

An agile marketing capability maturity framework

Ludovica Moi^a, Francesca Cabiddu^{b,*}

^a Department of Business and Economics, University of Cagliari, Italy

^b Department of Business and Economics, University of Cagliari, Viale Sant'Ignazio 74, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Agile marketing capability
Marketing capabilities
Maturity framework
Multiple-case study
MICE

ABSTRACT

This work proposes a four-stage maturity framework for the development of an *agile marketing capability* (AMC) in the context of MICE tourism. Through an inductive study based on 16 semi-structured interviews with CEOs and managers, we provide a snapshot of organizations at varying levels of maturity in the management and development of AMC based on the degree of “sophistication” undertaken in approximately four dimensions (customer-oriented responsiveness, high flexibility, human collaboration, quick and continuous improvement). Recommendations to further enrich the debate toward this novel line of inquiry are presented. This study also has important implications for managers, offering a useful tool to assess and improve their marketing efforts to develop AMC and achieve greater abilities to adapt to dynamic and fast-changing environments.

1. Introduction

Marketing capabilities epitomize the means through which organizations increase their ability to learn and exploit market knowledge to respond to customer changes promptly and efficiently (Barrales-Molina, Martínez-López, & Gázquez-Abad, 2014; Bruni & Verona, 2009; Guo, Xu, Tang, & Liu-Thompkins & Dong, 2018; Xu, Guo, Zhang, & Dang, 2018). In the tourism industry, this is a critical issue. The complexity of diverse stakeholder interests to be coordinated and satisfied and the need to constantly be responsive to internal and external stimuli yield difficulties in coordinating organizations’ marketing efforts (Buhalis, 2000; Inversini, Cantoni, & Buhalis, 2009; Pike & Page, 2014). Indeed, to adapt to changing conditions rapidly (Brito, Júnior, & da Costa Diniz, 2020), tourist marketers are forced to be more *agile* (Char-lee, Ritchie, Ruhanen, & Moyle, 2014; Huang, Liang, Tseng, & Wong, 2015) and, hence, capable of reacting quickly and easily to market changes (Gren, Torkar, & Feldt, 2015; Piercy, 2009).

Drawing on the dynamic capability (DC) theory, *agility* is defined as the firm’s dynamic capability “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, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016, p. 8).

Despite the salience of this topic, the scholarly work on the benefits that agility may generate in improving marketing capabilities in the tourism industry remains surprisingly nascent. Most studies on agility focus on supply chains and manufacturing (e.g., Lee, 2004; Swafford,

Ghosh, & Murthy, 2006), whereas research in the marketing field is scant. On the other hand, there is an increasing interest in professional studies focusing on the agile marketing approach. Agile marketing represents a new marketing management approach based on an array of practices aimed at solving the rigidities of traditional marketing (Gera, Gera, & Mishra, 2019). Notably, agile marketing encourages a firm’s teams to work together on common objectives centered around customers’ needs and regularly verify the presence of weak or unnecessary steps to adjust and optimize operations accordingly. Hence, greater customer engagement and value, greater speed toward market demand, and a greater ability to adapt to change are achieved (Accardi-Petersen, 2011; Ewel, 2013; Gera et al., 2019; Moi & Cabiddu, 2020; Smart, 2016). However, there is still a lack of systematic studies from an academic perspective on agile marketing approaches. The current literature does not well elucidate the advantages and benefits of adopting agile practices in marketing and their impact on improving current marketing capabilities.

The present study addresses this gap by defining and exploring the dimensions of a new dynamic marketing capability across different organizations, i.e., *agile marketing capability* (AMC). Therefore, the research question examined is as follows: “What is an agile marketing capability, and how do organizations pursue and implement such a capability?” This study adopts a theory-building approach based on an exploratory multiple-case study research design in the context of meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) tourism (Eisenhardt, 1989).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: fcabiddu@unica.it (F. Cabiddu).

This study extends the prior literature on agility and marketing capabilities by providing the theoretical and empirical conceptualization of a new concept (AMC). Additionally, it explains how firms might differ in the development and management of AMC through the identification of different maturity levels (i.e., the agile marketing capability maturity framework), where maturity refers to a condition of being “complete,” “perfect,” or “ready” (Lahrmann, Marx, Winter, & Wortmann, 2010). For practice, this study explains to marketing managers and practitioners how they could become more agile in their marketing capabilities, providing a useful tool to assess a firm’s current state of maturity regarding this capability and to understand potential actions for improvement, and, thus, achieve greater abilities to adapt to dynamic and fast-changing environments.

2. Theoretical background

According to the literature, agility, in the marketing field, is recognized as “the degree to which a firm can sense and respond quickly to customer-based opportunities for innovation and competitive action” (Roberts & Grover, 2012, p. 580). Therefore, marketing agility implies being responsive to changing customers’ needs and expectations and flexibly harmonizing objectives and resources accordingly (Hagen, Zucchella, & Ghauri, 2019). Marketing agility is also defined by scholars as the firm’s ability to reconfigure their marketing efforts at short notice, to adapt to changing market conditions quickly and to fulfill market needs more effectively (Asseraf, Lages, & Shoham, 2019; Gomes, Sousa, & Vendrell-Herrero, 2020; Hagen et al., 2019; Zhou, Mavondo, & Saunders, 2019).

Despite the growing importance of agility in the marketing field, the extant literature does not address agility well in the context of a firm’s marketing capabilities.

Early studies analyzed marketing capabilities from the resource-based view (RBV) perspective, assuming a static and internally driven approach (Barney, 1991). Over time, the early research on marketing capabilities began to be questioned because it was unable to adapt to more complex and fast-changing business contexts (Day, 2011). Currently, the literature on marketing capabilities is evolving toward more outside-in, open and adaptive perspectives, focusing on developing marketing capabilities that account for the increasing need for adaptation to ever-changing environments (Day, 2011, p. 2014; Guo et al., 2018).

Therefore, the dynamic capability (DC) theory has emerged to aid in the development of new marketing capabilities able to grasp the firm’s capacity to sense the market and to look for different ways to reconfigure available resources accordingly (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). This led to the conceptualization of a different set of marketing capabilities oriented to more open and adaptive paths to fast-changing contexts. For instance, scholars conceptualized dynamic marketing capabilities that “reflect human capital, social capital, and the cognition of managers involved in the creation, use, and integration of market knowledge and marketing resources in order to match and create market and technological change” (Bruni & Verona, 2009, p. 7). Such capabilities capture the responsiveness of a firm’s cross-functional business processes in reorganizing resources toward market-related changes to offer greater customer value (Falasca, Zhang, Conchar, & Li, 2017; Fang & Zou, 2009; Mu, 2015; Xu et al., 2018). Dynamic marketing capabilities attempt to align internal marketing resources with the dynamics of external environments (Day, 2011; Jaakkola, Möller, Parvinen, Evanschitzky, & Mühlbacher, 2010; Mu, 2015; Saeed, Yousafzai, Paladino, & De Luca, 2015), drawing on market sensing (Day, 1994; 2011; Teece, 2007), customer engagement (McEwen, 2005; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008), and partner linking (Mu, 2015; Mu, Bao, Sekhon, Qi, & Love, 2018). Furthermore, researchers have advanced the conceptualization of adaptive marketing capabilities (Day, 2011), namely, “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). Such capabilities enhance the organization’s capacity to engage “in vigilant market learning, adaptive market experimentation, and open marketing through relationships forged with partners” (Guo et al., 2018, p. 79).

Our work contributes to the previous literature on DCs in marketing, defining a new capability that, by embedding agility, is better suited to align with the urgent need for the tourism industry to transform their business in a time of environmental turbulence.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study adopts a theory-building approach based on a multiple-case study research design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). This is a suitable methodology for “how” and “why” modes of inquiry (Yin, 2009) and can provide an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena. Multiple cases also facilitate the exploration of different empirical environments (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Therefore, it is appropriate to verify the replication of the study results (Eisenhardt, 1991) and achieve greater generalization during theory building (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

3.1. Research setting

We focus on the tourism industry, specifically, in the context of MICE tourism. MICE is the acronym for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997). It defines a type of business tourism related to activities and events such as congresses, conferences, and private business parties (Getz & Page, 2016). MICE comprises a large network of hospitality-related services, such as accommodations, catering services, and transportation (Buathong & Lai, 2017; Haugland, Ness, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011). Hence, it represents a highly dynamic sector involved in a continuous exchange and allocation of resources and relationships for planning events to address and satisfy a variety of requests and needs (d’Angella & Go, 2009; McCabe, Poole, Weeks, & Leiper, 2000). Among the main marketing practices used in the meetings and events sector, prior studies highlight the importance of market segmentation. Marketing efforts should be designed according to the variety of attendees so that their objectives and requirements are properly met (e.g., marketing campaigns dedicated to families and group packages to visit exhibitions) (Lee & Palakurthi, 2013). Another aspect concerns communication. Technology is the primary marketing tool to enhance contact with customers (Schmidt, Cantalops, & Santos, 2008). However, in the specific sector of meetings and events, there are also other ways of attracting and building relationships with customers, namely, “typical event messaging channels including signage, name badges, graphics, PowerPoint presentations, handouts, materials, save-the-date promotions, invitations, promotional products, banners, newsletters, daily trade show papers” (Tinnish & Mangal, 2012, p. 233). Furthermore, scholars emphasize the need to improve the experiences of attendees, coordinating marketing efforts toward elements that leverage the “emotional” and “cognitive” spheres (e.g., product variety, assortment, entertainment) (Woo & Jun 2017).

A theoretical sampling approach was employed “to choose cases which are likely to (...) extend the emergent theory” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 537). The Sardinia MICE network and case studies that are highly representative and informative regarding this phenomenon were selected (Yin, 2009) and were considered suitable for addressing the theoretical purposes and research questions of this study.

The MICE network was founded in 2013 with the following objective: “to coordinate the supply of its Members for offering the best opportunities for events planning and management in Sardinia island – Italy” (www.micesardegna.it). Cases were selected from an initial list of 34 members within the network, including the hotels and premises, services, and Destination Management Companies (DMCs) – Professional Congress

Organizers (PCOs) categories. Theoretical saturation was reached at 16 cases.¹

3.2. Data collection

We triangulated data from different sources (Dubé & Paré, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The primary data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** with key respondents from the MICE sector of the organizations included in the network (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). Interviews followed a standard protocol of 10 questions concerning the organization’s marketing activities in the MICE context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) (Appendix A). The interview protocol was pilot-tested with the manager of a company operating in the tourism sector to reduce ambiguity and was refined based on the feedback received. During the interviews, further explorative questions were asked to enrich information. The interviews were properly recorded, transcribed, and coded through NVivo 10 software (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). A total of 16 interviews were conducted between June and July 2019, with each interview lasting between 23 and 61 min (Table 1).

Secondary data were gathered from **social networking sites** (e.g., Facebook), **official websites**, and **archival data** (e.g., documents, reports, meeting notes) (Miles & Huberman, 1984) (Table 2).

3.3. Data analysis

We conducted both within- and between-case analyses (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) following three coding stages (Saldaña, 2015) (Fig. 1).

First, we deeply analyzed the 16 cases individually, searching for descriptive and interpretative codes describing how each organization performs marketing activities in the MICE context (Miles & Huberman, 1984). We then began abstracting data following a concept-driven

Table 1
Case studies and primary data sources: semi-structured interview.

Case study	Case typology	Position	Interview time span (minutes)
Case-1	Hotel & Premises	General Manager	53 min
Case-2	Hotel & Premises	Sales Manager	47 min
Case-3	DMC-PCO	Sales Manager	25 min
Case-4	DMC-PCO	General Manager	29 min
Case-5	Services	CEO	33 min
Case-6	Hotel & Premises	Commercial Manager	41 min
Case-7	Hotel & Premises	General Manager	35 min
Case-8	Hotel & Premises	CEO	48 min
Case-9	Services	Commercial Manager	25 min
Case-10	Services	CEO	61 min
Case-11	DMC-PCO	Project Manager	37 min
Case-12	DMC-PCO	CEO	25 min
Case-13	DMC-PCO	Project Manager	30 min
Case-14	Hotel & Premises	Marketing and Communication Manager	39 min
Case-15	Hotel & Premises	Sales Manager	24 min
Case-16	Hotel & Premises	General Manager	23 min

¹ Although no ethical issues arose from this study, the organizations have chosen to remain anonymous so that the data collected could not be traced back to the individual respondents (Coffelt, 2017).

Table 2
Summary of secondary data sources.

Case study	Type	Number of items
Case-1	Facebook and Instagram posts	663 Facebook posts 102 Instagram posts 3 captures
Case-2	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	67 Facebook posts 216 Instagram posts 3 captures
Case-3	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	162 Facebook posts 1 capture
Case-4	Facebook and Instagram posts	83 Facebook posts 35 Instagram posts 5 captures
Case-5	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	975 Facebook posts 87 Instagram posts 7 captures
Case-6	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	392 Facebook posts 5 captures
Case-7	Facebook and Instagram posts	1371 Facebook posts 351 Instagram posts 3 captures
Case-8	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	1160 Facebook posts 140 Instagram posts 8 captures
Case-9	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	3713 Facebook posts 741 Instagram posts 7 captures
Case-10	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	NA
Case-11	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	4 captures 54 Facebook posts 53 Instagram posts 12 captures
Case-12	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	76 Facebook posts 7 captures
Case-13	Facebook and Instagram posts	269 Facebook posts 25 Instagram posts 10 captures
Case-14	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	2859 Facebook posts 747 Instagram posts 5 captures
Case-15	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	677 Facebook posts 108 Instagram posts 2 captures
Case-16	Web page Facebook and Instagram posts	1356 Facebook posts 55 Instagram posts 4 captures

coding procedure (Gibbs, 2007, pp. 38–56). The result of this coding stage was a list of behaviors related to marketing execution across cases.

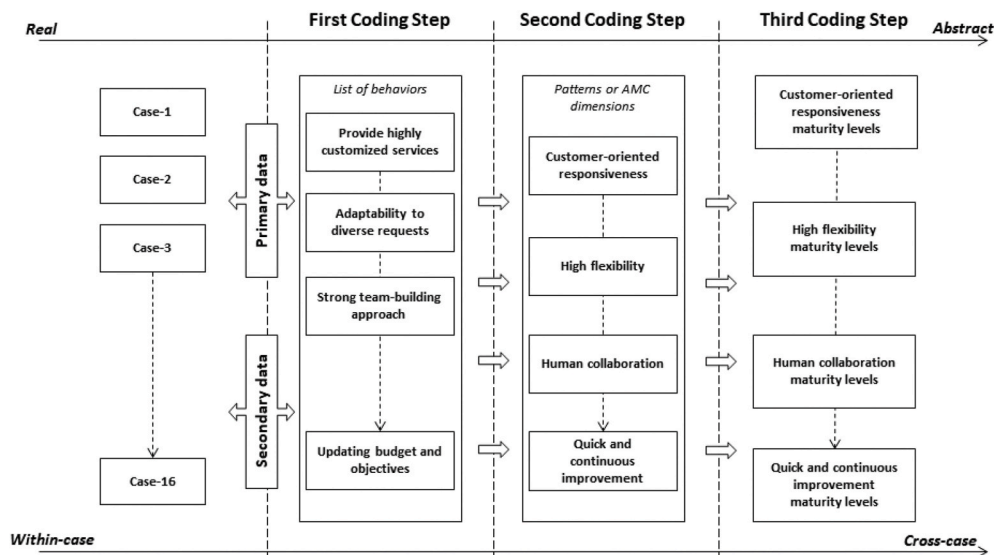
Second, we grouped the former collection of codes, verifying the presence of cohesive patterns and shared meanings. The results of our analysis led to the identification of the following dimensions of AMC: customer-oriented responsiveness, high flexibility, human collaboration, and quick and continuous improvement (Table 3).

Third, we attempted to assess the condition of being overall “complete,” “perfect,” or “ready” in the development of AMC (Lahrmann et al., 2010) in terms of maturity. Thus, we assigned an adequate maturity AMC level based on the accuracy, rigor, and systematic approach with which the organizations perform (i.e., established procedures). Therefore, we identified four maturity levels of AMC, which are as follows: initial agility; managed agility; defined agility; and proactive agility (Table 4).

The authors conducted the coding process independently and simultaneously. During each coding round, a *coding comparison query* was run, and the emerging inconsistencies were resolved between the coauthors until a kappa coefficient above 0.75 was achieved (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

4. Findings

Our analysis shows that four main aspects comprehensively



Source: adapted from Saldaña (2015)

Fig. 1. Overview of the data analysis process.

Table 3
AMC dimensions, definitions, descriptions.

AMC dimensions	Definitions	Descriptions
Customer-oriented responsiveness	Constantly sense and respond to changes related to customer needs and requests	Abilities to provide dynamic and timely sensing and respond to customer-related changes to fulfill customer requirements and expectations successfully
High flexibility	Follow an adaptive and flexible approach in dealing with changes	Ability to adapt and flexibly adjust tactics, operations and planning to deal with changes and satisfy customer needs and requests by using extant sources with more effectiveness
Human collaboration	Create close work relationships among people and a collaborative working environment	Close alignment, collaboration, and interaction among people and departments to create close and trust-based relationships and a collaborative working environment to be better able to develop successful, customer-oriented marketing programs
Quick and continuous improvement	Continuously and quickly adjust and deliver new marketing plans	Ability to addressing changes to continuously make improvements in the execution of marketing tactics, operations, and planning, and manage changes (e.g., new customer requirements, technical issues) more efficiently and effectively in a quick and timely manner

contribute to defining AMC, which are as follows: customer-oriented responsiveness, high flexibility, human collaboration, and quick and continuous improvement. Therefore, in this study, AMC represents a new concept within the dynamic marketing capabilities research stream. AMC is specifically defined as the firm's marketing capability to (1) constantly sense and respond to changes related to customer needs and requests; (2) follow an adaptive and flexible approach in dealing with changes;

Table 4
Description of maturity levels.

Level	Description
1 – Initial Agility	No proper strategic planning. Positive outcomes attributable to the initiatives of single or specific individuals within the organization
2 – Managed Agility	Encoded marketing planning and management of activities in the MICE context, that is, regular, repeated and standard actions, processes, and procedures
3 – Defined Agility	Adequate synergies and coordination of marketing processes and practices that adapt to changing conditions in the MICE context
4 – Proactive Agility	Systematic learning commitment and proactive actions or interventions to improve marketing performance in the MICE context

(3) create close work relationships among people and a collaborative working environment; and (4) continuously and quickly adjust and deliver new marketing plans.

Our data also revealed some differences across cases in terms of the actions, initiatives, and behaviors executed, since “not all companies are ready in the same way and with the same speed of adjustment” (Sardinia MICE network founder). In other words, we observed how organizations are agile in different ways in terms of their marketing capabilities.

4.1. Customer-oriented responsiveness

The MICE industry embraces various types of events and the related services to be provided. In planning events, organizations strive to achieve an optimal final result and to retain customers for future planned initiatives [Case-13]. They are committed to full customer satisfaction as a top priority in marketing performance by completely supporting customers during the design phase, planning, development, and management of their personalized events, from business meetings to professional conferences [Cases-1, -8, -11].

Organizations attempt to understand the specific needs expressed by their target customers and formulate tailored offerings. They provide highly customized offerings that combine all the aspects necessary to plan the event (location, transportation, technologies, room layout) [Case-16]. This may occur, for instance, by organizing collateral experiences that leverage the MICE destination's peculiarities and traditions, food, archeological, cultural, historical, ethnographic, enogastronomic,

and naturalistic-environmental aspects [Case-5, -8, -14], as the following quote exemplifies: *“Our strength is the ability to fulfill your wishes completely (...) to create an experience that involves the traveler, modeling it based on his requests, desires and aspirations. The priority is always and only YOU”* [Case-11, Website].

In some cases, organizations propose several alternatives based on client budgets and ensure that the important details are correct, such as the distance from the airport to the hotel. Attention to detail reflects the company's commitment to meeting every need a customer puts forth [Case-4].

In being responsive to customers, promotion plays a prominent role. In addition to traditional means, such as “word-of-mouth” or specialized sector magazines, promotion occurs through fairs or meetings to raise interest in the organization as the proper destination for MICE [Case-1, -13]. Other promotion channels are ad hoc campaigns or newsletters [Case-14], since, as a seasonal industry, such channels “push” interest during slower months, when requests are few (e.g., plan-specific offerings for niche operators) [Case-2]. Outbound (or one-way) marketing methods, such as newsletters, are usually combined with the use of digital channels to publish posts or messages on upcoming events (e.g., *“A new meeting this morning in our plenary room! #caqliari #meeting #congresses #mice #tourism #business #work,”* Case-1, Facebook and Instagram) or key information about the complete services that organizations provide (e.g., *“Hotel and restaurant booking, transportation, excursions, hostess and interpreters, special events, entertainment: these are just some of the services we can offer!”* Case-13, Website). Outbound communication forms are also used to provide information about the room and space features at the disposal of potential clients (e.g., surface, technologies at disposal, table shapes, acoustics, and number of seats) [Case-1].

Some organizations also engage in inbound marketing techniques (e.g., digital marketing strategies such as SEO or SEM) [Case-11]. In such cases, organizations create more personalized and valuable content that focuses on the organization's quality, distinctive features, and strengths in the MICE context [Case-4, -8]. Hence, they use technology to create engagement and positive B2C communication related to MICE (e.g., *“Whatever the occasion that brought you here, the important thing for us is to make you feel good and that yours would be a dip in taste, in art, in music, and in our Sardinia. With astonishment and emotion,”* Case-8, Website).

4.2. High flexibility

Planning and organizing MICE initiatives would be time-consuming and expensive if organizations were not able to flexibly adapt to unexpected events or sudden changes in customer requests. Such conditions compel organizations to learn how to redeploy people and resources according to the flow of events. Organizations should then achieve proper flexibility to provide more dynamic marketing solutions.

Being flexible in MICE means changing solutions dynamically and being prepared to react swiftly to the modifications that may occur within the system or in the external environment [Case-4, -9, -13]. For instance, having the ability to satisfy the “weird” requirements of customers by simply modifying the available resources, thus achieving an impressive and successful result (e.g., *“Few weeks ago sent us a request for an Incentive that previously took place in Tokyo (...) We have tried to adapt the requests for activities, experiences, etc., to the local level. So, if at Tokyo they were going to eat the top-level sushi on the highest tower, we brought them here to the family farm, to experience the typical local products, folkloric, Sardinian dance, local music,”* Case-13, Project Manager).

When engaging in flexible planning of MICE events and activities, organizations also attempt to optimize resources by redefining extant sources with greater efficiency to respond to change or using the same facilities alternatively to manage different events (e.g., *“if today I foresee that a room will have a particular layout, for example a parterre, and tomorrow the same room must be set in a horseshoe shape, it would be the case to find continuity in the same horseshoe-shaped room perhaps for two*

days three days, as much as possible,” Case-1, General Manager). A flexible approach ensures that organizations are elastic in addressing misunderstandings that may arise when dealing with MICE events and promptly find a solution. Organizations then tend to adjust or modify tactics and operations according to changing environments or new conditions. In other words, organizations should always have an optional plan B (e.g., you plan to have a business lunch on a boat, but because of bad weather, you organize an alternative lunch at an ancient farmhouse) [Case-4]. Thus, the most effective and rapid solution can be found to obtain the same (or a better) result [Case-14].

4.3. Human collaboration

People facilitate the successful planning and management of events and services in the MICE context. Coordination of the right people is essential for promptly adjusting to ever-changing contexts and most exigent requests. Thus, marketing management under such conditions would not be feasible without the involvement and coordination of people, who must be trained to cooperate efficiently to succeed in organizing events [Case-2]. The quality, competence, and expertise of the people involved in organizing MICE events are critical sources of competitive advantage, as the following quote exemplifies: *“You can have the most beautiful structure in the world, but if you don't have the right people who run it, it doesn't work (...) what people don't expect is the service you give, this is the difference”* [Case-2, Sales Manager].

Great marketing in MICE requires close alignment, engagement, and commitment across teams and departments to ensure the efficacy of the events. People (e.g., employees and heads of departments) must be present to ensure proper execution of all the steps during the event [Case-1, -8], and they must be ready to help and offer support not only during smooth functioning but also, more importantly, during crisis [Case-11, -14].

For successful teamwork, transparency, visibility, and coordination of information across teams and departments should be fostered through face-to-face conversations, as well as other ways, such as through the use of management software that records everything (e.g., every detail of the event) to ensure proper actions and prompt communication [Case-16]. In other cases, a person may be in charge of collecting all the updates and then interacting with the departments involved [Case-2]. Regardless of the methods adopted, it is imperative that all departments that work together are aligned and promptly informed or updated, especially when organizations have other offices (e.g., *“We need that each one always updates everything so that we are always aligned and informed. We have offices everywhere, it is fundamental that colleagues are also updated remotely (...) update documentation within our server is necessary to be always updated on everything”*, Case-11, Project Manager).

Successful organizations in the MICE context are found to be committed to building close relationships among teams and to stimulating a working environment in which tasks are performed collaboratively. It is important to motivate and valorize people and ensure proper support, as the following statement exemplifies: *“Here we love families, children, difficulties, we are always working in a nonconformist way (...) thus, welcome all those we can involve in anyway in this beautiful way of working. With great enthusiasm, we truly want to change the world, so we hope to enhance collaboration, study, research, and discussion”* [Case-12, CEO].

4.4. Quick and continuous improvement

Thus far, the study demonstrated that the MICE industry is indeed a complex “package” characterized by unexpected changes that require organizations to be as quick as possible in solving problems and making the necessary improvements [Case-2, -11]. Quick improvement is then a continuous activity in which organizations are involved, which includes rapidly adjusting marketing plans (e.g., resources, services, and people), promptly responding to customer requests, and adopting resolute

decision making practices [Case-1].

Providing continuous updates throughout the organization could occur in several ways, for instance, through frequent events or meetings (e.g., at least twice a week) or quick follow-ups with the heads of departments to understand what did not go well during events, identify gaps and weaknesses, and intervene accordingly to improve performance [Case-2]. This may occur not only by working close together in open space offices but also through e-mail or Skype [Case-11]. In summary, the results of MICE initiatives must be planned and monitored as a continuous activity of the organization’s *modus operandi* [Case-8, -12].

Even end-users play a decisive role in making improvements. They might be asked to give feedback about the event or their personal opinion on single services or activities [Case-7, Case-13]. Sometimes, organizations administer surveys with few, focused questions to gather opinions on potential improvement opportunities [Case-11].

Continuous adaptation of planning is crucial to seize new directions to become more competitive and achieve a sustained competitive advantage. For instance, by experimenting with new innovative paths to impress customers and open up to other sectors or extend the target (e.g., “We have abolished the plastic in the congress events, we work with

natural and recycled objects” [Case-12, CEO]. More efficient organizations set quantitative and qualitative objectives to improve service quality and, thus, profit (e.g., new catering services and investments in improving congress rooms through better facilities) [Case-9, -16] or provide modifications through the support of tools (e.g., “We share a kind of budget between all collaborators. This budget has quarterly updates; thus, three times a year we see if we reach the objectives,” Case-11, Project Manager).

5. Cross-case maturity analysis

Our analysis also reveals that organizations present contrasting levels of maturity in terms of AMC. We propose a framework for understanding progressive behaviors and actions that reflect different maturity levels in the development and management of AMC (Table 5). The proposed framework simultaneously identifies, on the one hand, the behaviors and actions related to each dimension of the capability and, on the other hand, the levels of maturity associated with such behaviors and actions, from 1 (“initial agility”) to 4 (“proactive agility”), based on the accuracy and systematic approach with which the organizations

Table 5
Agile marketing capability maturity framework: behaviors and maturity levels.

Dimensions	Maturity levels			
	Level 1–Initial Agility	Level 2–Managed Agility	Level 3–Defined Agility	Level 4–Proactive Agility
Customer-oriented responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No engagement in communication with customers - No use of technology to communicate with customers - No provision of customer experience - No collection of information through databases - No improvements for being more reactive toward clients [Case-3] [Case-10] [Case-15]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unit-level attention toward customers - Regular processes/procedures in addressing customer requests - Limited use of technology for attracting customers - Limited customer experience [Case-2] [Case-6] [Case-7]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outbound (one-way) communication with customers - Partial provision of customer experience - Improvement of quality services to address customer requests - Direct feedback from customers about issues [Case-1] [Case-5] [Case-9] [Case-12] [Case-16]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated use of technology for inbound communication - Provision of personalized experiences - Corrective actions based on customer feedback received - Proactively define customer plans [Case-4] [Case-8] [Case-11] [Case-13] [Case-14]
High flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual teams/specific people committed to develop marketing plans - Difficulty in making adjustments of marketing operations - Lack of full information to make adjustments and improve performance [Case-3] [Case-10] [Case-15]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular processes/procedures for marketing activities - Outline plan for key marketing activities - When responding to change, no proper synergies exist throughout the firm - Limited skills/resources to make improvements/adjustments [Case-5] [Case-6] [Case-7] [Case-13]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper synergies exist between people and new marketing objectives - Adapt competencies to new conditions - Quality-based adaptability - Make adjustments to existing marketing processes [Case-1] [Case-2] [Case-9] [Case-12]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactive actions to adapt marketing performance to new conditions (e.g., more incisive corrective actions, small changes, or experimentations) - Adjust marketing activities easily to new qualitative and quantitative business objectives - Alignment of marketing staff to find alternative successful solutions to new conditions [Case-4] [Case-8] [Case-11] [Case-14] [Case-16]
Human collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited collaboration - Individual efforts/commitment in the main marketing tasks - No integration of communication through IT throughout the organization [Case-3] [Case-5] [Case-10] [Case-15]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encoded processes and procedures to coordinate roles and tasks - Limited sharing of competencies - Unit-level communication, coordination and staffing [Case-6] [Case-7] [Case-9] [Case-13]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investments in increasing competencies - Proper synergies among teams and departments to deal with new conditions - Communications to coordinate the efforts of existing marketing processes [Case-1] [Case-14] [Case-16]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teams engage in defining a roadmap of marketing performance - Team-oriented qualitative and quantitative goals - Active participation of people in decision making [Case-2] [Case-4] [Case-8] [Case-11] [Case-12]
Quick and continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No forecast of objectives and results to make improvements - Lack of a proper improvement strategy - Lack of quick access to information on customers [Case-3] [Case-10] [Case-15]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep the results achieved in a consistent manner - Limited marketing feedback (unit-level) - New marketing programs mainly based on greater volumes - Limited investment in new resources, people and technologies [Case-5] [Case-6] [Case-13]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer reviews and evaluation mechanisms among teams - Coordinate efforts in response to unexpected changes - When people report problems, teams are aligned to solve them - Improve existing processes and procedures - Regular optimization of services and resources [Case-1] [Case-4] [Case-7] [Case-14]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proper qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques to improve marketing performance - Ad hoc tests to improve the performance of marketing processes - Quickly implement corrective actions to improve performance [Case-2] [Case-8] [Case-9] [Case-11] [Case-12] [Case-16]

perform them (i.e., established procedures).

5.1. Customer-oriented responsiveness maturity levels

At level 1 (initial agility), organizations do not attempt to improve communication with their customers. The use of technology is nearly absent. Some organizations do not seek benefits from using technology (e.g., social media, websites) to communicate with customers or provide any customer experiences [Case-3, -10]. They interact with customers through traditional means (e.g., phone calls, e-mail). Additionally, every action toward MICE-related targets is almost “spontaneous,” as they do not collect customers’ data or information or properly plan any MICE-related marketing activities, including promotions or newsletters [Case-3, -15].

At level 2 (managed agility), organizations pay better attention to customers. Even though still at the unit level, organizations follow regular and standard processes and procedures to address customer requests (e.g., small teams, such as receptionists, are present to coordinate efforts and solve customer problems or requests) [Case-2]. They communicate with customers but with limited use of technology to attract them and provide the customer experience in the MICE context (i.e., they have a website or a Facebook page but do not engage in creating valuable communication related to MICE events) [Case-2, -6, -7].

Organizations placed at level 3 (defined agility) engage in outbound or one-way communication, such as general e-mail, newsletters, and all the services provided by the website. They have a well-developed website and social media channels, where they promote the organization or Sardinia destination but not “push” the MICE industry. Therefore, the customer experience is incomplete [Case-1, -9, -12]. At the operation level, they tend to improve their service quality to address specific customer requests when they report positive or negative feedback about something [Case-16]. Rather than proactively trying to solve customer issues, for instance, through monitoring tools to provide tracing consistently, they tend to prefer the use of direct feedback from customers [Case-1, -5].

At level 4 (proactive agility), organizations reveal an integrated use of technologies (e.g., websites and Facebook) and engage in inbound communication across their digital channels [Case-8]. They provide a more personalized experience to customers and high-quality content. They promote all services offered and the value-added services used to enhance the customer experience [Case-4, -11, -13]. These organizations make greater attempts to proactively define customer plans in the MICE context. For instance, when designing MICE offerings, they gather all relevant information on the most adequate and alternative locations, hotels, and all features aligned with the client budget and propose solutions that proactively try to meet their requests [Case-4]. Moreover, they study their target customers to understand how to promote MICE offerings through using digital means and creating ad hoc campaigns [Case-14].

5.2. High flexibility maturity levels

The organizations placed at level 1 (initial agility) had no overall commitment to defining marketing planning (i.e., marketing objectives). Within such organizations, specific teams or people develop marketing plans, that is, the actions to capitalize on the MICE destination. This condition impedes flexibility in adjusting marketing operations to improve performance. When something unexpected occurs, it becomes complicated to cope during contingencies; consequently, they are unable to meet customer requests, especially the most demanding (or profitable) ones [Case-3]. Organizations have limited resources and capabilities to deal with MICE initiatives, leading to their failure to satisfy customers’ requests [Case-10, -15].

At level 2 (managed agility), organizational flexibility becomes part of the regular processes or procedures during marketing activities. Organizations define an outline plan for key activities but do not display

proper synergies throughout the firm. They still have limited skills and resources to respond to change and make improvements or adjustments [Case-6]. They may have organized some successful events in the past, but rarely. Their role in the MICE context is “passive”, as they lack all the resources necessary to conduct events [Case-7] or restructure existing resources to address all the requests expected during events [Case-13]. Their limited skills and resources turn into individual efforts by specific people or teams to provide services to customers, which may lead to difficulties in making improvements and adjustments to fulfill increasing customer requests. There is a lack of proper synergy throughout the firm, as the responsibility is centered on a single person [Case-5].

At level 3 (defined agility), organizations exhibit better synergies between the people involved in planning events and new marketing objectives. Such organizations show great unit-level coordination in their performance and properly adapt their competencies (e.g., skills and technologies) to meet evolving conditions [Case-2]. However, their adaptability mainly consists of improving the quality of services to suit the organization to meet new requests and needs, and final adjustments merely involve existing marketing processes (e.g., adapt service details to the original request received) [Case-1, -9, -12].

At level 4 (proactive agility), organizations undertake more proactive actions (e.g., small changes, or experimentations) to adapt their marketing performance to new conditions [Case-4, -11]. This is facilitated by a coordinated team aimed at meeting new qualitative or quantitative goals, which facilitate easy adjustment to marketing activities [Case-16], for instance, if in case of contingency during or soon after an event, such organizations manage to quickly adapt to new conditions and find an alternative solution with the same, or even a greater, degree of success [Case-8, -14].

5.3. Human collaboration maturity levels

At level 1 (initial agility), we identified organizations with no appropriate collaborative environment. Organizational success depends on the efforts undertaken by a single individual who manages all tasks, takes care of the relationships with stakeholders, and plans details about events and related services [Case-5]. The lack of an appropriate collaborative environment may lead to inefficiencies in satisfying increasing requests related to MICE activities. Despite interacting with other departments involved in planning events (e.g., logistics and booking), single individuals coordinate all the activities [Case-3, -10]. There is a lack of sophisticated communication and proper integration using technology since such organizations prefer verbal communication, phone calls, and e-mail [Case-15].

At level 2 (managed agility), organizations are characterized by proper unit-level staffing and communication based on encoded procedures in coordinating roles and tasks [Case-9]. Within these organizations, there is a reference person who ensures adequate unit-level coordination, but teams and departments are used to work on their tasks [Case-7]. They may consult colleagues to define some final details when planning events, but they do not truly work close or together. Thus, consultation and collaboration are limited and sporadic [Case-13]. The sharing of skills and competencies is still limited since the staff is small, and the lack of a more structured organization makes it challenging to collaborate and create synergies throughout the organization [Case-6].

At level 3 (defined agility), organizations achieve a good level of human collaboration. Such organizations are used to investing in increasing competencies to have more skilled people involved in performing tasks. There are also proper synergies among teams and departments when dealing with new or unexpected conditions, as they adequately intervene by coordinating efforts and the staff responsible for existing processes accordingly [Case-1]. Communication generally occurs through face-to-face conversation, quick follow-up, or e-mail [Case-14] but also through the use of digital means (e.g., management software) to trace all actions to be implemented and to better coordinate

teams and departments [Case-16].

At level 4 (proactive agility), the degree of human collaboration across teams and departments is extremely high. These organizations exhibit active participation of people in decision-making and are always ready to address unexpected problems [Case-4]. They are characterized by great transparency, reliable alignment, and cooperation throughout all departments, even remotely, when offices with different tasks work together, aligned to the same aspects or projects [Case-2, -11]. Teams engage in defining a roadmap of marketing performance, proposing and pursuing adequate team-oriented qualitative and quantitative goals [Case-8, -12].

5.4. Quick and continuous improvement maturity levels

At level 1 (initial agility), we identified organizations that do not perform any incremental improvements of objectives and results [Case-3, -10]. Limited resources and capabilities do not allow us to substantially extend or develop the MICE business; thus, there is no planning in this sense [Case-15]. A proper MICE-related improvement strategy is lacking, which creates general difficulties in accessing information quickly for customers [Case-3].

At level 2 (managed agility), organizations attempt to more substantially maintain the results achieved in MICE initiatives but still in a limited way. They neither monitor their results nor use tools but simply aim to maintain the results achieved. Marketing planning is more “temporal,” that is, they may set long-term objectives (e.g., improving workshops, synergies, experiences), but if they do not have the proper resources available to achieve them, they no longer pursue these objectives. There are no investments in new resources, people, or technologies [Case-5, -6]. They do not consider improvement actions as something relevant short-term (e.g., they would organize formative workshops to enhance congress planning, but they are not really committed to implementing them) [Case-13].

At level 3 (defined agility), organizations engage in performing some improvement actions or activities, such as peer reviews or evaluation mechanisms across teams. They hold regular meetings and follow-up with or provide quick updates to colleagues (e.g., face-to-face conversations) to optimize services and resources [Case-1]. Regarding customers, they prefer direct feedback or interviews to learn about potential issues immediately following MICE events [Case-14]. Such organizations are then able to coordinate efforts in response to unexpected changes [Case-4]. When people report problems, teams are aligned to solve them and improve the existing processes and procedures (e.g., if customers report a problem in any aspect of a service, they try to optimize it for the next time) [Case-7].

At level 4 (proactive agility), organizations regularly employ proper qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques and define more structured qualitative and quantitative goals [Case-2, -9, -16]. Such organizations tend to implement corrective actions to improve performance very quickly (e.g., ad hoc tests, team-oriented goals, quarterly marketing plans). They are committed to continuous marketing planning and monitoring through weekly meetings, not only to determine if there were eventual gaps or weaknesses immediately after the event but also to plan long-term improvement actions (e.g., they share a budget that is continuously updated with quarterly objectives) [Case-8, -11, -12].

6. Discussion and theoretical contribution

The Agile Marketing Capability. Although the prior marketing research has considerably advanced the knowledge toward the definition of more open, dynamic, and adaptive marketing capabilities (Day, 2011; Guo et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2018), to our knowledge, no study has developed marketing capabilities where agility is embedded.

The empirical analysis conducted in this study contributes to extending the prior research (e.g., Asseraf et al., 2019; Gomes et al.,

2020; Hagen et al., 2019; Roberts & Grover, 2012) by identifying the dimensions that collectively compose and define a new concept in the dynamic marketing capabilities research stream, namely, the agile marketing capability (AMC), which are as follows: customer-oriented responsiveness, high flexibility, human collaboration, and quick and continuous improvement.

Such dimensions increase the understanding, from a business perspective, of the practical advantages and benefits that could derive from employing agile approaches and capabilities in marketing by explaining how their employment could enhance the existing marketing capabilities, particularly in turbulent and fast-changing contexts.

More specifically, the prior research outlines the importance of marketing responsiveness as the capacity of a firm’s cross-functional business processes in reorganizing resources toward market-related changes to offer greater customer value (Falasca et al., 2017; Fang & Zou, 2009; Mu, 2015; Xu et al., 2018). Marketing agility, in particular, is defined as a firm’s ability to be responsive to foreign customers, i.e., be quick in detecting and addressing their needs and requirements (Gomes et al., 2020; Hagen et al., 2019). This study enhances previous studies, revealing that the tourist organizations that embed agility in their marketing activities can respond to customer requirements and expectations in a dynamic, timely, and effective manner. This is possible because organizations undertake continuous adoption and employment of up-to-date technologies or tools to offer the range of required customer responses (i.e., customer-oriented responsiveness) in a timely manner.

Additionally, the prior marketing literature highlights the ability to adjust strategies in response to quick market changes (Day, 2011; Guo et al., 2018). When discussing marketing agility, scholars outline a firm’s ability to change direction and customize strategies according to the features of international markets (i.e., flexibility) (Asseraf et al., 2019; Gomes et al., 2020; Hagen et al., 2019). By extending the prior literature, this work reveals that tourist firms that implement actions oriented to achieve greater flexibility toward customers improve their ability to adjust their strategies in response to quick market changes and are able to use resources and capabilities with more effectiveness by performing more adaptive and flexible actions to deal with the demand for their products in the marketplace (i.e., high flexibility).

Furthermore, the prior research emphasizes the ability of firms to engage with customers by creating enduring relationships (McEwen, 2005; Park et al., 2010; Yim et al., 2008) and implementing partner linking to organize their partners’ resources and capabilities better in the value-creation process (Mu, 2015; Mu et al., 2018). In the marketing literature, agility particularly emphasizes a firm’s ability to coordinate resources and activities among different stakeholders and foreign markets (Gomes et al., 2020; Hagen et al., 2019). This study extends the prior studies showing that the tourist organizations that undertake more active participation of teams and departments in defining a roadmap of marketing performance (e.g., definition of team-oriented qualitative and quantitative goals to improve performance in the medium and long term) increase their abilities to foster alignment, collaboration, and interaction among people and departments, creating close and trust-based relationships and a collaborative and stimulating working environment, which valorizes people and creates a lean decision-making process (i.e., human collaboration).

Finally, the prior marketing research refers to the need to “proactively sense and act on market signals” and “continuously learn from market experiments [...] to adapt to market changes and predict industry trends” (Guo et al., 2018, p. 81). Such aspects facilitate a firm’s ability to align internal marketing resources with the dynamics of external environments (Day, 2011; Jaakkola et al., 2010; Mu, 2015; Saeed et al., 2015). Regarding marketing agility, the 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” (Gomes et al., 2020, p. 265). By extending the prior literature, this study shows that agile tourist firms foster more incisive

actions that strive to achieve a more significant reaction to changes (e.g., quantitative and qualitative evaluation techniques to improve marketing performance). Hence, they considerably boost their abilities to quickly address continuous changes promptly, continually improving the execution of their marketing tactics, operations, and planning with greater speed (i.e., quick and continuous improvement).

The Agile Marketing Capability maturity framework. The prior studies addressing agility maturity assessment have mainly focused on the software development field of research (e.g., Gren et al., 2015; Leppänen, 2013; Patel & Ramachandran, 2009). This study contributes to extending the prior literature by proposing a framework in the marketing field to understand progressive behaviors and practices representative of different maturity levels in developing and managing agile marketing capabilities in the tourism industry. The framework grasps the differences among tourist organizations in terms of being ready and more “sophisticated” in the development and management of AMC, and, as displayed in this framework, moving from one level to the other implies deeper, more significant and continuous organizational learning.

Such a framework also extends the prior research on dynamic capabilities and marketing capabilities. Studies that focus on maturity frameworks in marketing fields are limited and concentrate on defining general patterns and guidelines concerning organizational capabilities (e.g., organizational capability lifecycle; organizational decision-making capability) (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003; McKenzie, van Winkelen, & Grewal, 2011). With this study, we extend the prior literature by developing a maturity framework oriented to the development of a specific marketing capability, namely, AMC. Moreover, the prior research focuses on explaining the heterogeneity of capabilities and resources between firms by defining the different evolution levels of a firm’s capability and deems maturity as the ultimate step in building that capability (capability maintenance) (e.g., Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). In contrast to the prior research, this study conceives maturity as a progressive evolving condition of being “complete,” “perfect,” or “ready” (Lahrmann et al., 2010), which ranges from levels of initial maturity to higher levels of proactive maturity. Our framework contributes to extending the prior research by offering a detailed and meticulous analysis of progressive steps to achieve greater maturity levels, where maturity is not the final step; rather, it is a constant condition of improvement.

6.1. Managerial implications

This study clarifies to managers and practitioners how they could become more agile, improving their marketing performance in the tourism industry.

The framework conceptualized in this study offers practical guidelines on what strategic actions are needed to implement, develop, and improve AMC. Hence, it could serve as a helpful tool to assess the current state of maturity in the development of such capabilities (e.g., identify current business gaps or areas of underperformance) and to demonstrate how to move through the maturity levels, understand potential improvement actions, and, thus, achieve higher levels of performance. Such a framework could also support marketing managers in making comparisons across organizations and businesses (e.g., benchmark, best practices’ evaluation), improving their performance, becoming more reactive to market changes, and increasing their competitiveness.

In other words, tourism managers can use our visual checklist to audit how well their organization is exploiting AMCs and then plan how to take it to the next level. By consulting the agile marketing capability maturity framework, tourist organizations could exploit useful, practical guidelines to boost their extant marketing capabilities and then achieve higher maturity levels. Organizations that are at suitable levels of maturity in their AMCs could become more aware of the further degree of improvement needed for more systematic change management and, thus, more significant efforts towards continuous improvement and

change management.

6.2. Limitation and future research

We acknowledge that this study is subject to some limitations.

Given the qualitative and exploratory nature of this work, it would be interesting to improve the generalization of our results and further extend this framework to other research settings where AMC might be required and strongly encouraged.

Additionally, we encourage future empirical validation and testing of the AMC maturity framework and the list of behaviors identified across the different progressive maturity levels. Following the guidelines defining a set of principles or practices to be adopted by the firm to develop a capability (e.g., Becker, Knackstedt, & Pöppelbusch, 2009), for example, it would be interesting to test this framework and develop appropriate AMC measurement scales.

Additionally, future research could further explore the reasons behind the lower level of AMC for some organizations. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate the question of financial constraints that could determine the difficulty that some organizations face in engaging in agility.

Author contribution notes

Although the article is the result of the synergistic collaboration between all the authors, they are attributable to **Ludovica Moi**. the following paragraphs: Formulation of research objectives and research questions; Development and writing of theoretical background; Development of methodology; Data collection, data analysis and interpretation of data; Discussion, Manuscript writing; Review of the manuscript. **To Francesca Cabiddu** the following paragraphs: Introduction, Definition of research problem; Critical review of the manuscript; Manuscript writing; Supervision and coordination of research planning and execution; Conclusion.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgments

Ludovica Moi gratefully acknowledges Sardinian Regional Government for the financial support of her PhD scholarship (P.O.R. Sardegna F.S.E. - Operational Programme of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, European Social Fund 2014–2020 - Axis III Education and training, Thematic goal 10, Investment Priority 10ii), Specific goal 10.5.

She also acknowledges the University of Cagliari for the financial support of her research grant (MIUR - Progetto di sviluppo Dipartimentale di ECCELLENZA legge 232/2016 art. 1, commi 314–337 - annualità 2020 - CUP: F29E18000040001 - Research project “Agile models for entrepreneurship”).

The authors are grateful to the Editor Stephen Page and the anonymous referees for their insightful comments and suggestions during the reviewing process, which were very constructive and helpful to improve the manuscript.

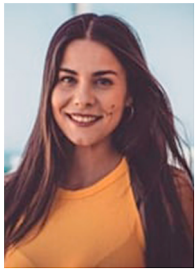
Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104347>.

References

- d’Angella, F., & Go, F. M. (2009). Tale of two cities’ collaborative tourism marketing: Towards a theory of destination stakeholder assessment. *Tourism Management*, 30(3), 429–440.

- Accardi-Petersen, M. (2011). How to get moving in agile. In *Agile marketing* (pp. 171–187). Springer.
- Asseraf, Y., Lages, L. F., & Shoham, A. (2019). Assessing the drivers and impact of international marketing agility. *International Marketing Review*, 36(2), 289–315.
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.
- Barrales-Molina, V., Martínez-López, F. J., & Gázquez-Abad, J. C. (2014). Dynamic marketing capabilities: Toward an integrative framework. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 16(4), 397–416.
- Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Becker, J., Knackstedt, R., & Pöppelbusch, J. (2009). Developing maturity models for IT management. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 1, 213–222.
- Brito, J. A. S., Júnior, N. T., & da Costa Diniz, R. (2020). Operations flexibility in events organization. *Tourism Management*, 76, 103959.
- Bruni, D. S., & Verona, G. (2009). Dynamic marketing capabilities in Science-based firms: An exploratory investigation of the pharmaceutical industry. *British Journal of Management*, 20, 101–117.
- Buathong, K., & Lai, P.-C. (2017). Perceived attributes of event sustainability in the MICE industry in Thailand: A viewpoint from governmental, academic, venue and practitioner. *Sustainability*, 9(7), 1151.
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 97–116.
- Char-lee, J. M., Ritchie, B. W., Ruhanen, L. M., & Moyle, B. D. (2014). An institutional assessment of three local government-level tourism destinations at different stages of the transformation process. *Tourism Management*, 41, 107–118.
- Coffelt, T. A. (2017). Confidentiality and anonymity of participants. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 227–230). Sage.
- Day, G. S. (2011). Closing the marketing capabilities gap. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 183–195.
- Dubé, L., & Paré, G. (2003). Rigor in information systems positivist case research: Current practices, trends, and recommendations. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(4), 597–636.
- Dwyer, L., & Forsyth, P. (1997). Impacts and benefits of MICE tourism: A framework for analysis. *Tourism Economics*, 3(1), 21–38.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1991). Better stories and better constructs: The case for rigor and comparative logic. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), 620–627.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 25–32.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: What are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(1), 1105–1121.
- Ewel, J. (2013). *Getting started with agile marketing*. Retrieved from <https://www.agilemarketing.net/GettingStartedWithAgileMarketing.pdf>.
- Falasca, M., Zhang, J., Conchar, M., & Li, L. (2017). The impact of customer knowledge and marketing dynamic capability on innovation performance: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32(7), 901–912.
- Fang, E. E., & Zou, S. (2009). Antecedents and consequences of marketing dynamic capabilities in international joint ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40, 742–761.
- Gera, G., Gera, B., & Mishra, A. (2019). Role of Agile marketing in the present era. *International Journal of Technical Research & Science*, 4(5), 40–44.
- Getz, D., & Page, S. J. (2016). Progress and prospects for event tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 52, 593–631.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2007). *Thematic coding and categorizing. Analyzing qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Gomes, E., Sousa, C. M., & Vendrell-Herrero, F. (2020). International marketing agility: Conceptualization and research agenda. *International Marketing Review*, 37, 261–272.
- Gren, L., Torkar, R., & Feldt, R. (2015). The prospects of a quantitative measurement of agility: A validation study on an agile maturity model. *Journal of Systems and Software*, 107, 38–49.
- Guo, H., Xu, H., Tang, C., Liu-Thompkins, Y., Guo, Z., & Dong, B. (2018). Comparing the impact of different marketing capabilities: Empirical evidence from B2B firms in China. *Journal of Business Research*, 93, 79–89.
- Hagen, B., Zucchella, A., & Ghauri, P. N. (2019). From fragile to agile: Marketing as a key driver of entrepreneurial internationalization. *International Marketing Review*, 36, 260–288.
- Haugland, S. A., Ness, Havard, Grønseth, B.-O., & Aarstad, J. (2011). Development of tourism destinations: An integrated multilevel perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(1), 268–290.
- Helfat, C. E., & Peteraf, M. A. (2003). The dynamic resource-based view: Capability lifecycles. *Strategic Management Journal*, 24, 997–1010.
- Huang, C.-C., Liang, W.-Y., Tseng, T.-L. B., & Wong, R.-Y. (2015). A rough set-based corporate memory for the case of ecotourism. *Tourism Management*, 47, 22–33.
- Inversini, A., Cantoni, L., & Buhalis, D. (2009). Destinations' information competition and web reputation. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 11(3), 221–234.
- Jaakkola, M., Möller, K., Parvinen, P., Evanschitzky, H., & Mühlbacher, H. (2010). Strategic marketing and business performance: A study in three European 'engineering countries'. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(8), 1300–1310.
- Lahrmann, G., Marx, F., Winter, R., & Wortmann, F. (2010). Business intelligence maturity models: An overview. In A. D'Atri, M. Ferrara, J. George, & P. Spagnoletti (Eds.), *Information Technology and innovation Trends in organizations, proceedings of the VII conference of the Italian chapter of AIS (ItAIS 2010)*. Italy: Naples.
- Lee, H. L. (2004). The triple-A supply chain. *Harvard Business Review*, 82(10), 102–113.
- Lee, D. P., & Palakurthi, R. (2013). Marketing strategy to increase exhibition attendance through controlling and eliminating leisure constraints. *Event Management*, 17(4), 323–336.
- Leppänen, M. (2013). A comparative analysis of agile maturity models. In *Information systems development* (pp. 329–343). Springer.
- McCabe, V., Poole, B., Weeks, P., & Leiper, N. (2000). *The business and management of conventions*. Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons.
- McEwen, W. J. (2005). *Married to the brand: Why consumers bond with some brands for life*. Simon and Schuster.
- McKenzie, J., van Winkelen, C., & Grewal, S. (2011). Developing organisational decision-making capability: A knowledge manager's guide. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 15(3), 403–421.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods. In *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Sage publications.
- Moi, L., & Cabiddu, F. (2020). Leading digital transformation through an agile marketing capability: The case of spotahome. *Journal of Management & Governance*, 1–33.
- Mu, J. (2015). Marketing capability, organizational adaptation and new product development performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 49, 151–166.
- Mu, J., Bao, Y., Sekhon, T., Qi, J., & Love, E. (2018). Outside-in marketing capability and firm performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 75, 37–54.
- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1–17.
- Patel, C., & Ramachandran, M. (2009). Agile maturity model (AMM): A software process improvement framework for agile software development practices. *International Journal of Software Engineering*, 2, 3–28.
- Piercy, N. F. (2009). Strategic relationships between boundary-spanning functions: Aligning customer relationship management with supplier relationship management. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 38(8), 857–864.
- Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination marketing organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, 41, 202–227.
- Roberts, N., & Grover, V. (2012). Investigating firm's customer agility and firm performance: The importance of aligning sense and respond capabilities. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(5), 579–585.
- Saeed, S., Yousafzai, S., Paladino, A., & De Luca, L. M. (2015). Inside-out and outside-in orientations: A meta-analysis of orientation's effects on innovation and firm performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 47, 121–133.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Schmidt, S., Cantalops, B., & Santos, C. (2008). The characteristics of hotel websites and their implications for website effectiveness. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(4), 504–516.
- Smart, R. (2016). *The agile marketer: Turning customer experience into your competitive advantage*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing Grounded theory*. Sage Publications.
- Swafford, P. M., Ghosh, S., & Murthy, N. (2006). The antecedents of supply chain agility of a firm: Scale development and model testing. *Journal of Operations Management*, 24(2), 170–188.
- Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28, 1319–1350.
- Teece, D., Peteraf, M., & Leih, S. (2016). Dynamic capabilities and organizational agility: Risk, uncertainty, and strategy in the innovation economy. *California Management Review*, 58(4), 13–35.
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18, 509–533.
- Tinnish, S. M., & Mangal, S. M. (2012). Sustainable event marketing in the MICE industry: A theoretical framework. *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*, 13(4), 227–249.
- Woo, G. J., & Jae-Kyoon, J. (2017). How to create a profitable boothscape? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(3), 966–985.
- Xu, H., Guo, H., Zhang, J., & Dang, A. (2018). Facilitating dynamic marketing capabilities development for domestic and foreign firms in an emerging economy. *Journal of Business Research*, 86, 141–152.
- Yim, C. K., Tse, D. K., & Chan, K. W. (2008). Strengthening customer loyalty through intimacy and passion: Roles of customer-firm affection and customer-staff relationships in services. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45(6), 741–756.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (applied social research methods)*. London Singapore Sage.
- Zhou, J., Mavondo, F. T., & Saunders, S. G. (2019). The relationship between marketing agility and financial performance under different levels of market turbulence. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 83, 31–41.



Ludovica Moi is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Economics and Business, University of Cagliari (Italy). Her research interests focus on the new frontiers of marketing driven by digital technologies, in particular Agile Marketing capabilities. Currently, she is involved in a research project about the development of agile models for entrepreneurship. Her research has appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as Journal of Management and Governance, Scientometrics, International Journal of Marketing Studies, among others. She has also co-authored book chapters and conference proceedings, including the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, ITAIS, and SINERGIE-SIMA conference. She can be reached at ludovica.moi@unica.it.



Francesca Cabiddu is Full Professor at the University of Cagliari (Italy). Her research expertise is in marketing and the use of IT to support customer service and engagement in the services sector. Her research has appeared in Annals of tourism Research, Business Horizon, The Service Industries Journal, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Service Research as well as other academic and applied journals. She can be reached at: fcabiddu@unica.it.