



Leading digital transformation through an Agile Marketing Capability: the case of Spotahome

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Abstract

Scholars and practitioners both acknowledge that agility is crucial in leading a digital transformation effort. However, empirical and theoretical research on agile capabilities in an international digital marketing setting is severely lacking. Drawing on qualitative research design methods, this exploratory single-case study involving the international digital firm Spotahome provides an empirical and theoretical investigation of a new marketing capability we define as an *Agile Marketing Capability*. We identify its key theoretical dimensions and provide empirical guidelines to facilitate its implementation. This study has important implications for international marketing managers, suggesting what strategic actions are needed to deploy agile practices in their marketing strategies and processes from a practical perspective, in the context of an Agile Marketing Capability.

Keywords Agile Marketing Capability · Marketing capabilities · International marketing · Digital business · Single-case study

1 Introduction

In today's business environment, firms are being pushed to rethink their business models, offerings, and processes in light of the challenges and opportunities posed by what is generally known as digital transformation (Daspit 2017; Killian and McManus 2015; Onetti et al. 2012; Rogers 2016). The term encompasses the myriad changes that digital technologies elicit in a company's business model, such as changed products and organizational structures, streamlined processes, and enhanced customer experiences (Fitzgerald et al. 2014; Hess et al. 2016). This

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has produced more “aggressive” marketplaces, where highly competitive, innovative and agile start-ups that leverage their abilities to quickly identify and respond to new business opportunities, are jeopardizing the stability of long-standing firms (D’Aveni et al. 2010; Roberts and Grover 2012a, b).

Scholars and practitioners alike deem marketing capabilities as a crucial source of a company’s competitive advantage, especially in today’s volatile markets and in international contexts. Marketing capabilities represent the means by which firms gather and exploit market knowledge to swiftly modify their businesses according to market-driven changes (Barrales-Molina et al. 2014; Bruni and Verona 2009; Orlandi 2016; Xu et al. 2018). The constant state of flux that characterizes the current business environment has led marketers to apply agile methods and practices to shorten cycle time, increase flexibility, and sharpen competitiveness (Barkema et al. 2002; Goldman 1995; Grewal and Tansuhaj 2001; Sebastian et al. 2017), and to swiftly adapt to market globalization (Chaffey 2010; Day 2011; Overby et al. 2006; Panda and Rath 2017). The extension of agile practices, i.e., faster production cycles, continuous improvement processes, transparency, coordination, customer engagement (Conboy 2009; Recker et al. 2017) from the software development arena to the marketing field has determined the emergence of *Agile Marketing*. This new marketing approach aims to reduce the gap between the “need identified” and “learning deployed” (Miles 2013; p. 22), to design more strategic and effective responses to dynamic environments (Accardi-Petersen 2011; Gera et al. 2019; Poolton et al. 2006; van den Driest and Weed 2014). Agile Marketing is rooted in a string of practices designed to quickly adjust marketing strategies in response to evolving customer needs, emphasizing speed in addressing those changes, coordination between roles and departments, transparency, and greater customer engagement (Ewel 2013).

The literature on marketing and strategy is increasingly focused on using agility to address the challenges posed by digital transformation. Studies emphasize the need to “embrace change” (O’Keeffe et al. 2016; p. 432), predict market needs and innovate (Rigby et al. 2016), and cater to customers’ needs (Bock et al. 2012; Jain 1989; Theodosiou and Leonidou 2003; Vendrell-Herrero et al. 2017), especially in highly competitive, international markets (Asseraf et al. 2019; Hagen et al. 2019). Being agile means moving quickly and flexibly (Gren et al. 2015) to respond to needs and opportunities in international markets (Hagen et al. 2019). From this perspective, agility is a dynamic capability (Felipe et al. 2016; Sambamurthy et al. 2003; Teece et al. 2016), and specifically a firm’s ability to stay up-to-date with market dynamics and adapt its strategies, tactics, and operations accordingly (Dubey et al. 2018; Ravichandran 2018; Zhou et al. 2018).

Despite international marketing scholars’ interest in agility (Gomes et al. 2020), no studies have yet investigated agility in the context of marketing capabilities research stream. Whereas scholars have extensively discussed the positive linkage between agility and marketing performance (Alford and Page 2015; Golgeci and Gligor 2017; Zhou et al. 2018), and have recognized agility as a critical success factor in tackling international market opportunities (Vaillant and Lafuente 2019), there is a lack of research that analyses and conceptualizes the concept of agility as a specific marketing capability that enhances a company’s ability to adapt to a changing international environment

(Gomes et al. 2020; Khan 2020). We found that existing studies have neglected to understand specifically how agile capabilities might take place in international digital marketing settings, and what components may be needed to develop an appropriate Agile Marketing Capability. This is particularly important for international marketing scholars and practitioners since important tensions remain in understanding how to develop key capabilities in increasingly competitive, international marketplaces (Guo et al. 2018; Vaillant and Lafuente 2019).

The present study attempts to close this gap and provides an empirical foundation for designing a new marketing capability referred to as *Agile Marketing Capability*. Specifically, this study aims to: 1) investigate the concept of agility in an international digital marketing setting; 2) identify and explore the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the Agile Marketing Capability, suggesting an initial framework and key propositions; 3) provide the first definition of an Agile Marketing Capability. This study adopts a theory-building approach based on an exploratory single-case study (Eisenhardt 1989; Miles and Huberman 1984; Yin 1994), focusing the attention on the case of *Spotahome*, a leading company in online bookings of non-vacation home rentals.

This study contributes to extend both academic research and practice. From a theoretical perspective, we extend the literature on agility and marketing capabilities by advancing the concept of an Agile Marketing Capability. Our findings provide the empirical and theoretical dimensions that characterize such a capability organized in a framework, thereby specifying the actions necessary to enable the development of an Agile Marketing Capability. We also put forth four propositions that summarize our results, as the starting point for future theoretical and empirical research in this nascent line of inquiry. From a managerial perspective, the study offers useful guidance for managers and practitioners, particularly those who operate in digital and international business contexts, on how best to leverage digital technologies to satisfy customers in rapidly changing international contexts. In addition, the framework and propositions of this study could help marketing managers and practitioners to understand ways to develop and implement agility in marketing to improve speed, flexibility, and customer responsiveness in their international marketing strategies, operations, and tactics.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Sect. 2 presents the theoretical background on agility and marketing capabilities; Sect. 3 describes the details of the single-case study methodology adopted here (i.e., case selection, data collection, data analysis process and rigor); Sect. 4 presents the research findings, identifying key dimensions of the Agile Marketing Capability organized into a theoretical framework; lastly, Sect. 5 concludes with a discussion of four propositions that summarize the study's outcomes, theoretical contributions and managerial implications, and describes certain limitations of this work as well as avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical background

Early research on marketing capabilities focused on the Resource-Based View, according to which firms assume an internally-driven approach to understanding and serving customers, using their internal resources and capabilities as the main

source of a competitive advantage (Barney 1991). Over time, this early definition of a firm's marketing capabilities has been challenged by the Dynamic Capability (DC) theory (Day 2011; Teece et al. 1997), which embraced a more dynamic and open perspective, and focused on developing marketing capabilities able to respond to fast-changing environments (Bruni and Verona 2009). Drawing on DC theory, marketing capabilities are "an organization's fundamental belief for value creation in an increasingly open market environment" (Mu 2015; p. 152); hence, internal marketing resources are aligned with the dynamics of complex external environments (Day 2011; Jaakkola et al. 2010; Mu 2015; Saeed et al. 2015).

Based on this perspective, scholars conceptualized "dynamic marketing capabilities" which "reflect human capital, social capital, and the cognition of managers involved in the creation, use, and integration of market knowledge and marketing resources to match and create market and technological change" (Bruni and Verona 2009; p. 7). Dynamic marketing capabilities are crucial for firms in highly competitive scenarios; they capture the responsiveness and efficiency of cross-functional business processes in reconfiguring resources to respond to market-related changes and deliver greater customer value (Falasca et al. 2017; Fang and Zou 2009; Xu et al. 2018).

Despite the considerable body of literature that recognizes the relevance of dynamic marketing capabilities, scholars acknowledge that it is a constantly evolving topic. Firms are always looking for new ways to increase their capacity to anticipate, respond, and adapt to market changes, particularly in the face of highly competitive rivalries (Day 2011; Merrilees et al. 2011). For these reasons, recent studies have shifted attention toward "adaptive marketing capabilities," given the increasing complexity of market demands and the velocity of technological progress (Day 2011; Moorman and Day 2016). Adaptive marketing capabilities are defined as "the extensible ability to proactively sense and act on market signals, continuously learn from market experiments, and integrate and coordinate social network resources to adapt to market changes and predict industry trends" (Guo et al. 2018; p. 81). Thus, they require a firm's vigilant market learning, adaptive market experimentation, and open marketing (Day 2014).

Briefly, dynamic and turbulent business environments require firms to gather higher capacities to answer to fast-changing environments (Day 2011; Merrilees et al. 2011). In other words, firms are increasingly forced to learn how to be more agile in adapting to changing business scenarios (Chakravarty et al. 2013). Agility is defined as the dynamic capability of an organization "to manage uncertainty [...] to efficiently and effectively redeploy/redirect its resources to value-creating and value protecting (and capturing) higher-yield activities as internal and external circumstances warrant" (Teece et al. 2016; p. 8). Research in the marketing field clearly recognizes the positive linkage between agility and marketing performance (e.g., Alford and Page 2015; Golgeci and Gligor 2017; Nemkova 2017; O'Keefe et al. 2016). Agility fosters a firm's ability to create customer value, increase its competitive advantage (Matthyssens et al. 2005), and handle market-driven changes (Tahmasebifard et al. 2017) due to the marketing teams' increased speed, coordination, customer engagement, and flexibility (Accardi-Petersen 2011; Ewel 2013; Smart 2016). In the international marketing literature agility "allows firms to better

Table 1 Summary of key features of agility. Source: Authors' elaboration

Feature	Sources
Continuously and quickly monitor and detect environmental changes, opportunities, and threats	Gligor et al. (2013), Li et al. (2009), Mandal (2018), Sambamurthy et al. (2003), Sangari and Razmi (2015)
Timely and resolute decision-making and innovation	Chen et al. (2015), Eckstein et al. (2015), Gligor et al. (2013), Lu et al. (2011), Swafford et al. (2006)
Quick access to information, multitasking teams, and speed in introducing new products and exploring new markets	Ismail and Sharifi (2006), Lin et al. (2006)
Responsiveness in identifying and responding to changing needs of new or existing markets, reactively or proactively, and adequately coordinating plans with the supply chain	(Chakravarty et al. (2013), DeGroot and Marx (2013), Hult et al. (2005), Li et al. (2009), Sangari and Razmi (2015))
Respond to market changes and customer demands through an adaptive and flexible approach without requiring significant strategic changes, by adjusting tactics and operations according to changing customer requirements	Gligor et al. (2013), Lu et al. (2011), Overby et al. (2006), Sheffi and Rice (2005)
Close relationships and collaboration, decentralized decision-making, and expertise in using IT to address dynamic environments	Chakravarty et al. (2013), Felipe et al. (2016), Mithas et al. (2011), Piccoli and Ives (2005), Wagner et al. (2014), Zhou et al. (2018)
Technology integration to align with businesses and facilitate effective information flow across the supply chain	Ismail and Sharifi (2006), Kearns and Sabherwal (2006), Lin et al. (2006), Oh and Pinsonneault (2007), Roberts and Grover (2012b), Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011)

formulate domestic market approaches (i.e., standardization) while customizing their existing strategies to approach international markets (i.e., adaptation),” thus, it “can be defined as the ability of organization in swiftly applying marketing practices contingent upon domestic and international market situations” (Li et al. 2019; p. 2). Features of agility are summarized in Table 1.

3 Methodology

To explore the dynamics of this phenomenon, we selected an in-depth, inductive case study research design (Eisenhardt 1989; Miles and Huberman 1984; Yin 1994). Limited theoretical and empirical studies on agility in digital and international marketing indicate the exploratory nature of the present study. We chose the single-case study methodology as it is recommended as a useful approach in the theory-building process (Miles and Huberman 1984; Yin 1994). Since the case study methodology is crucial for “confronting theory with the empirical world” (Piekkari et al. 2009; p. 569), it allows us to explore how agile competencies in a digital and international marketing field might take place from a practical perspective. Hence, this research design is a logical choice for gathering empirical data to broaden the understanding

of the concept of interest (Dyer and Wilkins 1991; Edmondson and McManus 2007; Stake 1995; Yin 1994).

3.1 Case selection

To conduct the study we followed a purposeful sampling approach (Patton 2014). We selected a case study that is highly representative of, and informative about the phenomenon of interest; in other words, an “archetypical” case that is highly suitable for accomplishing our theoretical purposes and addressing our research question (Silverman 2013; Stake 1995; Yin 1994). We focus on a company that employs digital marketing techniques in an international setting, as Agile Marketing skills are particularly important in this context and are therefore expected to be clearly observable.

With these goals, we identified Spotahome as a noteworthy case for our study that would allow us to perform empirical qualitative research on agile capabilities in a digital and international marketing setting. Several factors supported our case selection (Yin 2009), as described here.

Spotahome is a digital start-up with an international market, founded in 2014. It is a leader in the business of online bookings for non-vacation home rentals. First, we note that start-ups or recently launched firms are likely to embrace “agile” concepts, as innovation, internationalization, and technological advances require such firms to perform under conditions of high uncertainty (Ries 2011) and, in turn, to be extremely flexible (Almor 2011; Coleman and O’Connor 2008; Hoffman et al. 2013). Hence, start-ups are increasingly adopting agile practices to improve teamwork, coordination, communication, and speed in entering a marketplace (Coleman and O’Connor 2008; Hoegl and Gemuenden 2001; Pantiuchina et al. 2017; Pikkarainen et al. 2008).

Furthermore, online firms like Spotahome depend strongly on digital tools to reveal and monitor changes in international customer needs, and to pursue customer-centric marketing initiatives, both of which represent critical traits of agile capabilities (DeGroot and Marx 2013; Gligor et al. 2013; Kitchens et al. 2018; Matthyssens et al. 2005). Such firms must be highly flexible, internally and externally, to adapt their marketing strategies and operations to different country and region-specific preferences. These are key features embedded in agility (Lu et al. 2011; Swafford et al. 2006). Also, by selecting this company, we differentiate our analysis from previous works that investigated better known digital platforms such as Airbnb, Amazon and Uber (e.g., Stone 2013, 2017).

Preliminary research also revealed that the company has unique features that made it an excellent candidate for the study (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1994). Spotahome is a digital start-up committed to providing easier home rental services, as easy as “getting a coffee,” while avoiding traditional real estate agencies and preserving what customers appreciate about vacation home rental platforms. As clearly stated on its official website (<http://www.spotahome.com>), the company’s mission is “*to reinvent real estate. Make it transparent, instant, and exciting. Loved at last. Unreal estate [...] We work to teleport people into homes anywhere, so they can*

live the experience without being there. We connect with them. We bring reality to them.” Spotahome seeks to arrange mid- to long-term home rentals for their customers, focusing on ease of use, communication and transparency: *“The Spotahome experience removes the need for in-person viewings, saving both tenants and landlords the time and expense. We take professional photos, design floor plans, and record high-definition videos of the property and neighborhood. We also write detailed descriptions of the home and local area”*.

Based on these characteristics, we concluded that Spotahome’s values are strongly aligned with Agile Marketing principles (agilemarketingmanifesto.org). For example, one of Agile Marketing’s highest priorities is to continuously satisfy and create value for customers and Spotahome is clearly dedicated to meeting its customers’ needs. Another key aspect of Agile Marketing is viewing simplicity as essential, and Spotahome does so by declaring “embrace simplicity” as one of its priorities. Finally, Agile Marketing emphasizes collaboration and a motivating working environment, both of which play a pivotal role in Spotahome’s success.

We also chose Spotahome for our case study based on having access to key informants of the firm. Indeed, we interviewed key members of the marketing department in different roles who provided extensive, detailed, and useful information concerning the company’s marketing activities and performance.

These observations reinforce our view that using Spotahome for this case study would allow us to carry out our research according to our identified objectives.

3.2 Data collection

We collected data from various sources, namely semi-structured interviews, Spotahome’s social networking sites and official website, and archival documents (e.g., reports, press reviews) to ensure data triangulation and robustness of our research findings (Benbasat et al. 1987; Dubé and Paré 2003; Eisenhardt 1989; Miles and Huberman 1984; Yin 1994). We followed a homogeneous line of inquiry (Yin 2009) to reduce the potential for misinterpretation, and to enhance the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Hagen et al. 2019).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key respondents who are highly knowledgeable in the marketing field (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). We followed a semi-structured interview protocol, which consisted of eight questions (Fontana and Frey 2000; Robson 1993) (see Appendix A). The interview protocol was developed based on the literature on agility and the Agile Marketing Manifesto (agilemarketingmanifesto.org). To ensure clarity, we pilot-tested the questionnaire with an Italian firm that operates in the online booking (Yin 1994), and refined the interview protocol based on feedback received about the questions’ ambiguity or complexity (Van Teijlingen et al. 2001). While conducting the interviews, we asked additional exploratory questions to enrich the information gathered (Myers 2013; Taylor et al. 2015). The interviews were performed during November 2018. Each interview was recorded and transcribed (Bryman and Bell 2015; Seidman 2013), and lasted an average of 30 min. The interviewees had different roles within the firm and were deemed as key sources of information on the

Table 2 Summary of primary data sources

Source	Position	Interview time span (minutes)
Semi-structured interview	Head of Brand and Communications	28
Semi-structured interview	Brand and Communications Executive	31
Semi-structured interview	Head of Digital Performance Marketing	33
Semi-structured interview	Head of Insights And Analytics	18
Semi-structured interview	Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Manager	33
Semi-structured interview	Growth and User Acquisition Coordinator	32

Table 3 Summary of secondary data sources

Source	Type	Number of items
Social networks	Posts on Facebook and Instagram	261 posts on Facebook 712 posts on Instagram
Official website	Web page	5 captures

firm's marketing processes and strategies given their responsibilities in Spotahome's marketing department (Kumar et al. 1993) (see Table 2). To ensure accuracy, interviewees were invited to review/modify the interview transcripts.

We collected secondary data from Spotahome's social networks and the official website (see Table 3). Multimedia contents shared on social networks and official website (i.e., posts, photos, and videos) were captured using NCapture, the browser application of NVivo (Moi et al. 2018). To supplement our findings, we also analyzed archival documents (e.g., reports, press reviews). This secondary data enabled us to enrich the information needed to investigate the firm's marketing strategies (Miles and Huberman 1984).

3.3 Data analysis

For this study, we performed a within-case analysis (Eisenhardt 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Using NVivo 10 software, we took a theory-building approach to look for theoretical categories or concepts in the coding process (Gibbs 2007). We conducted our data coding and analysis as follows: (1) we analyzed the data and coded key words and units of text (e.g., "adapt" and "collaboration"), extending their meaning using a list of codes (Miles and Huberman 1984); (2) we re-analyzed the data, identifying new categories and codes and comparing them with the data already coded, and triangulated the interview data with secondary data sources until we reached a saturation point (Strauss and Corbin 1998); (3) we developed a thematic analysis to identify patterns, common meanings or emerging themes (e.g., "bring improvements and innovation" and "customer-centric marketing efforts") as the investigation progressed (Aronson 1995; Boyatzis 1998); (4) we advanced the interpretation of our analysis by reflecting on its connections with the original data.

We conducted our analysis by applying the following criteria, which are extensively used in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 2013; Shah and Corley 2006). Notably, for the credibility criteria (i.e., interviewees' trust in the researchers' understanding and interpretation of their responses), we clearly informed respondents about our research purposes and discussed our interpretations during the conversations. Regarding the transferability criteria (i.e., in-depth contextualization of information collected), we interviewed key personnel at Spotahome with different roles, to gather detailed data from different perspectives. With respect to dependability (i.e., use of various approaches and sources), we triangulated various data sources to enrich and support our understanding and interpretation. Finally, for confirmability (i.e., interpretation grounded on data collected), in explaining our research findings we incorporated direct quotes from our interviews, and supported our explanations with examples using the original data. At the end of the data analysis process, we identified a key set of relevant concepts to further our theoretical framework (see examples of this process in Table 4).

The two co-authors of this study performed the entire coding process independently and simultaneously. At each step, we ran a Coding Comparison Query and discussed any inconsistencies until achieving a Kappa coefficient¹ greater than 0.75 (Bazeley and Jackson 2013).

The following key dimensions of the Agile Marketing Capability were identified: "adaptability to changing conditions," "collaborative and integrated working environment," "continual and fast pace of innovation," and "forecasting and monitoring of market needs." The study's major outcomes are discussed in the following sections.

4 Findings

We studied agility in an international digital marketing context by analyzing semi-structured interviews, triangulated with Spotahome's social networking sites and official website, as well as additional archival documents (Table 5).

Spotahome is a digital start-up running a global marketplace, helping to drive the digitalization of the real estate rental industry. We observed how the firm works to educate customers in various countries about a different, more customized home rental experience. Our analysis reveals interesting and practical insights about how firms involved in an international marketing effort that is driven by digitalization should develop and implement an Agile Marketing Capability. Study findings are organized in a theoretical framework in which the key dimensions of the Agile Marketing Capability are represented (see Fig. 1).

¹ The coefficient measures the degree of agreement between coders. A value of K-coefficient close to 1 indicates "excellent agreement", whereas a value of 0 (or less) indicates disagreement between coders.

Table 4 Data analysis process (code examples)

First coding stage Open codes	Units of text	Second coding stage Key patterns	Third coding stage Concept
<p>“There are some users, for example in China, that use specific payment methods that are not the same as in Europe, for example, so we need to be flexible and adapt to the country of origin.”</p> <p>“We adapt for you our website, and from the beginning until the payment method.”</p> <p>“to adapt our product to the younger generation.”</p> <p>“because the one from Ukraine wants only a small place to work...and the one from Barcelona, he wants maybe to spend more time in the center of the city, etc. So, we have to adapt.”</p> <p>“If you have an objective you have to adapt your task to these objectives. For example, if you have to change something but there are budget limitations, other activities have to be reduced to keep the same budget.”</p> <p>“We need to be flexible and to adapt to the country of origin.”</p> <p>“You have to be really really careful with what things you convey to each stakeholder, and also you have to be flexible.”</p>	<p>Adapt, flexible</p>	<p>Adaptive and flexible approach according to diverse countries and customers</p>	<p>Adaptability to changing conditions</p>

Table 4 (continued)

First coding stage Open codes	Units of text	Second coding stage Key patterns	Third coding stage Concept
“We are always trying to make improvements on the website by making small changes.”	Improve, change	Bring improvements and innovation	Continual and fast pace of innovation
“We are using tools that are quite new in the industry...to improve the position of our brand.”			
“We innovate in the way that we make things better for the customers.”	Innovate, review		
“Our mission is to review our frictions and innovate.”			
“...and also put even more efforts [...] to continue being the best on that thing.”	Continue	Advancing performance constantly	
“We are always trying to review the frictions between both sides of the marketplace, and to do that, we are constantly evolving our product.”	Constantly, always		
“We are always trying to innovate in our industry.”	Always, innovate		
“Normally, we have a weekly goal, and a weekly plan to reach the goal.”	Weekly, every Monday, every week	Quick planning and performance of tasks	
“Every Monday we create a report with an analysis of the previous week, and then we take decisions after this analysis.”			
“Every week our CEO updates our main targets and figures out what we are achieving.”			
“monitor quickly, every week, to see what’s happening, for example, what is gaining visibility.”	Weekly, quickly		
“Our plans are shorter because we think in the mid-term.”	Short, mid-term		

Table 4 (continued)

First coding stage Open codes	Units of text	Second coding stage Key patterns	Third coding stage Concept
<p>“When we are deciding on a plan or an action plan for whatever, we always ask our team or ourselves ok, is this the best scenario?”</p> <p>“My personal management approach with my team is I try to be a mentor and teach what I think is the right path that we should follow, but I’m always opened to receive feedback, to allow anyone in my team to say you’re not right, maybe we can try to do this other thing and be open to testing, and discover another alternative.”</p> <p>“We are a team because we have an objective, and the entire company works toward the same objectives.”</p> <p>“We collaborate with the customer experience department people. We need to know their reviews, and we try to adapt, following user suggestions or complaints.”</p> <p>“I think that cooperation and collaboration with our peers and the rest of our stakeholders and departments is key to achieving our goals. If you don’t give a hand to your colleagues, the company is not going to succeed.”</p>	<p>Team, open, feedback</p>	<p>Strong team-working</p>	<p>Collaborative and integrated working environment</p>

Table 4 (continued)

First coding stage Open codes	Units of text	Second coding stage Key patterns	Third coding stage Concept
<p>“Specific target... that search for something related to that architecture... maybe could be our potential customers. So, we prepare these different lists, and we try to target these customers.”</p> <p>“We need to deliver the best experience to the customer.”</p> <p>“We are a marketplace of two faces... the needs are completely different from one another.”</p> <p>“Maybe you want to run a super fantastic marketing campaign, but everything has to be relevant for the customer.”</p> <p>“We listen to the voice of the customer, this is the first step. Once that we understand what they want, we try to bring it into our services.”</p> <p>“We know his interests through Facebook because... you can interact with users interested in... because they are looking for accommodation.”</p> <p>“They need to understand the pricing, the features of the apartment, flat, or whatever they are booking.”</p> <p>“We are giving the tenant all the tools they need to book accommodation without the hassle of visiting a property.”</p> <p>“We try to plan what these changes are going to be, try to plan it best [...] What you get is a forecast of what we'll be doing right after this change happens.”</p> <p>“We have to be super proactive about the reaction that the customer has.”</p> <p>“In terms of customers, we use tools to understand their behavior, how they enter a website, what content or pages they visit, what are their behaviors.”</p> <p>“What we are doing is trying to understand not only our customers but what all the possible customers in the real estate market are trying to look for.”</p> <p>“Once that we understand what they want, we try to bring it into our services.”</p> <p>“Monitoring is key because you need to follow the conversation across media channels and across countries to also analyze the sentiment of the conversation.”</p>	<p>Customer, user, target, voice, experience, interact</p> <p>Need</p> <p>Plan, forecast</p> <p>Proactive, reaction</p> <p>Understand, behavior</p> <p>Monitor, analyze</p>	<p>Customer-centric marketing efforts</p> <p>Solutions to market needs</p> <p>Sense changes and react to them</p>	<p>Forecasting and monitoring market needs</p>

4.1 Adaptability to changing conditions

To ensure its product is easy for its customers to use, Spotahome relies strongly on a flexible and adaptive approach to accommodating changing customer needs and different international settings. On its Facebook page, we read “*Serious company. I had a personal problem (my mother was in the hospital), and they activated the Cancellation Policy for Owners in the case of Force Majeure without any problems. Thank you very much!*” This underlines the company’s commitment to be flexible and to quickly adapt to the diverse needs and expectations of its customers who are looking for accommodations. Flexibility and adaptability are essential for such a business. The firm must also cope with the issue of seasonality affecting the rental market. Thus, the firm tries to adapt its product to a range of different periods (e.g., promoting September–October or January–February, when people are likely to move and change their accommodations more frequently). Hence, it focuses its marketing efforts differently according to how a firm’s objectives change over time. The Head of Insights and Analytics claims:

“If you have an objective you have to adapt your task to these objectives. For example, if you have to change something but there are budget limitations, other activities have to be reduced to keep the same budget.”

On its official website, Spotahome states, “*we embrace simplicity*” and “*we get more from less,*” which suggests the firm strives to satisfy changing customer needs through flexible, rather than rigid planning; it invests resources, simplifies, and ensures frugality, all without implementing radical changes, rather optimizing in terms of money, time, and efforts. As the SEO manager claims:

“We try to make the Spotahome product available in as many geolocations as possible [...] You can search for an accommodation in Madrid [...], but maybe you are looking for an accommodation at a specific address, or next to whatever square, or in a neighborhood [...] We try to create or make the site as granular as possible [in terms of] geolocation entities [...] to adapt our product to people searching for [a particular type of] accommodation. We try to make life easier this way.”

Emphasizing adaptability has helped the firm to develop an accessible product that flexibly adapts to various international contexts. As a global firm, Spotahome works to efficiently satisfy international customers’ different expectations. The Head of Digital Performance Marketing states that,

“To reach the target necessary for Spotahome that complete our specific audience and interested to book an accommodation [...] we need to [use each user’s] language [in] their country search [...]. Every time it’s necessary to think about the audience, the user. The user is [in] a specific age [range], located in a specific city or country, and we need to speak their languages... so we need to be flexible and to adapt to the country of origin [...] From your sofa, you can book from Cagliari an accommodation in Madrid, in your lan-

guage. So, we adapt for you our website, from the beginning until the payment method.”

In summary, Spotahome continually tries to adapt to customers’ expectations, which typically differ across countries. Also, the firm adapts its marketing campaigns to the user’s language. For instance, in Belgium, people mainly speak Flemish (Dutch), German, English and French. Although Spotahome’s website is not written in Dutch, they created some marketing campaigns in the Dutch language through remarketing, and impacted websites in Dutch on lifestyle and sport, aiming to convince the users to “come back” to Spotahome, and, thus, convert them into customers.

4.2 Continual and fast pace of innovation

By operating in a digital, international marketplace, Spotahome continuously undertakes initiatives to improve and innovate. Press releases retrieved from the firm’s archival documents show that Spotahome attracted important funding in multiple rounds over the past years, to allow for expansion across more countries, and to invest in new product development to optimize digital services for tenants and property owners (landlords). Spotahome has a long-term vision, and being innovative is key to its performance, as declared by the Head of Insights and Analytics:

“We have to be at the forefront of technology... so we innovate all the time in technology, we innovate all the time in customer support, we innovate all the time in many things that... bring better support to customers.”

Over the years, the firm has sought to bring innovation to the real estate industry. For instance, at the beginning of their business, Spotahome did not take 360° photos of properties. Currently, this is one of its key strengths as it allows customers to visit homes virtually, with an experience that is close to “real.” Furthermore, the firm has been working on influencer marketing campaigns, a practice seen more frequently in other industries such as fashion, involving “online entrepreneurs” also known as *digital nomads* (Johanson 2014). Digital nomads are tech-savvy, English-speaking, young people (MacRae 2016) who are highly popular on social media. Spotahome also aims to completely digitalize the rental process, including booking and digital transactions. The issue of payments is crucial for global firms to simplify monetary transactions from across the world.

From a practical perspective, constant attention to managing innovation is critical for the firm. As claimed by the SEO manager in charge of improving brand ranking on search engines (e.g., Google):

“We are always trying to make improvements on the website by making small changes,... launching new functionality on the website or testing a new channel, or whatever initiatives that we come up with within the company. We are always trying to launch them as fast as possible with minimum cost or effort.”

Table 5 Summary of Agile Marketing Capability dimensions

Dimension	Definition	Code example
Adaptability to changing conditions	The ability to respond to changing customer needs in different countries by adapting marketing plans	<p>“We try to do more with less because we try to optimize and spend less, not only money but time, effort, everything.”</p> <p>[Growth and User Acquisition Coordinator]</p> <p>“We try to make everything simple [...] when we define a plan we say, okay, is it simple enough to be understood by a 3 year old kid or a 50 year old? If it is the latter, let’s think again, and let’s try to make it simpler because we need to deliver really clear messages.”</p> <p>[Head of Brand and Communications]</p>
Collaborative and integrated working environment	The ability to create close and trust-based, outside-in and inside-out relationships among people and departments in different countries	<p>“It’s a matter of listening, of understanding the needs of each department, and the needs of the company [...] we are a team because we have an objective, and the entire company works toward the same objectives.”</p> <p>[Head of Insights and Analytics]</p> <p>“We are sitting with different people from different markets. I can ask them, can you help me with this because I don’t know how to do it or I don’t understand [...] we are very close to one another”</p> <p>[Brand and Communications Executive]</p>
Continual and fast pace of innovation	The ability to consistently and quickly innovate, improve, and update international marketing plans	<p>“Every Monday, we create a report with an analysis of the previous week, and then we take decisions after this analysis. To adjust in case of underperformance, we need to invent something to get to the target.”</p> <p>[Head of Digital Marketing Performance]</p> <p>“We are always trying to make improvements to the website by making small changes... launching a new functionality on the website or testing a new channel, or whatever initiatives that we come up within the company.”</p> <p>[SEO manager]</p>

Table 5 (continued)

Dimension	Definition	Code example
Forecasting and monitoring of market needs	The ability to project the future characteristics and trends of international market needs, to respond proactively or reactively, for greater customer satisfaction	<p>“We can measure the journey funnel [...] we use Analytics as the first tool to analyze the traffic, the (customer) acquisition and the behavior, [...] but also to determine how the market is going to evolve.”</p> <p>[Head of Digital Performance Marketing]</p> <p>“We are applying technology to a completely new sector, so when we implement a change, we don't know what the response of the market is going to be. We have to be super proactive in the reaction that the customer has.”</p> <p>[Head of Brand and Communications]</p>

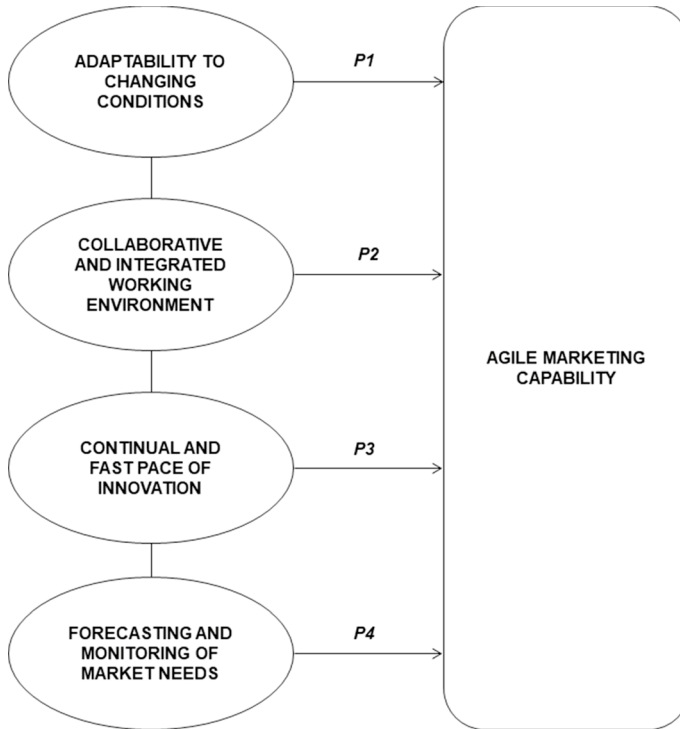


Fig. 1 The Agile Marketing Capability Framework

Managers create a weekly report analysis of customer behaviors—for example, how they click on the website and what content they select—to identify areas of “underperformance” and make decisions about how to reach their targets. They also analyze gains and losses in visibility in terms of keywords, cities, and targets, and try to make improvements. Furthermore, as an international business, these efforts to improve and innovate involve external freelancers in charge of the various countries. The firm defines a weekly plan to achieve a goal and conveys the changes to be implemented (e.g., a new promotion, discounts). If they want to improve efficiency, they communicate with the freelancers through Hangouts or e-mail to ask them to optimize. They constantly review the frictions that can arise among stakeholders (tenants and landlords) and seek to improve their product to reduce those frictions. This constant improvement, innovation, and optimization would not be feasible if Spothome was sluggish in its responses. As stated by the Head of Brand and Communications:

“Our plans are shorter because we think in the mid-term instead of in the long-term [...], so the plans are shorter, and everything has to be relevant for the customer.”

Every plan represents a forecast of possible future scenarios. Accordingly, the marketing department, as well as the other departments, defines different quarterly plans for the main project areas according to their role (e.g., content for the website, link building, and Business Intelligence, and technical aspects of the website for the SEO manager). They also try to enhance speed by simplifying the way communication channels are managed. For instance, one team member covers all languages and a minimum of two channels.

4.3 Collaborative and integrated working environment

A key aspect of success in a digital, global context relates to collaboration, both internally and externally. As Spotahome asserts on its website, *“we play a pivotal role in eliminating communication and language barriers between local landlords and foreign tenants by offering excellent customer support in several languages on both sides.”* The site also states *“we are a team,” “we live for the mission,”* and *“we trust in trust.”* Such values highlight how supportive interactions and trust-based relationships are crucial in developing a working environment that allows Spotahome to build successful international marketing programs. The Head of Brand and Communications remarks:

“We need to think at a global level, and we need to cooperate on a global level. So every time that we have a success, we celebrate all together. And every time that we fail, we cry all together [...] I try to be a mentor and teach what is the right way that we should follow. Still, I’m always open to feedback, I allow anyone in my team area to say you’re not right, maybe we can try to do this other thing and be open to testing, and discovering [a better] alternative.”

Accordingly, success in marketing projects depends on cooperation and collaboration. Spotahome nurtures close and trust-based relationships within and among departments. The marketing team may collaborate with the product department to solve technical issues between the website and the platform, or with the customer experience team to learn about user suggestions or complaints from posted reviews. The marketing department also needs to interact with the design team regarding the creative aspects of advertisements, or with the insight team to gather data necessary to measure the effectiveness of promotions. The Brand and Communications Executive states:

“Spotahome’s headquarter is in Spain [...] all the teams are located in the same building and the same place [...] I’m sitting with the other brand communication managers for other regions, for example, I have here the English one, the German one, the French one, so we talk all the time together because in marketing we are now structured like a function that gives service to the different regions, and we are a global marketing team.”

Although decentralized decision-making, in which different people oversee different countries, is common in global firms, there is a strong intention to cooperate

and work together, and these regional managers are situated next to each other, which simplifies the process of asking questions or seeking help.

A digital, global firm like Spotahome depends strongly on the use of technology in communication to foster an environment of close cooperation. For example, they use chatting tools for interacting, and sharing documents and links (e.g., Slack and Hipchat), and also have a weekly internal newsletter that delivers news and updates all departments. By leveraging technology, the firm strongly enhances information flow across the organization. When there is a meeting, information is loaded onto a chat box to promote transparent communication across the team. The CEO incentivizes this collaboration by providing weekly updates on the main achievements and targets for the departments. The Head of Insights and Analytics sums it up:

“Sometimes [...] you think that only the things you do are the right ones. It’s a matter of listening, it’s a matter of understanding the needs of each department, it’s a matter of understanding the needs of the company, and if you can combine all that and [point] them in the same direction, it all goes well. So, we are a team because we have an objective, and [everyone in] the company works toward the same objectives.”

4.4 Forecasting and monitoring of market needs

Finally, a key pillar of Spotahome is a completely customer-centric marketing approach, enabled by its 100% online platform. This approach is essential to delivering a superior customer experience, as repeatedly highlighted on their website. For example, their website states, “*We work to teleport people into homes anywhere, so they can live the experience without being there. We connect with them. We bring reality to them,*” and “*we are dedicated to providing the most enjoyable and stress-free housing search service. From booking to final confirmation, we’re there for you!*” Being customer-focused is critical to the firm’s mission. The firm’s Facebook page, where Spotahome offers help and guidelines to customers, states, “*Are you planning to move to Berlin, but you don’t know the city? We will guide you. We will help you to choose the place fit for your needs,*” or “*Are you going to move to another city, but you don’t have already found the right rental for you? We will help you to choose the perfect home!*”

In particular, the firm is committed to continuously anticipating and responding to changes in customers’ needs, to fulfill their expectations. Here IT plays a key role. As a digital business, Spotahome has the advantage of being able to analyze their customers’ behaviors and motivations across touch points, and can use the data to optimize customer interactions and predict future behaviors. The Head of Brand and Communications asserts:

“You need to follow the conversation across media channels and across countries to ... analyze the sentiment of the conversation, [whether] ... it is positive or negative [or] neutral, and also the keywords that users are using. Users can use some wording, a specific messaging [...], and you have to switch your

messages if yours have not delivered the proper idea or the proper description of the service that you are [providing].”

and also noted that,

“We have different metrics to measure ... satisfaction levels, and when those metrics go down a little bit, we put all efforts [in]to solv[ing] the situation [...] The customer has to be in the center. Not the brand, it’s the customer. Not the company, it’s the customer.”

Spotahome tries to forecast customers’ diverse needs so that it can offer a highly customized product. For example, landlords seek to increase income from their properties through quick rentals, whereas tenants seek accommodations in specific areas, with particular characteristics. The Spotahome platform is extremely useful for both landlords and tenants: landlords avoid the hassles of potential tenants visiting the property, as the tool allows homes to be rented in a couple of clicks. Tenants who are temporarily moving abroad obtain guaranteed, verified accommodations, with photos and videos of the properties. It is especially important for firms operating in foreign markets to be transparent, to manage different sets of expectations, and to ensure their customers’ safety. Verification of rental properties is one of Spotahome’s key strengths and is important in preventing scams.

Creating value for their customers is a top priority. Spotahome exploits technology to forecast and respond to customer needs proactively, applying technology to implement new features that meet and exceed customer expectations, and to adjust by correcting things that are not successful. They analyze group pages on Facebook that are dedicated to those seeking accommodation in their core markets, such as Madrid, London, Milan, and Rome, and contact these potential customers to offer customized solutions for them. These strategies are critical to success for technology-oriented firms that use digital tools to satisfy the expectations of customers internationally. Recalling the words of the Head of Digital Performance Marketing:

“There are specific audiences [identified] by Google, so we can’t choose, it’s something automatic, but it’s able with the algorithm to understand when you put for example specific keywords like we are searching for some users interested in, specific target with this age, located in specific countries, cities, or neighborhoods, that search for something related to the architecture or garden, etc. [They] could be our potential customers. So, we prepare these different lists, and we try to target these customers.”

Also,

“We can measure the journey funnel, so we know the number of people in the world interested in renting an accommodation [...] we try to convince them to book [...] we analyze this funnel, we use the Analytics as the first tool to analyze the traffic, the customer acquisition, and the behavior.”

5 Discussion and theoretical contribution

To succeed in today's dynamic, unpredictable and global business environment that is dominated by digitalization, the marketing function needs to employ agile principles. Despite the attention the topic is gaining, especially in the management and international marketing literature (e.g., Asseraf et al. 2019; Hagen et al. 2019; Li et al. 2019; Gomes et al. 2020), scholars have not analyzed and conceptualized the agility concept in terms of a specific marketing capability that enhances a firm's ability to adapt to a changing international and digital environment.

This study makes a contribution to the scholarly work by extending theories on dynamic capabilities and marketing capabilities by empirically examining and explaining how agile capabilities can be applied in a digital, international marketing context, and by proposing the Agile Marketing Capability. To date, scholars have paid little attention to how marketing efforts explicitly adapt to changing environments. Researchers have analyzed adaptive marketing capabilities (Day 2011; Guo et al. 2018; Moorman and Day 2016), while from a practical perspective there is increasing attention toward Agile Marketing approaches (Accardi-Petersen 2011; Gera et al. 2019; Poolton et al. 2006; van den Driest and Weed 2014). The conceptualization of the Agile Marketing Capability embraces a wider theoretical view, and proposes a capability that is more aligned with a highly competitive, international marketplace (Guo et al. 2018; Vaillant and Lafuente 2019). Explicitly, we define an Agile Marketing Capability 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.

Furthermore, this study extends the existing literature on agility in the international marketing domain by providing a theoretical framework in which to study the key dimensions that characterize an Agile Marketing Capability. Previous studies on international marketing agility focused on improving speed and accuracy (Vaillant and Lafuente 2019), or on being responsive and flexible (Hagen et al. 2019), forming the basis for developing international marketing agility. By responding to the need to understand how to develop agile actions that increase adaptability to fast-changing marketing conditions internationally (Gomes et al. 2020), this study identifies the following dimensions that characterize an Agile Marketing Capability: adaptability to changing conditions, collaborative and integrated working environment, continual and fast pace of innovation, and a focus on forecasting and monitoring market needs (see Fig. 1).

In this section, we elaborate on the contributions of this study by developing the four propositions that emerged from our analysis, offering them as the starting point for further research on this new line of inquiry.

5.1 Adaptability to changing conditions

Prior studies on agility have highlighted the relevance of an adaptive approach (Overby et al. 2006; Sheffi and Rice 2005) that competes with speed and surprise,

adjusts strategies and redeploys resources flexibly (Gligor et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2011; Sambamurthy et al. 2003; Teece et al. 2016), and develops new products or diversifies existing product lines using existing facilities and supply chain (Eckstein et al. 2015; Swafford et al. 2006). In describing international marketing, prior studies have outlined a firm's ability to change direction and customize strategies in terms of the features that are most critical in international markets, i.e., flexibility (Asseraf et al. 2019; Gomes et al. 2020; Hagen et al. 2019; Li et al. 2019). This study extends the existing literature by showing that, when considered in a digital and international marketing context, an agile approach helps organizations to not only adjust their strategies in response to changes in the market but also implies a more effective use of resources and capabilities, by being more adaptive and flexible in dealing with the product demands in different countries. Indeed, our analysis shows that, in a digital, international marketing setting, adaptability manifests through flexible planning that places individuals at the center, and adjusts marketing plans to meet changing requirements. The case study that is the focus of our analysis reveals how the firm adapts to the seasonal nature of the rental market in meeting customers' preferences, and its commitment to adapting its objectives and reaching a global target market by using time, effort, and capital efficiently. Interestingly, the concept of adaptability is, in many ways, related to the pursuit of simplicity; in this case, by providing an easy search tool that makes renting a temporary home simple and accessible, in a way that adapts to the different expectations of customers across different countries. Thus, we advance our first proposition:

Proposition 1 (P1) *An Agile Marketing Capability is grounded in adaptability to changing conditions, allowing marketing plans to quickly respond to changing international customer needs.*

5.2 Collaborative and Integrated Working Environment

According to the literature, collaboration is crucial for agile practices to efficiently achieve a firm's objectives. Integrating and aligning IT throughout the supply chain enhances collaboration, which facilitates information flows (Ismail and Sharifi 2006; Kearns and Sabherwal 2006; Oh and Pinsonneault 2007; Tallon and Pinsonneault 2011). The international marketing literature on agility emphasizes a firm's ability to coordinate resources and activities among different stakeholders across foreign markets (Gomes et al. 2020; Hagen et al. 2019). By extending prior studies, this work emphasizes that being open to feedback and advice from others is essential for global marketing teams, helping to foster close and trust-based relationships both inside and outside the organization. Particularly for international businesses with a digital focus, the use of communication tools throughout the organization is critical to aligning business goals across teams and departments by disseminating up-to-date information on achievements and targets. This study reveals that an agile framework helps firms to foster that alignment, collaboration, and interaction among people and departments operating in different countries. An agile approach also promotes close, trust-based relationships, and a collaborative and stimulating working environment,

empowers people and supports lean decision-making processes. These reflections lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 2 (P2) *An Agile Marketing Capability is grounded in a collaborative and integrated working environment that creates close, trust-based relationships among individuals, departments and customers in different countries.*

5.3 Continual and fast pace of innovation

Earlier studies claim that supply chain and IT agility involve the ability to continuously detect environmental changes and swiftly respond with innovative solutions (Chen et al. 2015; Gligor et al. 2013; Lu et al. 2011; Sambamurthy et al. 2003), such as by redeploying resources and quickly performing tasks (Li et al. 2009; Mandal 2018). Regarding international marketing agility, prior research highlights the necessity to “commit resources to allow the firms to rapidly adapt and change their strategies to the characteristics of the foreign market [...] to improve their planning procedures and implement marketing strategies that take into account the idiosyncrasies of the foreign market” (Gomes et al. 2020; p. 265). In other words, an Agile Marketing department must “allocate sufficient resources to underpin its continuous adaptation to changing and turbulent foreign markets” (Gomes et al. 2020; p. 265). By extending the prior literature, this study explains that agile firms foster insightful actions and strive to react decisively to changes, continually improving the speed and execution of their marketing tactics, operations, and planning. This study’s findings show that continuous efforts to adopt cutting-edge technologies to investigate market trends, customer behaviors, and competition are crucial to providing optimized services and innovative responses to customer needs in various countries. Moreover, planning for the short or mid-term is essential to achieving greater speed in adjusting tasks by learning directly from customer insights, quickly improving strategic areas that are most relevant for customers, and rapidly updating marketing plans. Therefore, we formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 3 (P3) *An Agile Marketing Capability is grounded in a continual and fast pace of innovation that consistently and quickly improves and updates international marketing plans.*

5.4 Forecasting and monitoring of market needs

A large body of literature on agility focuses on responsiveness, that is, the ability to identify and respond to changes in supply chains, technology, competition, and demand reactively and proactively, and to recover from (Eckstein et al. 2015; Overby et al. 2006). By leveraging IT to facilitate customer information gathering (DeGroote and Marx 2013; Gligor et al. 2013; Kitchens et al. 2018), agility implies a greater ability to predict needs in the market and customize products and services to meet those needs (Ismail and Sharifi 2006; Lin et al. 2006; Roberts and Grover

2012b; Sambamurthy et al. 2003). Previous international marketing studies refer to agility as a firm's ability to be responsive to foreign customers, i.e., to be speedy in detecting and addressing their needs and requirements (Gomes et al. 2020; Hagen et al. 2019). This study extends that stream of the literature, showing that by embedding agility in their marketing activities, organizations are not only able to identify and satisfy customers' needs, they are also able to respond to customers' requirements and expectations in a dynamic, timely and effective manner. This is possible because agile organizations continuously adopt up-to-date technologies and tools to address the range of customer needs in a timely manner. Indeed, our findings also reveal the importance of customer-oriented responsiveness triggered by technology in a marketing setting. We therefore propose that firms can forecast market needs at a global level using metrics for measuring customer satisfaction levels, by analyzing sentiments and other information across media channels and countries, thus offering more customized products. Our results also show a constant need to promote safety and transparency for the people in an organization. Our findings show that technology is vital in adopting proactive and reactive marketing strategies that improve customer satisfaction. We therefore propose the following:

Proposition 4 (P4) *An Agile Marketing Capability is grounded in forecasting and monitoring of market needs by projecting the future characteristics of, and trends in international markets, enabling a firm to respond proactively or reactively to improve customer satisfaction.*

5.5 Managerial implications

Although the present study provides an initial theoretical and empirical understanding of an Agile Marketing Capability, it offers crucial insights to increase managers' and practitioners' awareness of how to develop Agile Marketing capabilities, particularly those who operate in a digital-focused international context.

The study's findings provide interesting, practical guidelines for managers and practitioners to learn how to employ agility in their marketing strategies and operations. Indeed, to be more competitive and more aligned with the challenges of digital transformation, companies should be trained to develop agile competencies in the marketing field, and to pursue faster, more flexible, and more customer-responsive marketing strategies and tactics. We provide practical guidelines for managers and practitioners in implementing Agile Marketing practices to achieve superior results.

Furthermore, the definitions of the key dimensions that characterize an Agile Marketing Capability can help managers and practitioners to be better informed when planning how to implement marketing-focused agile capabilities. In particular, this study advances the understanding of how agile practices can be applied in an international digital business, how to implement these practices to improve how digital technologies are exploited in marketing activities, and use agile approaches to increase customer satisfaction.

5.6 Limitation and future research

Although our findings provide a good theoretical and empirical understanding of an Agile Marketing Capability, we acknowledge that the study is subject to limitations that could be addressed by researchers in the future.

Concerning the methodological approach, the single-case study method is appropriate for an in-depth analysis of a little explored phenomenon, but it is difficult to generalize and transfer the findings to other cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Gomm et al. 2000). Hence, future research may investigate whether the study's conclusions can be extended to other organizational settings. Also, this study examined agility from the firm's perspective, without considering the customer point of view. Future research could extend this topic by looking at customers' perceptions of a firm's agility.

The results of this study are summarized into four theoretical propositions, which could be used as a starting point for further theoretical and empirical studies on this topic. Finally, we encourage future empirical measurements of our proposed framework for an Agile Marketing Capability. Future studies could advance measurement scales for the Agile Marketing Capability, and use the survey instrument to validate the findings.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview protocol

Before starting with the interview, I would like to ask you some preliminary questions. Could you specify:

- Name
- Surname

- How long have you been working in Spotahome?
- According to your role within the company, which are your main tasks or activities that you perform?

Q1. According to your opinion, and also on the basis of your experience at work during these years, which are the main changes that take place in Spotahome sector?

- Technological changes, changes in customer needs or preferences, new competitors? Other?
- What activities do you implement in accordance with these changes? (e.g., market monitoring, sector analysis, customer data collection) What are the specific tools that you use?

Q2. With respect to the competitors in the same or similar sectors at international level, what is in your opinion the key success factor or most representative aspect that enable Spotahome to succeed and be competitive at international level? Why?

- “*We innovate to win,*” this is one of the values of Spotahome. What does it mean for you? In which way innovation is central for Spotahome competitive advantage?

Q3. On the basis of your experience at work, what are your customers looking for? What are their needs?

- Do you use specific channels/tools to communicate and interact with them? For example?
- Do you use specific tools to collect and analyze data of your customers? For example?
- Can you explain me the way or the procedure through which you try to satisfy customer needs?

Q4. Can you describe the procedure that you follow to change/update marketing plans?

- What are the key factors that you consider mostly to improve/optimize marketing plans or programs?

Q5. The mission of Spotahome basically concerns to make renting simple and fast, and offers the possibility for customers to live an experience without being there. Among the values the Spotahome supports there are “*we embrace simplicity*” and “*we get more from less.*” On the basis of your role within the firm, could you describe me what do they mean these principles for you? Could you give me a practical example?

Q6. How do you use technology to communicate with customers? What type of relationship do you create with them?

- Could you tell me an example of the way in which you interact with your customer on the basis of your current/past experience?

Q7. How do you use technology to communicate and coordinate your work with the other people within your department? Could you tell me an example of the way in which you use technology in this sense?

- Conversely, in which way do you use technology to communicate and coordinate your work with the other departments? Could you tell me an example of the way in which you use technology in this sense?
- Finally, how do you use technology to communicate and coordinate your work with the other departments located in different countries? Could you tell me an example of the way in which you use technology in this sense?

Q8. In its official website, among its key values Spotahome declares “*we are a team.*” According to you, and also on the basis of your experience at work, what does it mean?

- Can you describe me what type of relationship do you have with the other people within your department? In which way do you work with marketing department? Can you describe how is a “normal” working day?
- What type of relationship do you have with the other departments? In which way to you work with them? For example?
- What type of relationship do you have with the other departments located in different countries? In which way to you work with them? For example?

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