into the dynamic and evolving nature of strategic planning in response to real-time challenges. Digital transformation acts as a catalyst that influences contingency and emergent strategies, allowing organizations to develop new capabilities and respond more effectively to technological advances and market changes. By linking these theories, the study proposes a coherent framework that illustrates how strategic adaptability and digital capabilities are interdependent and essential for organizational success.

Methodology

The research strategy chosen to address the problem was a qualitative approach. The authors sought to identify the phenomenon's occurrence - how the development of deliberate and emergent strategies for DT occurred in the empirical object. The research also made it

possible to seek out the conditions for evaluating whether these strategies contributed to expanding or restricting their digital capabilities.

In addition to seeking to understand the strategy development process, the research identified how COVID-19 impacted the footwear retail organization, verifying whether the environmental hostility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the company's digital transformation, according to the model proposed by Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021).

According to studies by Sia et al. (2016), the development of new digital capabilities in the organization was analyzed, and it was assessed whether the digital transformation facilitated the development of strategies in hostile environments, examining the layers of digital strategies proposed by Subramaniam (2021). According to the studies by Mintzberg (1978) and Prado Júnior (2003), the strategies identified were categorized using the deliberate and emergent typology.

The research was qualitative in approach and nature, as it is a method that seeks to examine and reflect on perceptions to gain an understanding of social and human activities (Collis & Hussey, 2005). This research analyzed the organization to understand how contingency factors affected it.

Considering the objectives, the research was defined as descriptive. According to Collis and Hussey (2005), this type of study aims to describe the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon. In this case, the focus was identifying how the researched company dealt with contingency factors in conducting its business. In addition to establishing relationships between variables and facts, such as the environment, strategy, technology, management, and structure, we analyzed how these factors influence the company's ability to deal with contingencies.

The exploratory approach was used in this research, allowing the theoretical framework to code, classify, and categorize the data to be analyzed. The collection and analysis strategy will detail this.

The research method used was the case study, based on an in-depth examination of the empirical object to provide the broadest and most complete understanding. This method was also chosen based on its ability to provide more comprehensive knowledge than other methods (Eisenhardt, 1989; Greenwood, 1973; Godoy, 1995b; Goode & Hatt, 1973; Selltiz *et al.*, 1963; Soy, 1998; Yin, 2010). Godoy (1995b), when presenting qualitative research and its fundamental types, argues that the case study - analysis of a unit in depth - is the appropriate method for understanding social phenomena.

Collis and Hussey's (2005) work emphasizes the importance of using document analysis, interviews, and observation to collect data in a case study. This aligns with Yin's (2010) reflections on the subject.

With a 40-year history in the footwear, clothing, and accessories retail sector, the subject of this study is a Brazilian company founded in São José dos Campos - SP. It currently has more than 100 multi-brand stores in various regions of Brazil, such as the interior of São Paulo, Triângulo Mineiro, Santa Catarina, Alagoas, and Paraíba, serving through 8 own brands and more than ten renowned national and international brands, the families of consumers who find the products they want in its stores. The company has more than 1,800 employees spread across its network of stores.

In this way, the research sought to relate the data obtained in the interviews with data collected from other sources, as guided by Yin (2010). In addition to comparing the bibliography consulted and semi-structured interviews, documentary research was also carried out to relate better the information obtained. Meeting minutes and a survey were obtained with company employees in 2020.

The research was carried out in three phases: the first was semi-structured interviews with three of the company's directors: interviewee 1 - Managing Director, interviewee 2 - Human Resources Director, and interviewee 3 - Marketing and E-commerce Director. The interviews were conducted using Zoom Meetings videotelephony software, lasting an average of one hour per interviewee, and were transcribed using Sonix.ai software. The interviews were conducted between May and June 2022.

Interviewee 1 is the general manager of the Oscar group. He said that the Group is a family business, founded by his father and two aunts in 82 in São José dos Campos (SP) in the footwear sector and has several brands and franchises. He is a former professional athlete, having been a professional soccer player until 2011. He returned to continue the family business for reasons of succession and a desire to enter the corporate world. He has always liked stores and graduated with a degree in commercial management. He took several courses at the Dom Cabral Foundation, always focused on retail. He is now in charge of the company and is trying to understand the challenges of the changing consumer market. He believes that his biggest challenge is coordinating strategic management with the board of partners' and directors' future vision and direction. Innovation and Digital Transformation are his future projects.

Interviewee 2 is a teacher by training and has worked as a teacher for a long time. She has a post-graduate degree in marketing and always specializes in human resources. She is one of the founders of the company, together with the father of interviewees 1 and 3 and another

sister. She also has other relatives who work in the Group. Interviewees 1 and 3 are taking over, but she is still with them. She has worked in finance, purchasing, sales, and human resources. Her big challenge is changing HR; she sees herself as interviewee 1's right-hand man.

Interviewee 3 is the Group's Marketing Director and has a degree in civil engineering from Purdue University in Indiana (USA). He returned to Brazil and worked for other companies before joining the Group. He then started working in the family business founded by his father and two sisters. She has worked in various departments. She is responsible for the Group's marketing and e-commerce. His challenge is to stay current in this marketing and e-commerce market. As marketing director, he wants to innovate but is wary of the scale and impact it could have. Another challenge for him is to lead and motivate this very young and multidisciplinary team.

The interview script was designed to investigate how the company has coped with the environmental turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the questions sought to identify whether the company is systematically monitoring the environment to identify new threats and opportunities and considering how the uncertainty resulting from the pandemic has impacted the organizational structure and decision-making process. Next, the roadmap analyzes the process of drawing up the company's strategic plan before the pandemic, the main impacts that the pandemic has had on corporate strategies, and possible barriers to advancing TD. Finally, the roadmap assesses whether the company implements a digital strategy and, if so, how it is applied. It also investigates whether digital strategies have improved operational efficiency and made it possible to develop new capabilities.

Subsequently, in the second phase, the company collected and made available the following documentation: minutes of the June 2020 management committee meeting, the launch of the new ideas program, and an internal survey of the management and supervisory team in June 2020, with 129 respondents.

The survey was answered by professionals in various organizational roles, including administrative areas, supervision, and store management. Participants included managers, administrators, store supervisors, and coordinators in marketing, sales, human resources, and IT. This Group is geographically distributed in various regions of Brazil where the organization has stores, with a significant concentration at the head office in São José dos Campos. The respondents had, on average, between 3 and 4 years of experience and relevant administrative experience within the organization.

The survey questions were related to digital transformation, totaling 14 questions. The aim was to understand whether digital business development was a priority for the organization.

The questions addressed capabilities related to data analysis, understanding process automation, and whether optimizing resources was a priority agenda. In addition, they were asked whether improving and developing interfaces with customers and suppliers was considered essential and whether connecting people with new technologies made sense for the organization. Participants were also asked about examples of organizations that have developed digital transformation, the main barriers faced, and the priority projects identified for developing digital transformation.

In the last phase, the interviews and documents received were analyzed. Initially, the strategies and monitoring of the environment (external and internal to the company) were evaluated, considering how contingency factors were monitored and strategies developed in two periods: before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we identified the main technological barriers, i.e., the factors affecting the company's digital transformation, such as lack of technological infrastructure, institutional restrictions, security and privacy concerns, and restrictions at the organizational level (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

The content analysis technique (Bardin, 2016) was used with the aid of Maxqda Analytics Pro 2022 software to analyze the data collected through interviews and documentary research. *A priori* categories were established according to the literature consulted. Then, the system for coding the documents was created, establishing two main groups: before COVID-19 and after COVID-19 and the barriers to Digital Transformation. Before COVID-19, deliberate and emerging strategies and environmental monitoring practices were coded. In addition to these categories, digital strategies, strategic layers, and digital maturity were also coded. Each of these categories, in turn, has subcategories, which are strong and prepared leadership, agile and scalable operations, use of data to generate value, and continuous exploration. Operational efficiency, product excellence, value chain, and digital platforms were considered in strategic layers. Finally, the themes of strategy, market, operations, and technology were coded in digital maturity. Table 1 shows the coding used to classify the data. It should be noted that not all the elements coded as Digital Maturity were used in the analysis, given the more specific focus of the article.

Table 1

Categories and subcategories of analysis

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS
Barrier to digitization	Before COVID-19
	After COVID-19
Before COVID-19	Emerging strategies before COVID-19
	Monitoring the environment before COVID-19
	Deliberate strategies before COVID-19
After COVID-19	Emerging strategies after COVID-19
	Deliberate strategies after COVID-19
	Monitoring the environment after COVID-19
	Digital Strategies
Digital Strategies	Digital Strategy - Strong and prepared leadership
	Digital Strategy - Agile and scalable operations
	Digital Strategy - Using data to generate value
	Digital Strategy - Continuous exploration
Strategy layers	Strategic layers - Operational efficiency
	Strategic layers - Product excellence
	Strategic layers - Value chain
	Strategic layers - Digital platforms
Digital maturity	Digital maturity - Strategy
	Digital maturity - Market
	Digital maturity - Operations
	Digital maturity - Technology

Table 2 below summarizes the main stages and methods used in this research. It presents the research strategy adopted, outlining the objectives, the methodological approach, the data collection and analysis techniques, and the main findings about the company's digital transformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2

Summary of research methodology

Category	Description
Research Strategy	Qualitative approach.
Objective	Examine the impact of COVID-19 on the company's digital transformation.
Theoretical Model	Model by Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021).
Digital capabilities	Assessment of digital skills according to Sia et al. (2016).
Typology of Strategies	Deliberate and emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1978; Prado Júnior, 2003).
Analysis Technique	Content analysis (Bardin, 2016) using <i>Maxqda Analytics Pro 2022 software</i> .
Categories of Analysis	Deliberate strategies, emerging strategies, environmental monitoring, digital strategies, strategic layers, and digital maturity.
Subcategories	Leadership, operations, use of data, continuous exploration, operational efficiency, product excellence, value chain, and digital platforms.
Nature of the research	Qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory.
Method	Case study.
Data collection	Documents, semi-structured interviews, and observation.
Organization studied	Brazilian footwear retail company.
Research phases	1. interviews; 2. documentary survey; 3. analysis of interviews and documents.
Identified barriers	Technological infrastructure, institutional constraints, security and privacy, and organizational constraints.

Data analysis

After collecting the data, several essential factors in the company's approach to COVID-19 were identified. This allowed us to assess the phenomenon's occurrence—how the development of deliberate and emergent strategies for DT occurred in the empirical object. The findings show that these strategies have expanded the organization's digital capabilities. In this section, the results obtained by this study are demonstrated.

Like many organizations operating in the retail sector, the company studied was affected by the uncertainty generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to adapt by developing new strategies to face the scenario unfolding ahead. To do so, it had to act on several business fronts to make it through the pandemic. The initial impact was significant, but she tried to get her business back on track and implement more agile management with greater use of digital resources and technologies.

Over the years before the pandemic, the company, through deliberate strategies, developed new digital businesses, but until then, in a way that didn't have much impact or representativeness for the business (Interviewee 2).

E-commerce existed before the pandemic, but sales through vendors did not. Features in the e-commerce platform adopted by the Group, such as social selling and decentralized stocks, have made this new approach possible. Previously, e-commerce operated in isolation, generating conflicts with vendors and other stores. Currently, managers also act as regional e-commerce managers and online sales are structured with rewards and bonuses. Sellers have played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing sales and becoming vital elements in the response to the crisis.

Digital strategies have boosted sales efficiency, which previously didn't exist via online salespeople, and using the website has increased salespeople's productivity. There has also been an increase in team productivity. Online meetings began to take place regularly, allowing for the consolidating of multidisciplinary teams focused on projects. The technology facilitated collaboration between a supervisor in Uberlândia (MG) and a manager in São José dos Campos (SP).

During the pandemic, online sales strategies have intensified by developing new products and new sales models, such as the company's e-commerce, which offers its products through its website, and third-party marketplaces such as *Dafiti*, *Amazon*, *Mercado Livre*, and *Magalu*.

At the same time, the company developed its marketplace, in which the partners and suppliers in the network advertise their products, and the organization intermediates sales. Another essential digital sales strategy for the company was the creation of a network of affiliates registered and authorized people who promote and sell the products available on the e-commerce site and receive commissions for these sales. These strategies were emerging responses to the need to continue operations in a scenario in which sales through physical stores were compromised due to the constant closures of the trade due to health restrictions.

To facilitate access to credit, the organization has also developed a fintech that offers a credit card to its clients. This initiative predates the pandemic but was stepped up to provide customers with a competitive edge during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Another important aspect highlighted by interviewee 2 was the company's initiative to develop the sustainable side of the business. By participating in a project to recycle its products, the company maintains a social organization that correctly disposes of discarded products, trains people with disabilities, and transforms waste into reusable products.

In the view of interviewee 1 - General Manager, moving from physical stores to *e-commerce*, the company's objective was to occupy new spaces through partnerships with relevant brands and the search for new technologies to make life easier for customers.

Before the pandemic, the Oscar Group partnered with a business school focusing on executives and management. During the pandemic, it was suggested that the OKR (Objectives and Key Results) methodology be adopted and squads - small groups from different departments - be created to address strategic objectives. Three squads were formed to focus on digital transformation, *online* sales, and people and organizational culture development, aligning with the company's macro-objectives.

Leaders were trained to integrate digital transformation, participating in monitoring, *workshops*, and OKRs training with the business school. Several leaders coordinated groups in internal innovation programs and evaluated startups in open innovation initiatives and strategic projects.

In addition to the company's strategic planning changes, other projects were implemented. One was "Seller 3.0," an interface tool with WhatsApp for online service. According to interviewee 3, this tool created an open communication channel, improved sales, delivery of goods, and even payment of invoices from the Group's credit system.

Interviewee 1 said another critical factor in dealing with the pandemic was the change in mentality and way of working that the company adopted, creating multidisciplinary teams of people from different areas or departments to work on a particular project and achieve defined goals. Within this change process, teleworking tools were widely adopted, along with virtual meetings, collaboration tools, and a customized platform for internal communication, enabling all employees to access and communicate. And all this change was reflected in the behavior of the company's leaders. As interviewee 2 - HR Director - said:

"An important change that has also occurred is in the leadership profile. Leaders are more open to change. We used to have more rigid, time-consuming processes, and now proposals are bought more easily, and leaders believe it will work."

It was possible to observe that after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, emerging strategies predominated to the detriment of deliberate strategies. It is also noticeable that the organization emphasized strategies aimed at making operations more agile and scalable and the development of the strategic layer of product excellence to develop and improve, for example, *online* sales, which grew from less than 1% of turnover before the pandemic to almost 10%, according to information obtained from the interviewees.

Interviewee 3 highlighted that the leadership had been trained to participate in the digital transformation through monitoring and various *workshops* on *design thinking* and *OKRs - Objectives and Key Results*. Interviewee 2 added that they recently carried out open innovation work, where 82 innovative ideas were captured, and three were selected to contribute to the company. Finally, interviewee 3 pointed out that one of the most significant impacts of the pandemic on the company has been mainly on people's behavior. This is not just the behavior of the salespeople but also the company, directors, and customers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the company to face the challenges of digital transformation, revealing barriers such as fragmented data infrastructure, competitive pressure on prices, and the need for technological investments and staff training, as evidenced in the interviews. Figure 4 below organizes these interviewees' perceptions and shows the evolution of the company's strategic responses before and after the crisis, marked by the adaptation to remote working and the intensification of digital channels to sustain sales and customer interaction.

The interviews revealed concerns about the existing data infrastructure and the need for better integration and analysis to support strategic decisions. The importance of a *data warehouse* and the creation of a *data lake* system were emphasized to overcome the limitations imposed by information silos. The initial hesitation in responding to the pandemic and the subsequent adaptation to remote working indicated organizational resilience.

From Interviewee 3's perspective, when he mentions the decisions taken in the face of COVID-19, he highlights an emerging strategy to intensify the use of digital technologies. With the pandemic, people began to work remotely, a practice that had hitherto been uncommon in the organization. This new need constituted a significant strategic perspective for the company. Interviewee 1 considered that the change in planning, previously based exclusively on deliberate strategies with little flexibility, was an important aspect. This planning evolved into a model more oriented towards adaptation and experimentation, bringing new opportunities and the development of new channels. For his part, Interviewee 2 highlighted this process of changing and combining strategies. In addition to working from the perspective of annual

strategic planning, a deliberate strategy practice, the organization implemented changes in response to the crisis, reinforcing practices that ensured that digital channels increased connectivity between people, customers, and stores.

Table 3 provides highlights from the interviews and highlights specific challenges in the sector, such as low margins in *online* commerce and intense price competition. There has been a change in the leadership's approach, which has come to value the acceleration of digital transformation to achieve previously established strategic objectives.

Table 3

Summary of interviews

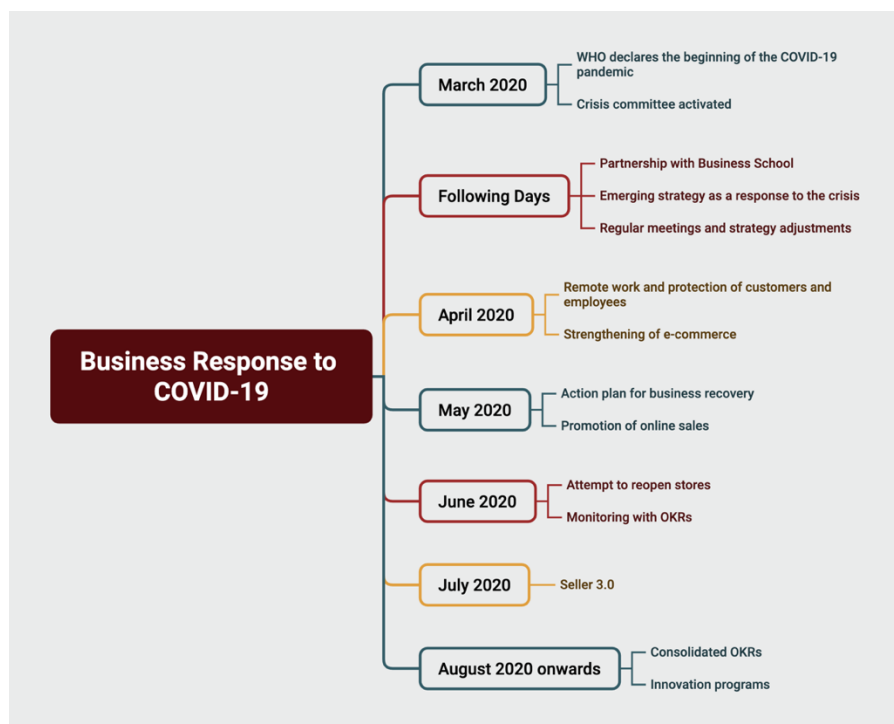
Interviewee	Barrier to digitization	Before COVID-19	After COVID-19
E 03	"There can be better interpretation and action on the current data we already have from customers. With the data we already have, there is a need for a <i>data warehouse</i> to create a system with a <i>data lake</i> that is fed by various data sources. For example, I have the Card database, the <i>e-commerce</i> area, the physical stores, which are other silos of information. There's no cross-referencing, which is a major flaw."	"Decision-making in the face of the uncertainty perceived by COVID was carried out late because we underestimated the pandemic; I believe that most companies did not expect the size of the impact."	"Another action was to adopt remote working for the administrative and support areas, which initially encountered difficulties because they were not technologically prepared with computers and infrastructure."
E 01	"Yes, there are also barriers to advancing digitalization in the company. The margins are low in the fashion footwear industry, specifically for the online channel. And there is still competition on price."	"Before, it was a huge crystal ball: a budget locked in for the year, with fragile bases for powerful comparisons."	"It was also an important point of the leadership's decisions to resolve to accelerate and to take advantage of this moment of transformation to achieve some objectives that we had already decided on in the past, but which are

Interviewee	Barrier to digitization	Before COVID-19	After COVID-19
			difficult to put into practice."
E 02	"To advance in the organization's digitalization, we see some existing barriers. One of them is financial because the cost of these new technologies is high, and we need to invest in adapting to them. Another barrier is skilled labor, as I pointed out earlier. So those would be our two big barriers."	"Our company has been working on annual strategic planning for some years. So we've developed four fronts: financial, customers and markets, learning and growth, and processes."	"During the pandemic, we reinforced the digital channels a lot, putting more people in place and increasing the digital channels so that customers could get in touch and the company could receive them since the stores were practically closed for sales."

When the pandemic was declared in March 2020, and all its stores were closed, the company began setting up a crisis committee. Advised by a business school that helped develop the organization's deliberate strategy, this committee took the first steps, focusing mainly on preserving the company's cash flow. In the first two months of the *lockdown*, the actions were aimed at "putting out fires" and containing the most critical situations, according to the interviewees. Figure 2 illustrates the timeline of the corporate response developed by the organization in the first moments after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared.

Figure 2

Timeline of business response to COVID-19



In April 2020, the first actions were implemented to protect customers and employees, enable remote work, and explore strategic alternatives to mitigate the loss of store revenue and strengthen sales channels such as e-commerce. During this period, the company carried out analyses to predict the impact of the crisis in the short and medium term.

In May, a detailed action plan was drawn up for the gradual recovery of activities, and the company began to promote its online sales. In June, the Seller 2.0 perspective began taking shape and was officially launched in July 2020 to engage sellers in online sales campaigns. Also, there was an attempt to reopen the stores in June, but as the crisis worsened, the focus turned to implementing the OKRs (Objectives and Key Results).

Since June 2020, digital strategies have begun to take shape, starting with a specific project focused on digital transformation. At this point, squads were formed, and ideas and strategies began to take shape. In July, the Seller 3.0 strategy and efforts to strengthen e-commerce emerged. Meetings began to be held weekly, monitoring each proposal and experiment using indicators based on the Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) defined by the Group.

From August onwards, the OKRs were consolidated, and innovation programs began to emerge, consolidating the company's adaptive response to the crisis and highlighting digital transformation as a central element in the recovery strategy.

In September 2020, the first ideas program was launched, calling on employees to suggest initiatives to contribute to the company's development. The program generated many responses and possibilities, but the company found it difficult to continue due to the high volume of work required.

In 2021, strategies were intensified, focusing on strengthening digital channels proving satisfactory for meeting needs due to the continued closure of physical stores, and the first startup evaluation program took place. These strategies and new channels were improved throughout the year by incorporating new tools. This development culminated in 2022, when, approximately two years after the start of the project, there was significant growth in revenue from digital channels.

In summary, deliberate strategies predominated before the pandemic, following an annual planning cycle with yearly reviews. The organization held monthly meetings to monitor strategy execution. With the advent of the pandemic, the company had to shorten this planning cycle, adopting four-monthly reviews for deliberate strategies. In addition, a weekly monitoring frequency was introduced, allowing for constant experimentation and adjustment of targets as necessary, enabling emerging strategies.

Monthly meetings focused on adjusting targets, while project fronts were established to increase effectiveness and facilitate communication between different departments. This new format no longer relied exclusively on a top-down model, allowing for a collaborative organization between departments. These emerging strategies provided the organization with greater adaptive capacity during the pandemic.

In the interviewees' view, financial and skills barriers were identified during the DT process, pointing to the high cost of new technologies and the need for skilled labor to develop DT strategies. Emerging strategies included developing digital channels and adjusting operations to maintain customer contact and sales continuity during store closures.

Still, from the perspective of barriers, other important factors could be seen from an internal survey by the company in 2020, in which 129 employees answered the following question: "In your opinion, what are the barriers preventing digital transformation in the organization?". Based on the answers to this question, the following word cloud was drawn up, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Word cloud - Barriers to digital transformation



The words "data" and "people" stand out in the word cloud, thus highlighting one of the main barriers to the company's digital transformation, which is the difficulty in recruiting and training qualified people with technological knowledge to develop the use of data to create value. The most prominent words, such as "data," "technology," and "digital," suggest the Group's focus on issues related to digital transformation. Terms such as "customers" and "access" indicate a possible emphasis on the interaction between companies and consumers and their ease of access to information or services.

Other words such as "security" and "people" refer to the importance of protecting personal data and the centrality of the human factor in technological environments. "Processes" and "information" can point to data management and manipulation. Terms such as "tools," "team," and "investment" highlight the need for resources, both human and material, to execute and improve technological processes.

The perspective exposed by the word cloud reveals the company's need to develop a new digital capacity oriented towards data and data analytics. This development can be understood as creating a new dynamic capability, which emerges as a strategic response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The Group perceives this process as a differentiator in developing new digital strategies and could become a competitive advantage factor for the organization.

In addition to the barriers, the *survey* highlighted the questions "Is the development of digital business a priority?" and "How important is connectivity between people, new technologies, and your business solutions?". Both used a scale of 1 to 5. In the first question, the answers could vary from "not a priority" to "a priority." In the second question, answers could range from "not important" to "important." Both questions received the highest average among the interviewees - 4.42 and 4.60 respectively - and the lowest standard deviation, 0.70

in both cases. The data reveals a high degree of convergence among respondents regarding the priority of developing digital business at that time and the importance of connectivity for business continuity.

This analysis complements the perspective proposed by the interpretive scheme (Figure 1) of this study, showing that developing new digital businesses or revising existing ones is a crucial strategy in the organization's digital transformation process. In this context, as mentioned earlier, the Group's openness to developing new businesses through open innovation processes is a significant driver. Interaction with the innovation ecosystem allows the Group to hold events that enhance the development of new businesses, promoting an environment conducive to innovation and strategic growth.

During the data analysis process, a matrix of codes per interviewee was drawn up (Table 2) based on the data collected and coded from the interviews, thus totaling the codes identified by category and by the interviewee. Table 2 shows the predominance of the themes of emerging and digital strategies for agile and scalable operations in the view of the interviewees. The dimensions that are still less developed are digital strategies - for using data to generate value- and the strategic layers - value chain and digital platforms.

Table 2

Matrix of codes per interviewee

Categories and Subcategories	Interviewee 03	Interviewee 01	Interviewee 02	Total
Barriers to Digitalization	2	7	10	19
Before COVID-19	0	0	0	0
Emerging Strategies Before COVID-19	2	1	2	5
Environmental Monitoring Before COVID-19	5	7	1	13
Deliberate Strategies Before COVID-19	8	7	2	17
After COVID-19	0	0	0	0
Emerging Strategies After COVID-19	30	16	8	54
Deliberate Strategies After COVID-19	9	13	4	26
Environmental Monitoring After COVID-19	8	8	4	20
Digital Strategies	0	0	0	0
Digital Strategy - Strong and Prepared Leadership	4	8	4	16
Digital Strategy - Agile and Scalable Operations	20	15	10	45
Digital Strategy - Use of Data to Generate Value	1	2	0	3
Digital Strategy - Continuous Exploration	7	2	5	14
Strategic Layers	0	0	0	0
Strategic Layers - Operational Efficiency	7	5	7	19
Strategic Layers - Product Excellence	15	7	5	27
Strategic Layers - Value Chain	3	1	0	4
Strategic Layers - Digital Platforms	2	1	0	3
Digital Maturity	0	0	0	0
Digital Maturity - Strategy	5	7	3	15
Digital Maturity - Market	15	3	3	21
Digital Maturity - Operations	2	5	3	10
Digital Maturity - Technology	7	5	3	15
SUM	152	120	74	346
N = Documents/Speaker	1	1	1	3

Initially, the organization incorporated emergency strategies to react to the environmental change caused by the crisis. The company began to develop its planning, not only with deliberate strategies but also with emergent strategies. These strategies initially focused on ensuring the organization could effectively carry out its operations. In addition, they paved the way for other possibilities, such as developing an enhanced focus on the customer experience. This included exploring new channels that would optimize products and facilitate more effective contact with customers, bringing new perspectives and opportunities for interaction.

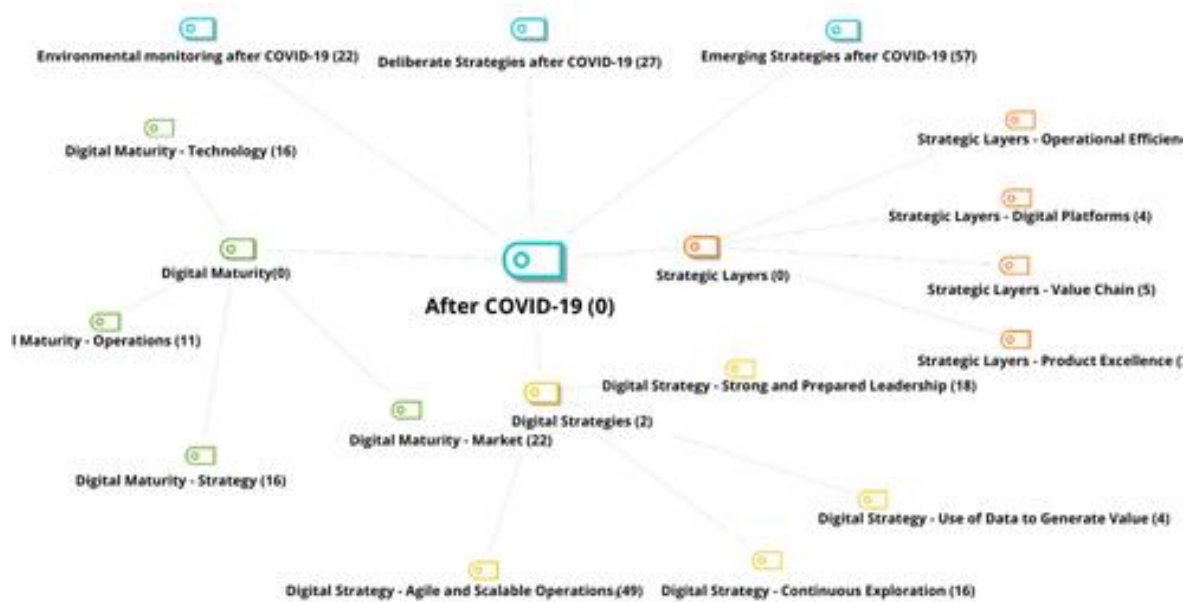
The data also shows the development of new digital capabilities, mainly aimed at continuously exploiting new opportunities. There is a weakness in the Group's ability to use data to generate value, along with an awareness of this weakness and the need to develop it to guarantee a competitive advantage. This finding ties in with the perspective of developing digital capabilities, a type of dynamic capability contained in the theory proposed for analyzing the case.

Interviewee 3 is the key informant who brought the most information to the research. He highlights the evolution of digital maturity concerning the use of technology from a market perspective, in which organizations, to remain competitive, seek new alternatives for creating value for customers through digital technologies (Salume et al., 2021). However, the study does not provide enough information to conclude whether the company's digital maturity has evolved concerning this topic, which was not the focus of the research.

Another analysis carried out with the data obtained was the code-theory model map applied to the strategies adopted after the COVID-19 pandemic, shown in Figure 4. The number after each code shows the frequency of theme occurrence after the content analysis of the interviews.

Figure 4

Relationships between "After COVID-19" codes and frequency



When analyzing the co-occurrence and overlapping of codes, emerging strategies are predominant, to the detriment of those deliberated after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on digital strategies that sought to ensure agile and scalable operations. The findings suggest the development of new capabilities focusing on process automation and a predominance of strategies aimed at operational efficiency and improving the customer experience based on the interpretive framework.

In the view of the interviewees, strengthening digital competencies presented a significant challenge during and after the pandemic. It became necessary to establish a technical team tasked with identifying the company's primary concerns in collaboration with the leaders of each department to understand their needs. In addition, a team dedicated to data architecture was essential for designing the process and subsequent actions to increase sales volume and improve the customer experience. The company needed to learn about various market tools and promote continuous improvements.

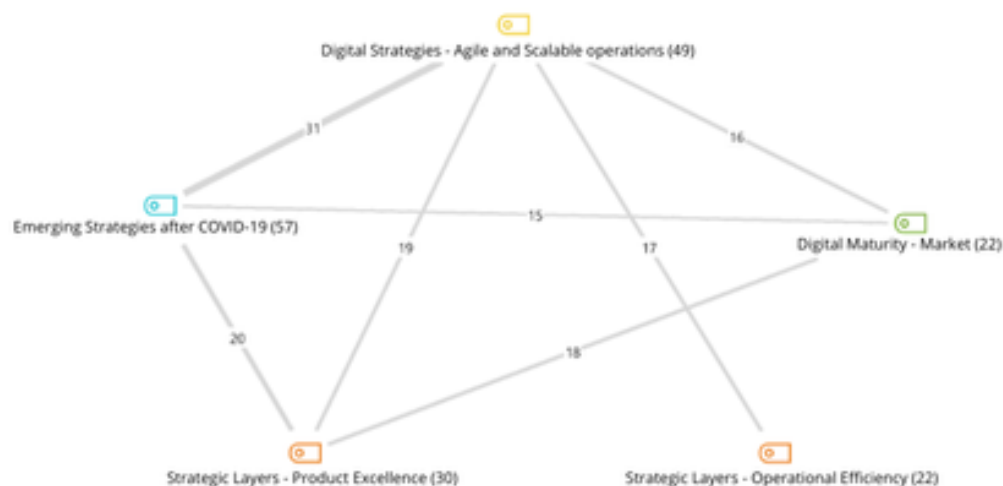
The predominance of emerging strategies suggested that the company tended to adopt more flexible and reactive approaches in response to the rapid changes imposed by the pandemic. These emerging strategies are aligned with the need for more agile and scalable operations, thus contributing to operational efficiency and product excellence. This strategic adaptation may also have accelerated the organization's digital maturity, especially regarding

market positioning and customer relations. However, no diagnosis has been carried out in this regard.

Figure 5 complements this analysis by showing the codes' overlapping and interconnections. It indicates a relationship between adopting emerging strategies and developing a digital approach prioritizing operational agility and scalability. The interconnection of the codes reveals a chain of influence: adopting emerging strategies has led to improved operational efficiency and product excellence, which can contribute to digital maturity in the market and customers.

Figure 5

Code overlap map



Discussion of results

Data analysis has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed the company's digital transformation, reassessed previous strategies, and encouraged a shift towards more agile and adaptable practices. This shows a transition by the company under study towards a more digitalized, agile, and customer-focused operation, which could be a competitive differentiator in the post-pandemic environment. The strategy formulation process has undergone major changes, with emerging strategies predominant. New methodologies have been incorporated, such as the use of OKRs. New capabilities have been developed to improve the efficiency of operations.

Considering the interpretative scheme proposed for the case analysis, identifying technological and environmental changes through competitive intelligence could be a function

of the organization to act preventively in the face of threats and opportunities. However, a specific function for this within the organization was not identified. The organizational process was reactive to the crisis caused by an environmental change, serving as a trigger for digital transformation. This process triggered the emergence of emerging strategies, which became predominant.

The company has sought to develop new strategies, mainly focused on operational efficiency, improving the customer experience, and developing new capabilities, especially those related to process automation and the continuous exploration of new technologies. The company has promoted a search for knowledge through an open innovation process, which is not yet fully structured, informally starting an innovation ecosystem to identify opportunities and acquire new capabilities. Among these is the use of data for decision-making, or *data analytics*, albeit still in its infancy. In the context of the Structural Contingency Theory, emergent and deliberate strategies, and the development of capabilities, the interpretive framework made it possible to understand how this dynamic occurred within the organization under study.

Table 3 summarizes the main results in line with the categories and subcategories of analysis defined and the principal authors used in the theoretical framework, linking the case study results with the previous literature.

Table 3

Matrix of codes per interviewee

Categories	Analysis subcategories	Results found	Main Authors
Barrier to digitization	Before COVID-19	The company had structural and cultural barriers to adopting digital technologies, which hindered the development of digital transformation.	Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021)
Barrier to digitization	After COVID-19	The pandemic has catalyzed digital transformation, forcing a reassessment of strategies using emerging strategies and adopting new technologies.	Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021)
Before COVID-19	Emerging strategies before COVID-19	Strategies were predominantly deliberate, focused on formal planning and rigid control, with long cycles for review and execution.	Mintzberg & Waters (1985)

Categories	Analysis subcategories	Results found	Main Authors
Before COVID-19	Monitoring the environment before COVID-19	The organization's environment was monitored through periodic (annual) strategic planning meetings but was not continuous.	Fuld, L. (2003)
Before COVID-19	Deliberate strategies before COVID-19	Predominance of deliberate strategies in the company, with little flexibility for changes during the execution period.	Ansoff (1965); Prado Júnior (2003)
After COVID-19	Emerging strategies after COVID-19	After the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation was reversed in the company, with the predominance of emerging strategies, with a focus on adaptation and flexibility and short cycles, and with the use of OKRs to monitor and follow up on strategies.	Mintzberg (1978); Mintzberg & Waters (1985); Rosa et al. (2023)
After COVID-19	Deliberate strategies after COVID-19	Deliberate strategies have reduced their prominence, initially with the predominance of emerging strategies to deal with uncertainty.	Mintzberg & Waters (1985)
After COVID-19	Monitoring the environment after COVID-19	The company began to develop a more structured process for monitoring the environment through frequent meetings of the crisis committee.	Fuld, L. (2003)
Digital Strategies	Strong and prepared leadership	Innovation programs began to emerge in the company, developed by the leadership to develop digital strategies and new digital capabilities.	Sia et al. (2016); Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021)
Digital Strategies	Agile and scalable operations	The main focus of the changes and technologies adopted in the organization was in search of agile and scalable operations to respond quickly to market changes. New digital capabilities were developed in the organization.	Sia et al. (2016)
Digital Strategies	Using data to generate value	The initial implementation of <i>data analytics</i> to support decision-making is still in its infancy within the company.	Sia et al. (2016)
Digital Strategies	Continuous exploration	For this purpose, the focus is on continuously exploring new technologies and opportunities through the <i>squads</i> created within the organization.	Sia et al. (2016); Gassmann & Enkel (2004)

Categories	Analysis subcategories	Results found	Main Authors
Strategy layers	Operational efficiency	Focus on operational efficiency as the basis for digital transformation, seeking to enable operations to occur securely and remotely.	Subramaniam (2021)
Strategy layers	Product excellence	Improved product development and sales channels as part of the digital strategy through <i>online</i> sales and integration with current sales channels.	Subramaniam (2021)
Strategy layers	Value chain	The exploration of the Value Chain is still at an early stage of development within the organization, with no relevant initiatives identified.	Subramaniam (2021)
Strategy layers	Digital platforms	Development of digital platforms to improve interaction with customers and partners, mainly through our own and third-party <i>marketplace</i> solutions.	Subramaniam (2021); Brynjolfsson & Hitt (2000)

Considering the theory proposed for interpreting the case, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the company's digital transformation process, in line with the observations of Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021). This pandemic has forced the company to re-evaluate its previous strategies, promoting the adoption of more agile and adaptable practices. This strategic reassessment is consistent with the principles advocated by Mintzberg et al. (2010), who emphasize the importance of adaptation in dynamic and uncertain environments.

As Mintzberg (1978) described, emerging strategies were predominant with the advent of the pandemic. The company incorporated methodologies such as *OKRs (Objectives and Key Results)* to promote greater agility and flexibility in operations, as evidenced by Rosa et al. (2023). Adopting these emerging strategies highlights the organization's ability to adapt quickly to change, which aligns with Mintzberg and Waters' (1985) recommendations on the importance of emerging strategies in contexts of high uncertainty.

In addition, the company has directed significant efforts toward developing new capabilities, especially related to process automation and the continuous exploitation of new technologies. This emphasis on dynamic capabilities is crucial for improving operational efficiency, as Sia et al. (2016) discussed. Although still at an early stage, the quest for automation and *data analytics* indicates a strategic move to increase operational effectiveness and responsiveness to market demands, a point also made by Gassmann and Enkel (2004).

The digital transformation process observed was aligned with the Structural Contingency Theory principles, as Donaldson argued (2007). The theory highlights the need for organizations to adjust their structures according to environmental and technological contingencies. In the case analyzed, adapting to the changes imposed by the pandemic reflects the applicability of the principles of Contingency Theory, demonstrating the importance of a flexible and adaptable organizational structure.

However, although the company had started monitoring the environment, it was identified that there was no specific formalized function for competitive intelligence, according to Fuld (2003). This gap suggests that the organizational process was reactive to the crisis caused by the pandemic rather than proactive. Creating a specific competitive intelligence function could have facilitated a more structured and less reactive adaptation to environmental changes, as suggested by the literature on competitive intelligence and digital transformation (Fuld, 2003).

The results show that the pandemic has profoundly changed the company and promoted its digital transformation, driving the adoption of emerging strategies and the development of new capabilities. The integration of the Structural Contingency Theory made it possible to understand the dynamics of the company's adaptation to environmental and technological changes. At the same time, the lack of a formal competitive intelligence function highlighted a reactive approach to the crisis. These findings highlight the importance of strategic adaptability and the continuous development of capabilities to face emerging challenges and guarantee organizational effectiveness in times of crisis.

In 2022, the company earned around 11% of its revenue through digital channels, compared to less than 1% before the pandemic. As a traditional retail company with 115 stores, its base is still physical stores. Interviewee 1 considered that the crucial point in achieving these results was the organization's ability to understand the consumer and their behavior, allowing the company to adapt accordingly.

With the end of the pandemic, the company, which serves around 4 million customers a year in more than 115 stores and around 300,000 customers via the *online* platform, now has managers who consider it necessary to modernize their stores and intensify the TD process, according to the interviewees.

As the company deals with a transforming post-pandemic scenario, new critical challenges require deep and strategic reflection. These dilemmas center around the effective integration of *online* and *offline* operations, an essential issue for the future.

Final considerations

The company studied has developed new strategies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging strategies have changed the organization's positioning and adopted digital transformation to seek more agile and scalable operations (Sia et al., 2016).

Many digital transformation initiatives took place in the operational efficiency layer and were essential for intensifying the company's digital strategy (Subramanian, 2021). In addition to gains in operational efficiency, the company has benefited significantly from improved productivity in developing its products and services.

According to Salume et al. (2021), many organizations seek alternatives to create value to increase competitiveness and bring positive results for themselves and other stakeholders. Through digital technologies, they are expanding their value proposition, value networks, digital channels, more agile operations, and ambidexterity. Interviewee 1 uses the term ambidexterity to describe the development of his strategy.

Based on the assumptions of Mintzberg and Waters (1985), it was identified that the emerging strategies imposed by the external environment caused by the hostility of COVID-19 prevailed in the organization's adoption and formulation, including the change of methodology, adding the use of OKRs to its existing strategic process.

On the other hand, strategies such as using data to generate value, exploring the layers of the value chain strategy, and using digital platforms are still in their infancy in the organization in question. Perhaps intensifying the maturity of operations through open innovation models could help the company meet this challenge.

Pursuing a digital business strategy requires organizations to strategically identify their digital information resources, actively targeting the exploitation of data from their digital platforms to create customer experiences (Sia et al., 2016).

The analysis of the results revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant catalyst for the company's digital transformation, as Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) observed, forcing the reassessment of previous strategies and promoting more agile and adaptable practices. As Mintzberg (1978) described, emerging strategies were predominant, and methodologies such as OKRs were adopted to increase operational flexibility, as Rosa et al. (2023) pointed out. The company focused on developing new capabilities, especially process automation and continuous exploration of new technologies, which are essential for operational efficiency, as Sia et al. (2016) discussed. This process, aligned with Donaldson's Structural Contingency Theory (2007) principles, highlights the need to adapt to environmental and

technological changes. However, lacking a formal competitive intelligence function (Fuld, 2003) indicated a reactive approach to the crisis, suggesting that formalized competitive intelligence could have facilitated a more structured adaptation. These findings highlight the importance of strategic adaptability and the continuous development of capabilities to face challenges and ensure organizational effectiveness in times of crisis.

The interpretative framework proposed contributed significantly to the development of the research by providing a coherent structure that made it possible to interpret environmental changes and adaptive strategies and understand how the development of capabilities occurs in a continuous process of digital transformation. It allowed for a deeper understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed digital transformation, forcing companies to re-evaluate their strategies and adopt more agile and adaptive practices. By explicitly linking the empirical results to Mintzberg's (1978) emerging strategy theories and Donaldson's (2007) Structural Contingency Theory, the interpretive framework demonstrates how adapting to technological and environmental changes is crucial for organizational effectiveness. In addition, by highlighting the importance of developing capabilities, such as process automation and continuous exploration of technologies, the interpretive framework underscores the need for a proactive and structured approach, as Sia et al. (2016) suggested. Thus, the *framework* facilitated the integration of the empirical results with the theoretical perspectives and provided valuable *insights into the* importance of competitive intelligence and strategic adaptability, strengthening the argument and making a clear contribution to the literature on digital transformation and strategic management.

To contribute to future studies, we can consider delving deeper into strategy as practice, which was not discussed in the theoretical framework. From the perspective of strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 2006), new research may make it possible to understand how an organization reshapes its internal structures and processes to remain resilient in the face of severe environmental shocks. Many changes in practices were stimulated by the external partnerships established, such as with the business school mentioned by the interviewees, which enabled new knowledge to be acquired. This scenario brings up the prospect of open innovation as a potential facilitator for TD. In this sense, studies on open innovation, as proposed by Chesbrough (2003), can contribute to future research and a better understanding of the phenomena under analysis.

Although it offers valuable *insights* into digital transformation in a specific organization during the COVID-19 pandemic, this single case study has characteristics inherent to its methodology and scope. Firstly, the generalizability of the results is limited due to the singular



nature of the case studied. While rich in contextual detail, single case studies may not reflect the diversity of experiences and strategies of other organizations in different sectors or geographical contexts (Yin, 2018).

As a limitation, the research did not delve into detecting threats through competitive intelligence, which could be considered the trigger for the episodes. The study did not examine the effects of adopting digital strategies and developing digital capabilities through digital maturity (Salume et al., 2021). These topics could be explored in future studies. The study focused on understanding the process and practices of formulating and adopting strategies and developing digital capabilities.

Another limitation was that the data collected was mainly the result of interviews with the prominent directors of the organization and reflected their respective points of view. Interviews with employees at other levels could provide new perspectives. However, the article's primary author acted as the company's advisor during the analysis period, which allowed him to discern and weigh up the statements of each interviewee, minimizing possible biases.

However, reliance on specific data sources, such as interviews and company documents, can introduce bias in interpreting the results. The interviewees' perspective may not wholly represent the entire organization, and internal documents may reflect aspirations more than operational reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Another relevant limitation is the difficulty in isolating the impact of the pandemic from other variables that may have influenced the adoption of digital technologies and strategic change. Although research identifies COVID-19 as a catalyst for digital transformation, other factors, such as market changes, technological innovations, and competitive pressures, may also have played a significant role (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014).

On the other hand, the findings of this study could contribute to the academic debate and organizational practice in different cultural and economic contexts. The practices and processes for developing the strategies identified could serve as a model for companies in various sectors that face or will face similar challenges. Finally, the research focuses predominantly on the operational efficiency layer of digital transformation, possibly neglecting other critical dimensions, such as organizational culture, leadership, and innovation capabilities, which are fundamental to a comprehensive digital transformation (Bharadwaj et al., 2013). This limited emphasis can restrict understanding of the complexity, and multifaceted challenges associated with digital transformation in organizations.

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