

# Agile Marketing Capability: A New Type of Dynamic Meta-Capability to Lead Digital Transformation

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## Abstract

Digital transformation heavily relies on the adoption of agile practices. However, there is limited research available regarding the importance of agility in digital transformation. Thus, this chapter introduces agile marketing capability as a new type of dynamic meta-capability leading digital transformation. So then, marketing capabilities, agility, agility and flexibility, marketing agility capabilities and digital transformation were discussed based on the existing literature. Thereafter, the role of agile MCs in digital transformation was discussed. Recommendations are also provided to enhance the quality of the discussion regarding this newly explored field of study. For managers, this study holds significant importance as it equips them with a means to assess and enhance their marketing strategies, fostering business growth and adaptability in ever-changing environments.

## 1. Introduction

The current recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for brands to speed up their flexible and quick marketing strategies online. Leaders should take into account the dynamic landscape and digital preferences of the market alongside technology-based strategies as they design agile marketing plans. With the cessation of large gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people turned to digital interactions as their primary means of communication. In order to remain relevant, businesses had to choose between engaging with customers digitally or facing insignificance (Sedivy & Barrett, 2021). There has been a considerable shift in the way customers approach shopping. The interaction between companies and

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customers has diversified significantly, offering a plethora of options for customers to connect, while competition and technology remain in a state of constant flux. As a result of this, companies are placing more emphasis on the speed and flexibility of their marketing tactics. Consequently, businesses are prioritizing agility and promptness in their marketing approaches. This has led companies to concentrate on being swift and adaptable in their marketing strategies (Kalaigyanam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee, & Gal, 2020).

Studies indicated that the need for modern and flexible organizational models and recognised that marketing should be “agile” (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Moorman, 2020). In marketing, being agile means using data and analytics to constantly find good opportunities or solutions to problems right away. The process entails conducting tests promptly, examining the outcomes, and implementing changes swiftly (Edelman, Heller, & Spittaels, 2016). Given the variety of devices, platforms, and resources people use to access content, a multi-channel, hyper-agile marketing strategy remains key (Mandich, 2021). Additionally, the significance of agile marketing is expected to rise as the digital landscape expands. In the present context, marketing agility is a new type of dynamic meta-capability. Nevertheless, there is still a paucity of studies on how to accurately assess its efficacy (Khan, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to present novel information that is currently absent in literature, and second, to underscore the significance of agile marketing capability in an era characterized by growing digitalization.

## **2. Marketing Capabilities**

In order to cope with fierce competition, businesses are constantly searching for innovative methods to enhance their capacity in foreseeing, responding to, and adapting to market changes (Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele, & Lye, 2011). Existing literature identified three different types of marketing capabilities: (1) static marketing capabilities (Static MCs), which means using resources within a company to meet customer needs; (2) dynamic marketing capabilities (Dynamic MCs), which means being able to change and adapt marketing strategies based on the market; and (3) adaptive marketing capabilities (Adaptive MCs), which means actively learning about the market, trying new things, and forming relationships with partners (Day, 2011).

### **2.1. Static MCs**

Basic marketing-mix elements are known as static MCs (Guo et al., 2018). It is because they either “[offer] an implicitly static portrayal of

organizational capabilities as well-honed and difficult-to-copy routines for carrying out established processes” (Day, 2011, p.185). While this perspective acknowledges the valuable assets possessed by companies, it fails to address the methods employed to acquire or enhance these assets and maintain a competitive edge (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). There was no possible explanation for how skills and abilities came into being or adjusted to accommodate changes in the market or unexpected occurrences like the Internet (Day, 2011; Schreyögg & Kliesch-Eberl, 2007; Makadok, 2001; Teece et al., 1997). It is therefore the dynamic capabilities theory was created to solve this problem (Day, 2011).

## 2.2. Dynamic MCs

The companies that have been successful in the worldwide marketplace are the ones that can quickly respond to changes and come up with new and flexible products. They are also able to effectively manage and use their resources both within the company and from outside sources (Teece et al., 1997). This ability means being able to gain an advantage over competitors by adapting and developing new skills. These skills are referred to as “*dynamic capabilities.*” (Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic MCs refer to how quickly and effectively a company can adapt its different business processes to meet the needs of customers and keep up with changes in the market. Dynamic MCs has been described as “the responsiveness and efficiency of cross functional business processes for creating and delivering customer value in response to market changes” (Fang & Zou, 2009, p. 744). The main idea of dynamic MCs is that a business can easily change its internal resources to match customer demand after getting signals about changes in the market (Morgan, Katsikeas, & Vorhies, 2012).

The advancement of technology, the increase in ways for customers to interact with businesses, and the availability of lots of information have made markets more complicated and fast-paced. These big changes made companies work even harder to improve and acquire new marketing skills (Cerit & Karaosmanoğlu, 2021). Therefore, Day (2011) argues for an alternative perspective on marketing skills. The primary emphasis of this novel approach should be to initially analyse things from an external standpoint, and afterwards explore potential internal opportunities.

## 2.3. Adaptive MCs

Due to the increasing complexity of market demands and rapid technological advancements, recent studies have emphasized the importance of adaptive marketing capabilities (Moorman & Day, 2016). As mention

that the dynamic MCs means a company's ability to adapt to changes in the environment. However, companies still depend on their own cross-functional resources from to deal with changes in the market. Adaptive MCs is a proactive strategy that begins with learning about the market and understanding the specific issues and concerns customers are facing (Guo et al., 2018). Day (2011) suggested that adaptive MCs of three main parts: (1) vigilant market capability, being able to understand the market well and recognize changing trends and needs early through the use of technology, (2) adaptive market experimentation capability, continuously learning from testing different strategies in the market, and (3) open marketing capability, using new media and social networking technology to build and maintain relationships with partners.

In simple terms, the adaptive marketing approach is notable for its distinct attributes compared to other marketing approaches. The main focus of the approach, as mentioned in the text, lies in investigating and seeking information beyond the boundaries of the organization. Additionally, it indicates that marketing capabilities must possess the ability to adapt rather than remaining static or undergoing constant changes. Pointing out the significance of exploring different possibilities, even at the cost of financial setbacks. The statement implies that organizations should move away from merely reacting to circumstances and instead focus on actively learning and responding. In the end, it is executed within a network that is not restricted or closed off (Cerit & Karaosmanoğlu, 2021).

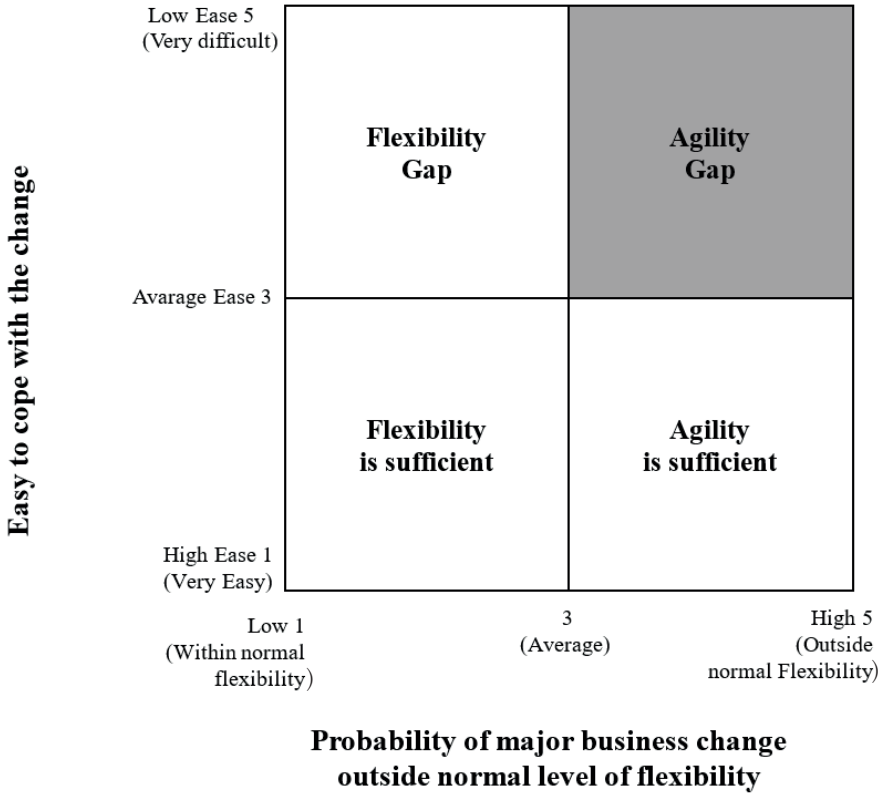
### **3. Agility**

The integration of agile methods into software development occurred in the year 2000. These approaches are being utilized by businesses to enhance their flexibility and prosper in an ever-changing world (Beretta & Smith, 2023). Within this context, the agility forum highlights four crucial elements in determining business agility: ensuring customer satisfaction, collaborating for competitiveness, optimizing resource utilization, and ability to adjust to change (Van Oosterhout, Waarts, & Van Hillegersberg, 2005). Researchers emphasize that "agility encompasses the exploration and exploitation of opportunities for market arbitrage" (Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj, & Grover, 2003). While exploration means trying out new things and learning about unknown ways to be competitive, exploitation means using and improving things that are already known by refining and expanding existing skills, technologies, and knowledge (March, 1991). In simple terms, agility is the ability to discover and learn new things, as well as to develop and use what is already known and implemented in order to be competitive.

Moreover, agility means being able to quickly and effectively compete with others. Simplifying this text; being flexible, innovative, proactive, and providing good quality and profitability are important in a fast-changing market. This can be achieved by combining adaptable resources and using the best methods in a knowledgeable environment to create products and services that meet customer needs (Ramasesh, Kulkarni, & Jayakumar, 2001). The success of a company relies heavily on customer satisfaction. The importance of the speed at which products or services are delivered has risen to the same level as their price and quality. As the became more complicated, customization appeared. Companies from this time were encouraged to adjust to the changing situation and become flexible and agile in order to satisfy market demand (Abdelilah, Korchi, & Balambo, 2018).

### **3.1. Flexibility Versus Agility**

Wadhwa and Rao (2003) explore the shared and unique characteristics of flexibility and agility. Flexibility refers to effectively managing anticipated changes, whereas agility pertains to effectively managing unexpected changes. Flexibility refers to modifying and accommodating a singular system in situations where changes occur at a moderate pace. Agility refers to the skill of handling quick alterations by effectively collaborating and synchronizing multiple systems (Van Oosterhout, Waarts, & Van Hillegersberg, 2005). In some cases, organizations must demonstrate adaptability in situations where change is expected and the necessary response can be largely predetermined. However, responding can be more difficult in certain situations when unexpected changes occur. It proves to be a formidable task to incorporate flexibility into organizational processes and systems in such scenarios. Being able to adapt quickly to these changes requires a higher level of flexibility, which is called “agility” (Van Oosterhout, Waarts, & Van Hillegersberg, 2005). The presence of an agility gap arises when businesses find it challenging to manage large-scale changes that surpass their usual capacity. A framework that analyses business agility in detail has been created (see Fig. 1).



*Fig. 1 Flexibility Versus Agility (Van Oosterhout, Waarts, & Van Hillegersberg, 2005, p. 279).*

#### 4. Marketing Agility

Markets are experiencing a significant surge in issues and difficulties. This development has sparked conversations about agile marketing, a novel method that can assist in fostering marketing capabilities (Cerit & Karaosmanoğlu, 2021). Because marketing capabilities are widely acknowledged by professionals and practitioners as crucial for gaining a competitive edge in business. Particularly valid in contemporary volatile markets and global business scenarios. The adoption of agile practices in software development for marketing has given rise to a novel approach known as “Agile Marketing” (Moi & Cabiddu, 2020). Marketing agility defined as “the extent to which an entity rapidly iterates between making sense of the market and executing marketing decisions to adapt to the market” (Kalaignaman et al., 2021, p. 36). Agile marketing is a set of practices that help companies change their marketing strategies quickly in response to customer needs. It focuses

on acting fast, working together, being transparent, and engaging with customers more (Ewel, 2013). The new definition of marketing agility adds more detail and focuses on how things work. The process starts off by examining market changes to establish the need for a marketing decision. After gathering feedback, we revise and adapt our marketing strategy before ultimately deciding on the final approach. It was suggested that marketing agility includes four key concepts: sensemaking, iteration, speed and marketing decision (Kalaigaman et al., 2021).

#### **4.1. Sub-Dimensions of Marketing Agility**

A review of the literature and interviews with experts produced various ideas about what marketing agility in business might mean to researchers as well as practitioners (Kalaigaman et al., 2021). The opinions of experts have been classified into various dimensions according to the substance they have offered. The dimensions of marketing agility that emerged through this process are as follows:

- \* Sensemaking
- \* Iteration
- \* Speed
- \* Marketing Decisions

##### **4.1.1. Sensemaking**

Sensemaking that is about contextual rationality refers to “built out of vague questions, muddy answers, and negotiated agreement that attempt to reduce confusion” (Weick, 1993, p. 636). Sensemaking, in the realm of business, entails comprehending and adjusting to shifts in markets, customer migration, and new technologies (Ancona, 2011). Sensemaking becomes a crucial endeavour when we face difficulty in comprehending or rationalizing the world around us. This phenomenon occurs when the surroundings undergo swift alterations, putting us in unexpected situations or presenting challenges that demand flexibility and problem-solving abilities instead of just technical know-how (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Sensemaking plays a vital role in maintaining agility within the marketing field, to put it more simply.

##### **4.1.2. Iteration**

Iteration means continuously improving marketing decisions before launching or expanding them. Iterations help marketing managers to better

understand and meet the changing needs of the market. Agile marketing groups can reduce initial risks and change their focus if feedback indicates they need to adapt further (Kalaigman et al., 2021). The main concept behind agile marketing is to embrace continuous experimentation and learning, rather than striving for perfection. Innovation involves the capability to generate a multitude of ideas, quickly put them into action, effectively track their progress, and make intelligent choices to pre-empt potential problems. Researcher claimed that “the future of marketing is iterative. The future of marketing is experiment-driven, agile, and cadence based” (Williams, 2023).

#### **4.1.3. Speed**

In regard to marketing agility, speed entails the capacity of companies to rapidly acknowledge and adapt to market fluctuations. This includes taking action, getting feedback, and making adjustments to their marketing strategies (Kalaigman et al., 2021). The speed at which an organization responds to customers, market fluctuations, and new technological options determines its level of quickness (Mathiassen & Pries-Heje, 2006). This means that the process includes the time to notice important events, understand what is happening and how it will affect the organization, think about different choices and decide on what actions to take, and then actually put those actions into practice (Haeckel, 1999).

#### **4.1.4. Marketing Decisions**

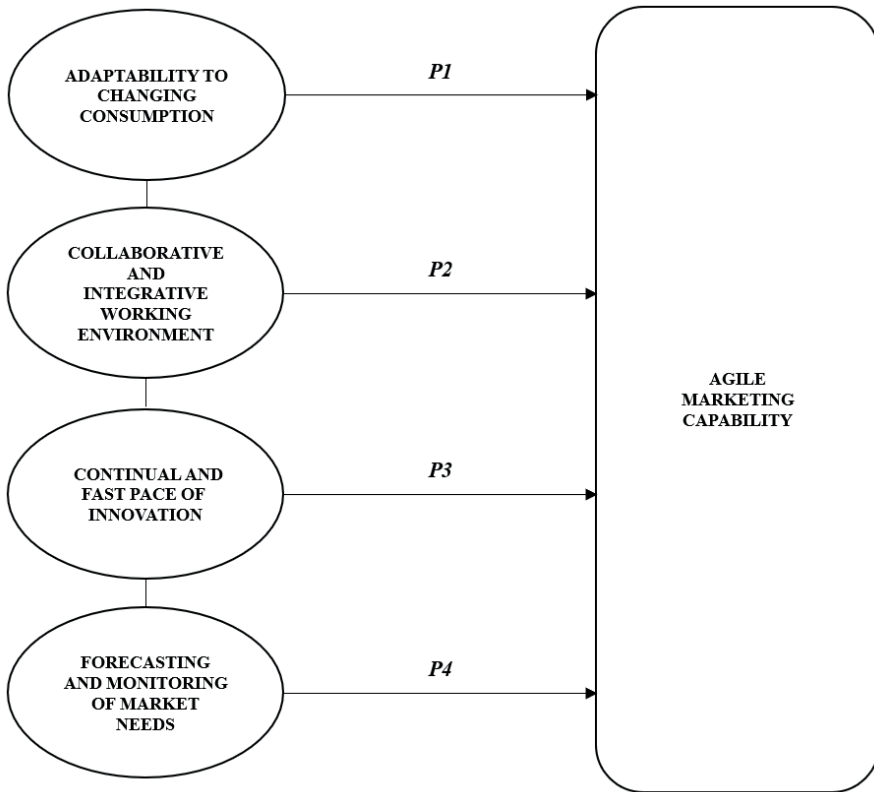
The research reveals that the people have a strong inclination to make decisions that help their organizations in advancing in the right manner and at the appropriate speed. They achieve this objective by closely observing events in a broader context and carefully analysing the effects of actions that are still in progress or have already been completed. They use this information to make their marketing better and also to make big changes in the organization. This is done to make sure it matches with the ongoing and sometimes fast changes to the marketing world. This type of decision-making behavior is called “agile”. It means that marketing managers carefully evaluate and respond to both internal and external signals in a proactive and experimental manner (Nordin & Ravald, 2023).

#### **4.2. Agile MCs**

Moi and Cabiddu (2020) defined agile MCs as being characterized by a cross functional collaboration of people, roles and departments that seeks to continuously renew, improve and innovate resources and capabilities to provide higher customer value by constantly sensing and responding to



market changes through a flexible and adaptive approach. In this sense, Moi and Cabiddu (2020) introduced four proposals for agile marketing capability (see Fig. 2).



*Fig. 2 The Agile Marketing Capability Framework  
(Moi & Cabiddu, 2020, p. 1162).*

## 5. Digital Transformation

Markets and society heavily rely on digital technologies, and digital transformation is becoming a crucial element of business innovation. Digital transformation is complex, and companies still do not have the skills to fully understand and take advantage of its benefits (Pascucci, Savelli, & Gistri, 2023). Understanding the complexities involved in obtaining or utilizing new software or computers, as well as the integration of digital services, is crucial (Ragazou, Passas, & Sklavos, 2022). Digital transformation is a broad concept that encompasses diverse definitions and implications (Bedell-Pearce, 2018). While the existing literature has

provided valuable insights into certain aspects of digital transformation, a comprehensive understanding of its entirety and significance is still lacking. Thus, a framework for digital transformation has been constructed by examining 282 distinct works, incorporating eight key components. Based on this study digital transformation was defined as “a process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies” (Vial, 2019, p. 121).

In order to achieve this, organizations must possess a firm commitment, a well-defined strategy, an effective organization of requirements and priorities, meticulous implementation, as well as sufficient resources and tools incorporated into their plans. Overall, it is important to have preparedness and assistance from other businesses (Khurana, Dutta, & Ghura, 2022; Yang, Chang, Huang, & Mardani, 2023). Embracing digital transformation requires company leaders to recognize the possibility of encountering unexpected threats down the line. The widespread and unexpected emergence of COVID-19 posed a significant threat, leading numerous businesses to suffer, despite their attempts to embrace digital technology (Bounfour, Housel, Silkey, & Nonnis, 2023). Digital transformation requires the creative capacity to develop a conveyance system characterized by flexibility and speed instead of essentially reorganizing old value packages (Ali & Jali, 2018).

## **6. The Role of Agile MCs in Digital Transformation**

Marketing is witnessing notable shifts and experimenting with novel technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (Kumar, Ramachandran, & Kumar, 2021). It is therefore various aspects of the market can be significantly impacted and transformed by digital technologies. Changes or complete replacements can occur not just in products, business processes, sales channels, and supply chains, but also in entire business models (Downes & Nunes, 2014; Hess, Matt, Benlian, & Wiesböck, 2020). It means that the rise of technology has subsequently led to a transition from the old mechanistic model to the new more flexible and digitally-driven model. To gain an advantage over rivals, companies need to keep up with this transformation. The primary pillars of marketing agility involve the capability to swiftly adapt and move with speed, as previously mentioned. It is therefore having agile MCs are vital in the current circumstances to navigate through digital transformation.

The way customers journey has been significantly altered due to digitalization, as there is constant connectivity among people and the rise of digital technologies has led to a substantial growth in customer empowerment. This change means that companies need to think of new ways to communicate with customers and they must interact with each customer quickly, openly, and all the time (Pascucci, Savelli, & Gistri, 2023). With this situation, it becomes the significance of digital transformation intensifies. A key part for digital transformation required the implementation of agile methodologies (Beretta & Smith, 2023).

In the fast-paced digital world of today, businesses striving to stay ahead of their competitors and effectively target their desired audience recognize the paramount importance of digital marketing innovation (Kannan & Li, 2017). Marketing capabilities can be improved through digital marketing innovation. Because the introduction of digital marketing innovation enables organizations to enhance their ability to reach and connect with customers by utilizing novel and inventive channels (Jung & Shegai, 2023). Businesses can boost their marketing capabilities and gain a competitive edge through the adoption of innovative digital marketing strategies. Companies have the opportunity to upgrade their advertising abilities and establish meaningful connections with customers on various online platforms through the utilization of innovative techniques in digital marketing. The implementation of this strategy has the potential to enhance customer satisfaction, foster greater loyalty, and ultimately result in increased sales, which benefits the company (Jung & Shegai, 2023). It is thus for companies having the agile MCs is crucial throughout the digital transformation process. Because agile digital transformation entails constantly innovating and uncovering improved digital methods. Through incremental adjustments and utilizing the available resources, a business can bring about significant transformations in how it operates and the tasks it can accomplish. By enabling organizations to swiftly begin, acquire knowledge, and recommence digital initiatives, they can effectively address evolving market trends and customer requirements (Ricci, 2023).

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

In order to succeed in the current dynamic and globally interconnected business landscape, characterized by significant digital technology impact, the marketing department should employ agile principles (Moi & Cabiddu, 2020). Because the research on marketing and strategy is placing a growing emphasis on employing agility to address the challenges arising from digital transformation. However, there has been a lack of emphasis in current

research on comprehending the occurrence of agile MAs in global digital marketing situations, as well as the vital elements required for establishing a suitable agile MCs (Moi & Cabiddu, 2020). Understanding how to enhance crucial skills in highly competitive, international markets remains a significant challenge for marketing experts and professionals working globally (Guo et al., 2018; Vaillant & Lafuente, 2019). This study aids in disseminating academic research and its practical implications. The idea of being agile in digital marketing enhances the existing understanding of agile MCs and the utilization of technology, thereby enriching theoretical knowledge in this area.

The way companies advertise and communicate is influenced by the social media platform that is currently being used by a large number of people. Considering the fast-paced nature of communication, it is crucial for the company to have the ability to adapt and employ different communication methods. The e-commerce platforms that are currently accessible have the ability to impact the sales channels. Furthermore, widely-used hardware can also have an influence on the development of software (Legner et al., 2017).

By establishing a theoretical framework, this study expands on previous research on international marketing agility to explore the key factors that determine an agile MCs. Although the study provides a comprehensive theoretical understanding of agile MCs, there are also certain limitations that can be addressed by future researchers. The primary goal of this chapter was to evaluate the company's level of agility without considering the perspectives of the customers. It is possible to conduct further research in the future to examine how customers perceive a company's capacity to swiftly adapt and respond to alterations. Future advancements in research may lead to improved techniques for evaluating agile MCs, with researchers potentially opting for surveys to validate the precision of their findings.

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