

THE EMERGENCE OF AGILE MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
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Date of approval: 8 April 2021

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Title of thesis: The Emergence of Agile Marketing in the Digital Era

Date: 8.4.2022

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration

Supervisor: Patrick Simek

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the emergence of Agile Marketing as a response to the changing marketing environment in the digital era from a marketing professional's perspective. The aim is to advance the research of Agile Marketing due to the lack of literature on the subject and the timeliness of the topic.

Summary

The exploratory study interviewed five Finnish and three foreign marketing professionals with strong backgrounds in the field. The study utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were recorded for further analysis. The analysis of the data was conducted by using a thematic method to identify the emerging themes.

Conclusions

This study recommends the use of Agile Marketing to be beneficial in the complex and uncertain marketing environment. The study finds that marketing professionals have explored the use of Agile Marketing with results that suggest improved transparency and employee satisfaction after the implementation. In addition, the case studies indicate improved marketing performance in the form of increased revenues and competitiveness.

Key words: Agile Marketing, marketing, marketing management, agile methods, agility

Language: English

Grade:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. INTRODUCTION 1
 - 1.1 Background 1
 - 1.2 Research Problem 1
 - 1.3 Research Questions 2
 - 1.4 Research Objectives 2
- 2. LITERATURE REVIEW 2
 - 2.1 Introduction 2
 - 2.2 The Marketing Environment 3
 - 2.2.1 The Marketing Literature During the Digital Era 5
 - 2.2.2 Main Trends in the Digital Era for Staying Competitive 6
 - 2.3 Agile Marketing 9
 - 2.3.1 Overview of the Frameworks 11
 - 2.3.2 Research Papers on Agile Marketing 13
 - 2.3.3 Benefits and Challenges of Agile Marketing 15
 - 2.4 Conclusion 16
 - 2.5 Conceptual Framework 17
- 3. METHODOLOGY 17
 - 3.1 Data Collection 18
 - 3.2 Data Analysis 19
- 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 20
 - 4.1 Marketing Environment as a Driver for the Use of Agile Marketing 20
 - 4.2 Fundamentals of Agile Marketing 24
 - 4.2.1 Organisational Structure 26

4.3 Implementation of Agile Marketing.....	29
4.4 Frameworks Cause Resistance	30
4.5 Benefits of Agile Marketing	31
4.6 Challenges of Agile Marketing	34
5. CASE EXAMPLES.....	35
5.1 Case 1: Logistics Software Company	36
5.2 Case 2: Entrepreneur Support Organisation.....	39
6. CONCLUSION.....	42
6.1 Main Findings.....	42
6.2 Implications for International Business	43
6.3 Limitations of Research	44
6.4 Suggestions for Further Research	45

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Agile methods originate from the software industry. The Agile Manifesto was created to answer the fast-paced and complex needs of the industry (Brinker, 2020). Twenty years later, it has surfaced in other sectors as well, such as marketing (Conforto et al., 2016). Brinker (2016) suggests that a marketer can benefit from the processes created by digital professionals. However, marketing is its own discipline and has different needs to software development. Therefore, the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) was created, at the Sprint Zero in 2012, to better apply these values and principles that aim to help marketers “keep up with the speed and complexity of marketing today”. Still, regardless of the timeliness of the topic, Agile Marketing remains under-represented in the available literature with some marketers even considering it a buzzword.

1.2 Research Problem

Fuciu and Dumitrescu (2018) in their paper explain how the definition of marketing has changed over the years. While the definition evolves with time, it is inevitable that the discipline and the ways of working are also adapted to the changes. Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) identify the change from traditional marketing to digital marketing. The digital era has increased the complexity of marketing in the past years and raised questions on how to stay competitive during uncertainty (Leeflang et al., 2014). This research will first aim to identify the key changes that marketers face in their daily work and the environment they work in. The emergence of Agile Marketing is only visible in a limited amount of research. The approach has been described as a way to navigate the complex and fast-paced marketing environment (Agile Marketing Manifesto, 2020). However, the existing literature in the field of Agile Marketing is still limited and the topic remains under-researched despite the urgency of the matter. Additionally, the research on Agile Marketing lacks Finnish representation, and this study aims to fill this gap.

1.3 Research Questions

The target group of the research is marketing professionals, and the research questions are the following:

1. What are the key changes in the marketing environment in the digital era?
2. How are marketing professionals responding to changes in the marketing environment?
3. Does the use of Agile Marketing enhance the performance of marketing units/agencies?
4. What are the challenges associated with Agile Marketing?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives for this thesis are the following:

1. Examine if marketing professionals have used Agile Marketing in response to the changing marketing environment.
2. Explore the emergence of Agile Marketing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to critically analyse and comment on the literature in the field of marketing, with a focus on the changes in the industry's environment and Agile Marketing. The review will identify the essential factors that marketing agencies should possess in the digital era of marketing to stay competitive in the industry. In addition, the literature review will expand on the challenges brought by the changing marketing environment and how Agile Marketing has been researched in these circumstances. The purpose of this academic paper is to build a framework that supports the research.

The literature review will start by highlighting the changes in the marketing environment introduced by the digital era and how they have impacted the nature of the industry. Next, it will critically analyse the connection between Agile Marketing and the current marketing industry needs. The focus will be on the current literature on the topic of Agile Marketing. Finally, based on the findings from the literature review, the paper will introduce a conceptual framework to support the research.

This literature review will follow a traditional framework by identifying the key trends from relevant research and analysing the concepts and limitations in the literature. The structural approach of the paper is to narrow the topic from marketing environment changes to the use of Agile Marketing and further explore the literature in the field.

2.2 The Marketing Environment

This section will focus on giving an overview of the marketing environment and the background for the changes. In addition, the literature review will elaborate on the key trends in the industry. Lastly, the section will sum up the essential concepts to apply to stay competitive in the field of marketing.

According to Fuciu and Dumitrescu (2018: 44), marketing was first defined by the American Marketing Association as “the development of economic activities (business activities) that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to the consumers”, but this is now considered outdated. A definition introduced in their (Fuciu & Dumitrescu, 2018: 44) publication by the Chartered Institute of Marketing from 2015 states that “Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably”, presenting a more accurate definition considering the current era. The changes throughout the years have led us to view marketing as a managerial and social approach that aims to create value for the customer (Fuciu & Dumitrescu, 2018).

Markets and sectors around the world have experienced rapid change in the last decade. Vassileva (2017) recognises increased connectivity, urbanisation, ageing of the population and globalisation of markets as the changing forces. The study

(Vassileva, 2017: 47) highlights that the increased globalisation of markets is closely related to the surge of different information technologies, describing them as “the most important contemporary transformative processes which force companies to change their traditional marketing activities, organisational structures and even their business models.” Taking a different stance on the matter, Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017), in their work “Marketing 4.0: moving from Traditional to Digital”, refer to broader power shifts in the global environment, such as a change to the horizontal power structure, inclusivity, and social forces as the drivers for change. These changes in the global environment are also affecting the marketing industry by bringing new challenges to organisations’ managers and employees (Killian and McManus, 2015; Vassileva, 2017; Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2017). Only following traditional practices and not reacting to the changing environment can lead to the loss of competitive advantage and a significant reduction in market share (Vassileva, 2017).

A great deal of researchers in the field of marketing have identified the rise of digitalisation and information technologies to permanently change the marketing environment (Kumar, 2015; Tikkanen et al., 2009; Vassileva, 2017; Lamberton and Stephen, 2016; Kotler et al., 2017). At the start of the 21st century, Yoon and Kim (2001) still considered the internet to be separate from other traditional media when it came to marketing. They (Yoon and Kim 2001) recognised the potential of the internet in the marketing mix, but the research at the time lacked clear metrics to evaluate its impact. Nowadays, Lamberton and Stephen (2016: 168) go as far as to state that we live in the post-digital world, where traditional media and digital media are linked to the point that “digital marketing is just marketing”. To sum up ideas from the literature, to stay competitive in the marketing industry, companies cannot overlook the changes in the marketing environment; instead, they need to adapt and find new possibilities by exploiting the available resources.

Adapting to the changes in the environment over the years, the marketing industry has evolved from a product-driven approach to an approach that aims to combine online and offline activities between companies and their customers. The new concept of Marketing 4.0 was introduced by Phillip Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) to describe the current digital economy that marketers and companies need

to navigate. Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) refer to it as a shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing. Marketing 4.0 does not support the fact that traditional marketing is entirely replaced by digital marketing but rather argues for the combination of the two. This view differs from Kim, Kang, and Lee's study that argues all marketing to be digital marketing.

2.2.1 The Marketing Literature During the Digital Era

This section will give an overview of the marketing environment based on the currently available literature. As previously stated, changes in the global environment have affected the marketing environment, which this section will focus on. A more in-depth look into the notable key trends will be presented.

Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017), in their book, "Marketing 4.0: Moving From Traditional to Digital", identify various upcoming trends brought by the digital economy. According to them (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2017), increased connectivity is the central theme that has had the most significant impact on the marketing industry. The increased connectivity that the digital economy has brought with it has created new consumer needs and demands that marketing units need to consider and adapt to. In addition to the ever-changing environment, it is evident from the literature that customer needs have become increasingly complex (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan 2017; Vassileva, 2017; Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema, 2015). Vassileva (2017) also points out the need for experiential marketing strategies to fulfil the rapidly changing needs of digital customers.

According to Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017), repeatedly communicating brand identity and positioning towards the customers is known to be successful in traditional marketing but is no longer displaying the same results in the digital world. However, digital marketing offers new ways to engage and reach customers by utilising new technologies (Kim, Kang & Lee, 2021). Guven (2020: 33) goes as far as to claim that "-- digital marketing is one of the most important elements of the century". In a bibliometric analysis focusing on digital communication, Kim, Kang, and Lee (2021) acknowledge the increased number of studies conducted in the field of digital communications due to technological advancements. In their bibliometric

analysis, Kim, Kang, and Lee's (2021) findings support the research paper done by Woerdl et al. (2008) on Internet-induced marketing techniques, as both identify internet word-of-mouth and viral marketing to be at the core of the emerging marketing forms.

Another key trend emerging from the digital economy is that brands need to protect their brand identity and remember the roots of the company while the environment around them is quickly changing (Dash, Kiefer, Paul, 2021). Rapidly changing trends and short product life cycles force brands to be reactive and dynamic. However, Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) also highlight the importance of being flexible while keeping the brand authentic. They (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan 2017) go as far as stating that authenticity is the most relevant asset a brand can possess.

After a review of the literature, it is evident that the following key trends are essential for navigating and staying competitive in the digital era:

- Reacting to the new customer needs
- Staying on top of digital marketing
- Protecting the brand identity

These topics will be further analysed in the next part of the literature review to better pinpoint the essential aspects to acquire to remain competitive.

2.2.2 Main Trends in the Digital Era for Staying Competitive

Reacting to Evolving Consumer Needs

Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) describe the new digital customers to be more agile than ever. These new consumers demand high speed, instant solutions and customised services. In addition, customers are easily influenced by trends, making it a challenge for marketers to be able to keep up with them (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan 2017).

Leeflang et al. (2014) highlight the importance of understanding collected data to understand the consumers and leverage this information in the company's

actions. They also bring up the idea of following the customer journey through big data to better optimise and offer valuable content to each consumer. Nowadays, customers value companies that can leverage personalisation in their approaches.

Another essential aspect that today's consumers demand is seamless transitions from offline to online and vice versa. Traditional media such as radio, television, and print, are unable to meet this expectation, presenting the need that digital media has stepped up to answer (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2017). However, even in digital marketing, the process is hindered by the silos in marketing companies where different business units are not well connected, and cross-unit communication is weak, often leading to channel conflicts. Therefore, Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) suggest forming teams that consist of specialists from multiple units to create coherence.

Staying on top of Digital Marketing

An empirical study titled "Effectiveness of Digital Marketing in the Challenging Age" (Yasmin, Tasneem and Fatema, 2015) reports that digital marketing should be a vital part of a company's marketing strategy, although the benefits of the approach are often not immediate. Their research promotes a cycle of trial and error to achieve results in the digital environment. In addition, Guven (2020) emphasises that to be successful in digital marketing, companies need to personalise their content according to the varying customers. Data analysis and search tracking are vital tools for a company to achieve the level of personalisation that digital customers expect. In a more recent study, Deshmukh (2020) states that COVID-19 has resulted in a near-total change to digital marketing, as digital communication has increased tremendously.

E-Marketing is a part of digital marketing that includes social media, email marketing, content marketing, influencer marketing and many other sub-sections. It focuses on building relationships with customers through internet platforms. Sidek et al. (2020), in their study, recognise e-marketing as a great approach, especially for smaller businesses, to acquire a competitive

advantage affordably. In addition, internet word-of-mouth, also known as viral marketing, is researched to be more effective than traditional word-of-mouth and can reach wider audiences in a shorter time (Woerndl et al., 2008). Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) suggest that if the aim is to create viral marketing, the company should focus on genuinely authentic content that reflects the identity of the brand.

Brand identity

Dash, Kiefer, and Paul (2021) define brand identity to describe the associations customers have about the brand as well as its positioning. Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) describe it as the roots of the company that should be protected in the ever-changing environment. Dash, Kiefer and Paul (2021) found in their study that brand identity and image are positively and significantly correlated with customer purchases and satisfaction. In addition, Silveira, Lages, and Simões (2013) emphasise how the increased competition in the market makes differentiation key, and therefore brand identity even more important than before. In their study Silveira, Lages, and Simões (2013) found it essential for the brands to keep their “sense of self” while also being dynamic and flexible with their brand identity in unpredictable business environments.

The main changes in the marketing environment brought up by the digital era and presented in the literature are the new customer needs, the rise of digital marketing, and balancing a flexible but rooted brand identity (Silveira, Lages, and Simões, 2013; Sidek et al., 2020; Kotler et al., 2017). These bring challenges such as personalisation, finding and creating the right type of content, channel conflicts, and keeping up with the fast-paced changes and trends. To stay competitive, it can be argued based on the literature, that marketing agencies and units should aim to be more data-driven, experimental, customer-centric, responsive, adaptive and emphasise collaboration across business units. It is known that internationally renowned companies, such as Adobe and Lego, have started to implement an Agile Marketing approach to cope with the new demands of the industry (Lewnes, 2021; Sommer, 2019). However, the limited number of studies on the subject leave room for further research.

2.3 Agile Marketing

This section of the literature review will focus on giving an overview of Agile Marketing in its current state.

Yusoff et al. (2019: 1420) describe the meaning of agile as “— a set of values and principles that provides a foundation for teams to make decisions, resulting in better outcomes.” It can often be misinterpreted as a process or framework. While it is true that frameworks such as SCRUM can be used with agile principles, it is not mandatory. In fact, agile is an approach that can be implemented in many fields (Conforto et al., 2016). The best practices of agile should keep evolving based on the environmental changes and trial and error practices (Yusoff et al., 2019). The heart of agile is to receive feedback, take risks, and learn from the process (Yusoff et al., 2019).

Agile practices and values originate from the software industry. Conforto et al. (2016), in their research paper titled “Can agile project management be adopted by other industries than software?” conclude the answer to the question to be positive, and they present sufficient results to suggest that non-software industries, including marketing, can adopt agile principles. Especially innovative projects showed strong results, which supports the use of Agile in marketing (Conforto et al., 2016). Kalaiganam et al. (2021) study shows that Agile Marketing differs from other agile disciplines by focusing on marketing needs. In addition, they (Kalaiganam et al., 2021) conclude that it also differs from other marketing constructs by possessing its own characteristics, discussed later in the literature review. Their study provides excellent incentives for further research by providing multiple insightful questions on the topic that still call for answers.

Brinker (2016: 9) ties the digital world, agile practices, and marketing together by saying, “– marketers can benefit by adopting management practices that were forged in the natively digital profession of software development –”. Also supported by a quote from Lamberton and Stephen’s (2016: 168) paper “A Thematic Exploration of Digital, Social Media, and Mobile Marketing: Research Evolution from 2000 to 2015 and an Agenda for Future Inquiry” traditional media and digital media are linked to

the extent that “digital marketing is just marketing”. As stated, the agile approach has its roots in software development and was originally created to cater for the needs of a highly dynamic environment (Brinker, 2016). Leeflang et al. (2014) sum up the current environment, stating that marketers face increasingly complex and changing markets that are not in their control. Lewnes (2021) even adds that Agile Marketing is mandated to thrive in marketing.

Agile Marketing is an approach that consists of values and principles. The reasoning behind the creation of the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) is stated at the beginning of the publication as follows: “To keep up with the speed and complexity of marketing today, we are adopting a different mindset and new ways of working.”

The Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) has five values that can be summarised: focusing on customer value and business outcomes, delivering value early, learning through iteration and data, utilizing cross-functional collaboration, and responding to changes instead of excessive planning. To elaborate on the values, the following principles were created (Agile Marketing Manifesto, 2020):

1. Great marketing requires close alignment, transparency, and quality interactions with internal and external customers.
2. Seek out different and diverse points of view.
3. Embrace and respond to change to enhance customer value.
4. Plan only to a level sufficient to ensure effective prioritisation and execution
5. Take chances and learn from your failures.
6. Organise in small, cross-functional teams where possible.
7. Build marketing programs around motivated individuals and trust them to get the job done.
8. Long-term marketing success benefits from operating at a sustainable pace.
9. Agile Marketing isn't enough. Excellence in marketing requires continuous attention to marketing fundamentals as well.
10. Strive for simplicity.

According to Brinker (2016), agile practices aim to make marketing smarter, faster, and more innovative and increase the adaptation to change as well as transparency.

2.3.1 Overview of the Frameworks

This part of the literature review will give an overview of the different frameworks marketers can adopt with the use of Agile Marketing rather than using an unstructured approach. The focus is on Scrum, Kanban and Lean.

Scrum

The Scrum framework, originally for software development, was introduced in 1997 by Ken Schwaber when he defined the basic concepts of sprints, daily meetings, and backlog.

Cervone (2011) gives a comprehensive overview of Scrum. According to him, it consists of three sections – roles, a five-step process, and artefacts. Firstly, the three roles are Scrum master; who works as a team leader, product owner; a unit manager that determines what needs to be built; a Scrum team; a self-organising cross-functional team of five to ten people. The five-part process is as follows: 1. The kick-off meeting for determining the high-level backlog. 2. The sprint planning meeting for creating the product backlog, sprint goals and sprint backlog. 3. The sprint. 4. Daily Scrum Meetings. 5. Sprint review for showing the development to the product owner.

Sprints differ from traditional ways by being limited to a single month, and the goal is to eliminate outside influences during the time to keep project requirements the same throughout. The goal of the sprint is to develop the functionality of the product. Lastly, the Scrum artefacts: Product backlog that includes the requirements for the project, sprint backlog that takes relevant items from the product backlog to the starting sprint, and charts to show the progress of the project. (Cervone, 2011)

The findings of Cervone's (2011) publication, "Understanding agile project management methods using Scrum", suggests that the main advantage of Scrum is its simplicity, alongside increased communication and productivity. He also claim this framework to be one of the most effective tools in enhancing the development cycle. The idea is to eliminate bureaucracy and

give more time for productive work, which will shorten the cycle. He also emphasises the importance of commitment to be able to achieve the wanted results. Management and employees need to be committed and well trained to succeed in the implementation.

Kanban

Anderson (2010), in his book “Kanban: Successful evolutionary change for your technology business”, defines Kanban as its used today in software development. He (Anderson, 2010: 3) gives it the following definition:

Kanban as the evolutionary change method that utilises a Kanban pull system, visualisation, and other tools to catalyse the introduction of Lean ideas into technology development and IT operations.

Henderson (1986) continues by stating that Kanban is often defined as a just-in-time system due to the pull strategy. Nowadays, according to Brinker (2016), Kanban and especially a Kanban board can be utilised in marketing activities to visualise the overall workflow.

Kanban, defined by Anderson, has five principles: visualise the workflow by dividing the work into smaller tasks, limit work-in-progress by setting limits for the number of ongoing tasks, measure and manage flow by utilising the pull strategy, make process policies clear and utilise models to recognise improvement opportunities. Pull strategy aims to make sure that the team is ready for a new task since they can pull it by themselves instead of it being assigned to them.

A Kanban board, according to Brinker (2016), can also be used in marketing. Kanban in Japanese translates to “signal cards”, and the primary purpose is to either digitally or physically visualise the workflow (Anderson, 2010). The original idea of a Kanban board has the columns “to do”, “doing”, and “done”, but additional ones such as “testing” can be added (Brinker, 2016). The tasks can either be post-its or longer user stories that state the task, role and reasoning (Brinker, 2016).

Lean

Skarin (2015) describes the core idea of Lean as a way of thinking, where using resources for any other purpose than creating value for the end-users is waste, and this waste should be eliminated. Dewell (2007) adds the aspect of increasing efficiency and professionalism amongst employees. In Lean, success is measured from the customer point of view instead of the organisational side. Lean practices have three goals: increasing resource efficiency, flow efficiency and optimising value. The organisation should move toward these goals by eliminating parts of the process that do not create end value for the customers (Skarin, 2015). Dewell (2007: 24) defines Lean Marketing as follows:

... a systematic continuous improvement process that will eliminate waste and inefficient processes, speed up production cycles and increase the professionalism of the people in every aspect of marketing.

Skarin (2015) suggests that continuous improvement is done through a four-step process: understanding the current state, clarifying the expected improvements, experimenting and lastly, based on the results, either implementing or stopping the experiment. By utilising Lean, a company can evolve, experiment, and stay adaptive with a fact-based approach (Skarin, 2015).

2.3.2 Research Papers on Agile Marketing

In this section of the literature review, the study goes over the research papers conducted in the field of Agile Marketing. The aim is to critically analyse the results of practical implementations of Agile Marketing in the cases. The literature review will also focus on the limitations and extent of the literature in the field to determine the need for future research on the topic.

Poolton et al. (2006), in their research titled “Agile Marketing for the Manufacturing-based SME”, examine the use of agile principles in a small UK

based company that had not started its marketing efforts. They found that an Agile Marketing approach encouraged the company to become more adaptive and was able to react to changes at short notice time. They concluded that the implementation increased the company's turnover but was unable to disclose the extent of the growth due to the short period of the study. Overall, the impact of Agile Marketing was found to be positive in terms of growth, reaction time and adaptation. However, the research has many limitations since it only provides a "snapshot" of one company and therefore falls short in connecting Agile Marketing and its benefits.

Aydin and Yasarol (2018) studied the effects of using Agile Marketing, more specifically the SCRUM framework, in a telecommunication company's marketing campaign. They compared two approaches, Waterfall (traditional marketing) and SCRUM (Agile Marketing), simultaneously running a campaign with each method. They were able to record a 33.2% improvement in time-to-market when using an Agile Marketing approach, as the finished product was delivered to the market more than a week earlier. Again, this study shows positive results when using an Agile Marketing approach but takes only a narrow look at the topic. The study fails to include the possible setbacks of the process and again focuses solely on one company and one campaign.

Sommer's (2019) study focused on the agile transformation of the LEGO group across all units, including marketing. The main objective was to examine if an agile transformation would increase the responsiveness to change and the speed of processes. They identified the need for increased responsiveness to stay competitive in the market, also including the marketing department. They found that by using agile methods in marketing, employees felt more motivated and engaged, and they were able to produce value faster. However, they also identified challenges, such as the use of agile methods not translating to the fundamental understanding of the concept, leading teams to believe they were agile when the reality was different. Again, the study was limited, only focusing on one company as well as being vague with the results. To conclude, the implementation of agile was positive but had its

challenges. In addition, to evaluate the true impact of Agile Marketing, they report the need for further research.

It is clear that the research in the field of Agile Marketing is scarce and has severe limitations. Case studies were able to identify some positive impacts of using Agile Marketing but only focusing on one company leaves gaps in the research. They also lacked clear metrics, and in most cases, the implementation of Agile Marketing was at such an early stage that the reliability of the results was compromised (Sommer, 2019; Poolton et al., 2006). Kalaignanam et al. (2021) bring up the need for further research on the metrics in their study on Agile Marketing.

These findings also support the importance of this research paper conducting an exploratory study of Agile Marketing since the studies failed to include multiple perspectives. Furthermore, Kalaignanam et al. (2021: 20) also bring up the urgency for the overall research on the topic of Agile Marketing by stating that ‘-- the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) has identified "Organising for Marketing Agility" as a key research priority for 2018–2020.’ Therefore, this study is highly relevant and will advance the literature by exploring the emergence of Agile Marketing based on multiple interviews, this way broadening the perspective.

2.3.3 Benefits and Challenges of Agile Marketing

The current literature has identified some benefits and challenges of implementing Agile Marketing. This section will summarise the ones mentioned in available research papers.

Poolton et al. (2006) identified that after implementing Agile Marketing, a company becomes more adaptive, and the reaction time to market changes was significantly reduced. Sommer (2019) reports that the company in their case study was able to produce value faster than previously. Aydin and Yasarol (2018) support these findings by identifying improvements in time-to-market. Poolton et al. (2006) added results of higher turnovers from their study, increasing overall performance. In addition, Sommer (2019) reports an increase in employee motivation and engagement. In contrast, the literature also reports some challenges; for example, in

cases where the Agile Marketing approach is not fundamentally understood, the implementation can lead teams to falsely think they are agile, harming their overall potential and performance (Sommer, 2019).

The limitations of the available literature are the lack of research on the topic, narrow study fields and lack of clear metrics to back up the results of the studies, provoking future research on the topic of Agile Marketing.

2.4 Conclusion

The marketing environment has changed, adapting to the new, continuously evolving digital age. The currently available literature has identified the following aspects:

1. The marketing environment has shifted from traditional to digital
2. The marketing environment has increasingly become more customer-centric and with expectations for greater personalisation
3. The current marketing environment is highly dynamic and fast-paced
4. Adapting an Agile Marketing approach may be beneficial for marketers to remain competitive
5. Agile Marketing lacks much needed comprehensive academic research

The literature has identified significant gaps in the research regarding Agile Marketing, as only a few studies have been conducted in the field. In addition, based on the literature, the clear effects of implementing an agile approach are missing as well as the metrics for measuring these effects (Kalaiganam et al.,2021). Therefore, this study explores if and how marketing professionals have implemented Agile Marketing and with what results. To add value to the existing literature, the study will conduct exploratory research on the topic of Agile Marketing in the digital era.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

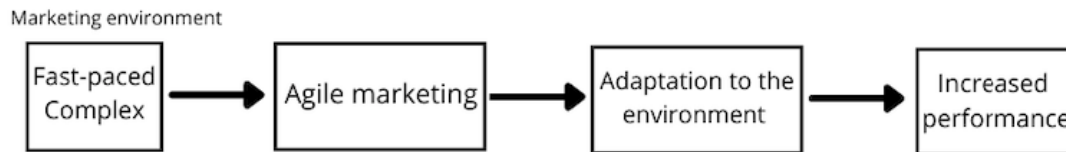


Figure 1. Conceptual framework on Agile Marketing (Pettersson, 2022)

This research moves from the marketing environment that is increasingly fast-paced and complex to the implementation of Agile Marketing as a possible solution for marketers to cope with the challenges. Adaptation to the environment is crucial to staying on top of competition (Vassileva, 2017); Agile Marketing provides values and principles that have been reported to increase adaptation and reaction time (Poolton et al., 2006; Sommer, 2019). Furthermore, better adaptation to market changes can lead to increased performance; like Poolton et al. (2006) report in their case, the improvement in turnover and growth. However, the gaps in the literature leave room for research to deepen the understanding of Agile Marketing.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research aims to further explore the topic of Agile Marketing through semi-structured interviews with marketing professionals. The focus is on identifying how marketing professionals perceive the use of Agile Marketing in the marketing environment.

A qualitative exploratory research method is selected due to the broadness of the topic. Cooper (2014) suggests an exploratory approach to be used when essential variables are not well defined, and the topic of research is vague. In addition, the goal of the research is to deepen the understanding of the topic, which also supports the chosen methodology (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), an exploratory method is useful when the aim is to broaden the

understanding of a phenomenon or an issue; instead of driving a concrete result. Patton (2002) assures that by finding information-rich individuals, it is possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic when conducting qualitative research.

3.1 Data Collection

The chosen method for interviewee selection was purposive sampling to ensure information-rich individuals based on their experience and perceptions (Cooper, 2014). Patton (2002) assures that significant findings can be made even with small sample sizes when the interviewees are selected purposefully. Interviewees were found via LinkedIn based on their job title, experience, and current job description. The interviewees were expected to have strong expertise in marketing or agile marketing as the research target group is limited to marketing professionals.

The research uses a sample that consists of eight individual marketing professionals from different companies with unique experiences. Five of the interviewees are located in Finland and work in companies that have Finnish offices, and the three foreign marketing professionals were located in the US, Canada and Germany.

Name	Role	Interview date	Mode of interview	Country	Years of experience in marketing
John Cass	Contract marketer / AI content strategist	18.2.2022	Online	USA	30
Ansgar Hein	Marketing consultant	4.2.2022	Online	Germany	25
Lyndon Johnson	Entrepreneur: consulting & agile methods	7.2. & 26.3.2022	Online	Canada	25
Marco Mäkinen	Chief Strategy Officer	9.2.2022	Online	Finland	33
Erika Vitikainen	Agile consultant	9.2.2022	Online	Finland	10
Anonymous	Channel Strategist	7.3.2022	Online	Finland	15
Anonymous	Startegist & Client Team Lead	17.2.2022	Online	Finland	10
Katri Kennedy	Executive Strategist	11.3.2022	Phone call	Finland	1,5

Table 1. Interviewees

The selected data collection method was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This method was chosen after evaluating the Saunders et al.'s (2019) three-step list of characteristics of a semi-structured in-depth interview:

1. Broad number of questions
2. Questions are open-ended and/or complex
3. Order and logic of questions should be changeable

The exploratory research requires several open-ended questions to ensure an in-depth understanding of the topic. Therefore, it can be concluded that the research in question would benefit from this style of data collection.

The length of the interviews varied between twenty minutes to an hour, and all of them were conducted online using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams, with one exception of a phone call. In addition, the interviews were video recorded for later analysis. The respondents were able to answer either in Finnish or in English, depending on their preference.

The interview questions are formulated based on the 7W's, first introduced by logician and philosopher Georg Darjes (The 7W's, 2022). The 7W's are described as follows: "- one can develop a detailed description of the state and the task(s) at hand by obtaining answers to the seven 'W' interrogatives for the perspectives under consideration." (The 7W's, 2022) The questions can be found in appendix 1.

3.2 Data Analysis

The results will be analysed by using a thematic analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2012: 57) define the thematic analysis (TA) method as follows:

TA is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. Through focusing on meaning across a data set, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences.

This method is an accessible way to analyse qualitative data and allows the researcher to identify relevant aspects concerning the research questions and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2012). By using the thematic method, analysis is conducted bottom-up, which allows the themes to emerge from the data set (ibid).

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to research the current state of the marketing environment and examine how professional marketers have responded to the changes. More specifically, focusing on the use of Agile Marketing as a possible response to these changes.

The following sections cover the findings and analysis based on the interview data in relation to the research questions and objectives. The emerging themes from the data will be discussed, starting from the marketing environment changes leading to the use of Agile Marketing.

4.1 Marketing Environment as a Driver for the Use of Agile Marketing

All the interviewees were able to recall changes in the marketing environment, such as the accelerated speed of change and increased uncertainty. The emerging reasoning for the changes could be pinpointed to technological advancements in the past decade. This phenomenon was previously presented in the literature by Vassileva (2017) and Kotler (2017), and the conducted interviews supported the findings from the literature.

The emergence of new technology has brought up many topics for a marketer to consider and has made the working environment increasingly complex. The interview data shows that the importance of data, increase in distribution channels, e-word of mouth, and changes in the customer journey are critical themes for marketers. Hein supports the aforementioned:

“You have a lot more on your plate than 20 years ago.”

Data and Customer Journey

According to Cass, the customer journey has changed vastly. Before digitalisation customers did not have the same capabilities to research companies and compare their offerings. Nowadays, customers hold the power

as they can do their own research on the offerings and companies upfront and do not have to rely on the companies to deliver the information. This change in the customer journey has led marketers to use data to stay competitive. Similarly, in their study, Leeflang et al. (2014) suggested that marketers use big data to track the customer journey and leverage the information to gain competitiveness.

By using big data, companies can follow the customer journey from the information-seeking phase to the purchase decision (ibid). Leeflang et al. (2014) introduce an example of Tesco, which has made loyalty card data their key decision-making indicator in their format, category and customer relations management. Through gathered loyalty card data, they have been able to track customer trends and increase responsiveness. This has led the company to outperform its competitors and become a number one retailer in the UK (ibid). Vitikainen adds to this by stating that the need for marketers with data analysis skills and training has increased. Compared to traditional marketing, Agile Marketing puts more emphasis on learning through data, which according to the findings by Cass, Leeflang et al. (2014) and Vitikainen, is vital in the current market.

Increase in Content Distribution Channels

Content distribution has changed from closed to open, meaning that previously marketing was mainly done through magazines and TV, where the channels determined the published content. Currently, marketers and individuals can directly publish their content on different platforms such as social media without mediators. Also, the platforms have multiplied in recent years, and simultaneously the amount of content has increased tremendously. One participant mentions that this increases the marketers' work when every channel has its specific content requirements and audiences. For example, in video production, content has traditionally been shot horizontally, but currently, platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok require vertical videos. In this case, the company needs to film different videos for Youtube and Instagram as they require different formats. Gueven (2020) adds that to be

successful in digital marketing, the content should be personalised for the target audience and the platform.

The changes in channel requirements can be fast-paced and require flexibility from the marketers to adapt to the changes. Therefore, Agile Marketing encourages companies to organise their units so that they can respond to changes quickly. This can mean that instead of traditional 6-months long fixed plans, marketers shift their focus on the following two to four weeks, making the unit more flexible.

The Scale of Marketing Fuelled by E-word-of-mouth

In the bigger picture, digitalisation and globalisation have changed the scale of marketing. This is strongly supported in the literature by Kumar (2015), Tikkanen et al. (2009) and Vassileva (2017). An important emerging phenomenon was also brought up in one of the interviews:

“Today, the key opportunities offered by technology create an exponential rate of change, and at the same time, the scale of things has exploded. Tweets in a local environment can explode rapidly into a global phenomenon, while global things can affect the individual’s life. The phenomenon goes in both directions - from big to small and small to big.” (Strategist & Client Team Lead)

Mäkinen, a chief strategy officer at a marketing agency, brings up another strategic viewpoint on marketing that leverages the new scale: real-time marketing and phenomena building. He emphasises the impact of earned media coverage, and internet word-of-mouth, where the content created is worth sharing and interacting with, as opposed to more mechanic approaches such as performance marketing. In their book, Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) agree with the importance of creating authentic and interesting content.

Mäkinen recalls the best results when the brand is able to be present in the culture and society and therefore can capture media attention from the current

events. He gives an example of being present in society through a case: His team decided to link their customer's, a pet store's, brand to a phenomenon that would gain media attention. In this case, the Finnish president's wife was having her first newborn, and the team planned for the client company to congratulate the president family's dog on social media for gaining a new family member. This way the company was able to leverage the already established media attention, be present in the culture, and gain engagement. This is an example where Agile Marketing as a whole, may not be the best fit due to the longer preparation times. Since this type of marketing can only be done on a single occasion, important values from Agile Marketing, such as iteration and learning through data, are not feasible. Instead, the company can use so-called "cherry-picking" by taking values and principles of Agile Marketing, mentioned earlier in section 2.3, that support their core strategy. In their case, the company has implemented the sixth principle: "organising in small, cross-functional teams where possible" by forming teams that include employees with different functional expertise. This "cherry-picking" is brought up by Hein when he talks about best practices for adapting to change:

"Cherry-picking - you take what is best and see what works."

Overall, the interview data shows an increase in the complexity of marketing due to the expansion of different channels and changes in the customer journey. In addition, the uncertainty in the global and local environment has reportedly grown and made the future unpredictable. In this changing marketing environment Cass, one of the creators of the Agile Marketing Manifesto, brings up an important question:

"How do you actually manage marketing?"

Collected interview data indicates that most have found Agile Marketing or some aspects of it to help managers lead in the everchanging environment, which supports the finding from the literature (Lewnes, 2021; Sommer, 2019). The following comment from Johnson gives insight into the decisions to implement Agile Marketing:

“Increasingly bigger organisations are experiencing what start-ups experience because technology, environment, and marketing are changing quickly. To some degree, big organisations are experiencing the same degree of change that start-ups are and that is why some larger companies are looking into agile. These companies realise that the plans they write for a year, half, or a quarter are quickly out of date or you learn new things to improve the plan.”

A recent example of this is the COVID-19 pandemic, where small and large corporations had to act quickly to the changing market. Companies with traditional yearlong plans were less prepared to adapt than agile companies with short term plans. For example, an agile company that uses 2-week Scrum cycles can add tasks to the backlog as soon as they recognise them and, at the sprint meeting happening every two weeks, move crucial tasks to the top of the list. These changes do not cause crucial disruption since the plans are only for the following two weeks rather than for the next half year or so. The COVID-19 pandemic has left the marketing environment more uncertain and unpredictable, further proving the need for agility in marketing.

4.2 Fundamentals of Agile Marketing

Agile Marketing is a set of values and principles aforementioned and cited from the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020). This research gathered insight of Agile Marketing through interviews and case examples, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic due to the irregularities found in the literature.

An occurring trend in the interview data was to describe Agile Marketing through its key aspects. Vitikainen mentions the fundamentals, such as feedback, continuous improvement, and self-reflection, as essential parts of Agile Marketing. Yusoff et al. (2019), in their paper, agree by stating that the core of agile comes from receiving feedback, risk-taking and continuous learning. According to the research, iteration, reflecting, and testing are the key concepts in Agile Marketing. Kennedy describes that in practice, this can be seen as making prototypes such as social media posts in

different colours or with different pictures and getting comments on these prototypes from clients early on. Vitikainen describes the concept:

"We do not rely on hypotheses; instead, we validate all of our assumptions all the time, starting from the marketing ideas."

Shorter cycles are the staple piece of the Agile Marketing approach, and it is linked with the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) value that recommends delivering value early over striving for perfection. Shorter cycles support the second value of the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020): responding to changes instead of excessive planning, which is further demonstrated in the section 5 case studies. Mäkinen takes a contrasting approach by suggesting that instead of adapting or responding to change, companies should drive the change. However, this may not be in the scope of possibilities for all companies due to the increasingly bureaucratic organisational structures. Furthermore, it can be considered that Agile Marketing is a step in the right direction by breaking these barriers and increasing flexibility and transparency.

The fundamentals of Agile Marketing are well depicted in following figure 2, an example case of CarMax from the Kalaignanam et al.'s (2020) paper. Figure 2 shows an Agile Marketing process in a car retailing company.

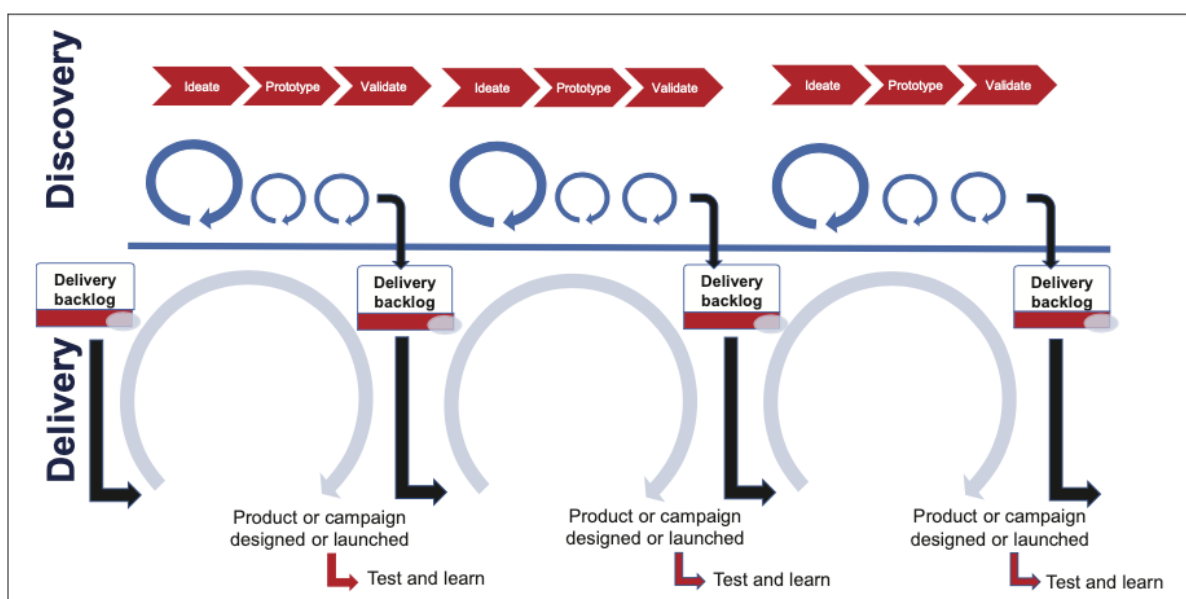


Figure 2. An illustration of Dual-track Marketing Agility (Kalaignanam et al., 2020)

The company uses a dual-track process, meaning two different phases conducted by different teams simultaneously. The discovery phase is set up to iteratively test a hypothesis. The hypothesis is created in the ideation phase and turned into a prototype in the second cycle. This prototype is then validated with real customers, and if the validation phase shows positive results, the prototype moves to the delivery phase. In the delivery phase, the project is carried out by the other team. After completion of the delivery phase, the results are gathered and analysed for future learning. This iterative testing and validation process is continuously carried out in short cycles. (Kalaiganam et al., 2020)

4.2.1 Organisational Structure

Organisational structure changes have been made to better facilitate Agile Marketing. These changes have, for example, been the utilisation of cross-functional teams to answer the complex needs of marketing, close teamwork that increases transparency and moving from campaigns to continuous work.

Continuous work

Agile Marketing can be seen as a change from campaigns to a continuous and transparent way of working that justifies decisions with data. Yusoff et al. (2019) agree and add that working practices should keep evolving with the environment. Therefore, the approach differs from the traditional Waterfall model, and it is further explained in the following statement:

"One can think of an alternative to waterfall-type projects that start with the fact that there is a certain decided end result, and work is done in stages to achieve that certain end result and then that project is done. It [Agile] really differs from it [Waterfall] in many ways, for example there is no end point for a project, only a really high-level goal, not just a rule book but also certain values and what we are trying to achieve from that end. That [high-level] goal may be a bit like a The North Star: we are never going to get there but at least there is a direction to go every day." (Channel Strategist)

According to the interviews, to be able to work in the present, the company needs to develop ambitious strategic goals that employees can go back to when deciding on a course of action. It is a common practice for agile marketers to set goals that may not be reachable but align with the company's mission. For example, the company can have a goal of reaching all their customers daily. This may not be achievable, but the company can strive towards the goal every day by assigning tasks like creating social media content for different target groups and creating new touchpoints. In practice, they can identify that they are not reaching a target age group of millennials, therefore, deciding to create a company TikTok account; this aligns with the high-level goal of reaching customers every day.

The key capability has been to accept the uncertainty and be ready to act on the changes. This has required businesses to be present at all times, which has led many to abandon the project way of working and move towards continuous improvement. This means that companies that have previously focused on creating only a few bigger campaigns in a year with clear start and end dates are falling behind. In today's society, companies are expected to be present at all times and continuously test which marketing approaches are working at the time. This has led many of the interviewees to move from set campaigns to longer partnerships. Interviewed channel strategist sums up the following:

"Let's take small steps forward all the time in a world where big steps are getting harder and harder to make."

In this context, small steps refer to companies constantly working towards a bigger goal that reflects the company's core strategy rather than striving to complete a project by the end date. This continuous work can be done through iterating and testing the marketing actions and making decisions based on the data that reflects the performance of these actions. Channel strategist gives a concrete example, where their goal is to continuously reach multiple customer groups, and in their meetings, the marketing team will

assess which type of materials they need to produce to achieve this goal. Then the material needs are divided into tasks, and when done, the materials are published. In addition, the company can analyse the performance of certain marketing material such as social media posts and reflect on the results. This way, the company can alter the marketing plan according to the data, rather than prepare a campaign for months and hope it performs well.

Close teamwork for transparency

A reoccurring keyword in the interviews used to describe Agile Marketing was transparency. Cass links transparency with Agile marketing as it works as a mechanism for having conversations with the team and the stakeholders. Hein agrees, stating:

"Agile to me means a lot of transparency."

The Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) includes transparency as one of the first principles, along with "close alignment and quality interactions with internal and external customers." Interviewees report that by increasing the interactions with their clients, they were able to increase transparency. In the more traditional way, marketers have agreed on a result and later present the ready work to the clients. In contrast, in an agile approach, it is more common to work with the client in workshops or meetings to better the unfinished work towards the goal together. This way, the client can make changes and has a transparent view of the process. Also in the literature, Brinker (2016) recommends the agile marketing approach as a way to increase transparency.

Cross-functional and diverse teams

Multiple interviewees report the benefits of organising in cross-functional teams, as gaining different perspectives that lead to creative and unique ideas and solutions. Cross-functional teams include professionals from multiple fields of study with diverse experiences. For example, a marketing team can be a combination of graphic designers, analysts, content creators and video producers, etc. The key is to leverage the unique skillsets and experiences

toward a common goal. The concrete benefits of organising in cross-functional teams will be further explained in section 4.5.

4.3 Implementation of Agile Marketing

The implementation of Agile Marketing demands a mindset change from the marketers. Interviewed channel strategist summarises the idea in the following statement:

"Agile Marketing is organising of marketing in a way that accepts that we do not know what the future will bring, so we are organised in a way that we are able to react and move proactively towards our company's goals."

Therefore, Agile Marketing can be seen as a mindset change from resisting or discarding the change to accepting and taking advantage of it. Johnson reports similarly:

"People do not know the answer to everything, especially in start-ups, and it is not a bad thing - it is just the reality. Things change so quickly, even if you think you know the answer; today or tomorrow, next week or next month something will be different and not taking advantage of that would be short-sighted and a disadvantage. You are wasting an opportunity to improve if you do not use agile."

The most common reason for implementing agile marketing is in response to the changing marketing environment. These findings were similar to the research articles written by Lewnes (2021) and Sommer (2019), which report that Lego and Adobe implemented an agile marketing approach to better cope with the new challenges brought by the fast pace of change. The majority of interviewees describe Agile Marketing as "giving tools to manage the chaos"; however, some lean more toward the description of "giving tools to *tolerate* the chaos".

Often companies with a traditional marketing approach feel stuck, or they are unable to satisfy the customer needs and are looking for a way to stay competitive. This is also discussed in the literature by Vassileva (2017), who agrees that the rapidly changing customer needs have become increasingly complex. Commonly a company faces issues with quality or inefficient working methods that result in waste of budgets. The interview data showed problems with increased tasks per employee, for example, due to content marketing. The old processes are not efficient enough to keep up with the new trends and customer needs, such as reaching customers on new social media platforms. The issues come from excessive planning that makes it difficult for marketers to react fast, for example, to new platform trends like Tiktok, which can lead to the loss of competitiveness. Vitikainen summarises these issues:

"Company is no longer in the same cycle with the customer."

However, according to interview data, companies are not likely to seek Agile Marketing as a concept. Hein emphasises that managers often feel stuck in the changing environment and seek a change of approach instead of directly wanting to become agile. The agile consultant reports that companies that struggle with their marketing are often not aware of the different approaches and are more likely to adapt to the change in unspecific ways. The old economy does not yet recognise the potential of the agile approach as well as start-ups and technology companies. Hein predicts the future trend to go more towards companies seeking Agile Marketing when its visibility grows.

4.4 Frameworks Cause Resistance

Agile Marketing can be implemented in a structured way by using frameworks such as Scrum, Kanban or Lean. However, according to the interview data, the unstructured or hybrid way was mostly used; in these cases, the companies adapted Agile Marketing values and principles without a particular framework. Mäkinen and others state that often employees feel that frameworks require too much commitment, and that leads to resistance. For example, some interviewees from

marketing agencies reported that their clients did not want to implement frameworks since it required learning a new process.

Scrum was widely criticised for being too structured for marketing purposes. Especially in the implementing phase using strict frameworks was found to result in resistance and loss of motivation amongst employees. Hein described Scrum as “an overhead that marketing cannot afford” due to the many rules associated with the Scrum framework. This differs from Cervone’s (2011) description, which suggests Scrum to rather eliminate bureaucracy and increase productivity. Vitikainen reports similarly to Cervone (2011) as her team found Scrum helpful in teams that worked part-time since it provided clear deadlines, better control, and more accurate estimations regarding available time resources.

According to the data, Kanban is the most popular out of the three frameworks previously discussed: Scrum, Kanban and Lean. However, it is still primarily used in a hybrid setting where the company implements only some aspects. The Kanban board is especially useful for visualizing work, which is similarly described by Anderson (2010) in his article. Brinker (2016) also supports the use of the Kanban board in marketing activities. In contrast, some interviewees also reported that they had implemented Agile Marketing by developing their own customised frameworks. Data shows that this is often done by borrowing aspects from the existing frameworks such as Kanban and Scrum.

4.5 Benefits of Agile Marketing

The interview data shows strong links between the Agile Marketing approach and employee satisfaction. Many variables associated with the Agile Marketing approach, such as stronger communication, transparency, increased collaboration, and teamwork, were reported to improve employee motivation and satisfaction. These findings support the results found in Sommer’s paper that researched the implementation of Agile Marketing in the Lego group. Sommer (2019) found employees to be more motivated and engaged, leading to increased efficiency. The

interviews also highlighted that employee satisfaction could be crucial in terms of keeping a talented workforce.

According to the interviews, a concrete example of what drives employee satisfaction and better quality of work are cross-functional and diverse teams. This was also suggested by Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) to avoid channel conflicts and create coherence. Also, the second principle of the Agile Marketing Manifesto (2020) encourages to “seek out different and diverse points of view”, and the sixth principle advises to “organise in small, cross-functional teams where possible.” In the interview, Mäkinen underlines the importance of diversity by saying:

“The more diverse the team, the more surprising and interesting things we are able to make. Without multidisciplinary teams, you won’t get the crazy ideas.”

Mäkinen continues by stating that the difference between successful, mediocre, and poor performance are significant and that only around twenty per cent are able to succeed in marketing. To succeed, the company needs new ideas to grab attention, and it is best achieved in diverse teams. An example of one of these successful ideas is Mäkinen’s case of the Finnish city of Lahti. They created a series of actions that aimed to gather international media attention for the city of Lahti and promote it as the environment capital of the world. These actions included offering skiing equipment for locals during snowy days, remote workplaces in a forest during COVID-19 and making beer out of goose excrement to promote sustainability. They were able to reach over 3.2 billion people mainly through earned media and CNN mentioning Lahti as their top ten most attractive destinations.

Johnson adds that the Agile Marketing approach helps marketers to bring employees outside of the discipline to be part of a marketing team. According to the interviewed channel strategist, this is important since marketing agencies and their clients, as well as other consultants, agencies, and professionals can be working around the same goal. Therefore, it is essential to facilitate a working environment where everyone can contribute to the common goal. The interviewee recalls a positive change after implementing Agile methods where the teams are closer, and the hierarchy has decreased.

The teamwork internally and with possible client companies according to data has improved. Especially the point of delivering value early was reported to bring the teams and clients closer and break barriers which resulted in better collaboration. Delivering value early means in practice that marketers communicate and collaborate with their clients at every step of the process. This can mean for example showing first drafts of the wanted slogans rather than waiting to present the final version. Constant communication assures the direction of the process, decreases the number of long progress meetings, and gives the client an opportunity to be a part of the creation process. The teams are encouraged to introduce unfinished ideas and include all the stakeholders in the process from the start to get real-time feedback, saving resources as it helps the process stay in the wanted direction. The opposite of this is the traditional way where marketers present the final ideas after limited collaboration during the process. In this case, there is a risk of customer dissatisfaction since they have not been able to contribute to the final deliverables during the process. Kennedy recalls positive feedback from the clients regarding their use of the Agile Marketing approach, especially in transparency and increased teamwork.

Overall, Kennedy comments on the use of Agile Marketing:

“Easier to proceed with the clients and comment on which direction to go and therefore the results are better and the process more efficient.”

On top of increased reaction speed, employee satisfaction, and transparency, some businesses have gained a competitive advantage as service providers. Marketing agencies have started to brand themselves according to their ways of working. Reportedly, some have gained clients based on their approach that facilitates closer client relations, in this case, the Agile Marketing approach.

4.6 Challenges of Agile Marketing

According to the interview data, the change of mindset is found to be the most challenging part of implementing Agile Marketing. Most of the interviewees reported similar issues.

“Problems are rarely about the tools but rather from the fact that the company needs to profanely change their values and leadership.” (Vitikainen)

Agile Marketing requires work and flexibility when implemented. Employees and managers often need to change their routines and mindsets to benefit from the approach. Managers are recommended to move away from an authoritative leading style and toward a coaching style, resembling a team member like relationship. Especially, according to Vitikainen, leadership takes time to adjust and requires total commitment. Since everything starts from the leadership, it is crucial to have everyone on board with the change. Cervone (2011) also emphasises thorough training of Agile methods, like the Scrum framework, for managers and employees before implementation.

Employee resistance or uncertainty is an occurring theme around the challenges when implementing Agile Marketing, according to the interviews. In contrast, these findings were not reported in the research literature. Resistance often occurs in cases where the company is transforming towards an Agile approach. Kennedy, who works in a company that has always used an Agile approach, has not faced these issues. On the other hand, she recalls that some clients have had concerns about the approach in regard to it taking more time than traditional ways of working. However, after some time, the clients have seen benefits like work that better aligns with their wishes since the client is more incorporated with the process. Resistance and concerns often come from not understanding the core idea of the Agile Marketing approach:

“People might assume that it [Agile Marketing] is just a pile of frameworks and tools, and the leadership, as well as the employees, should not disregard the core values and principles.” (Vitikainen)

However, changing employee mindsets can be difficult. Especially in marketing agencies where the employees are expected to show unfinished work and change their perspectives from working with a client to working with a team member. In an Agile Marketing method, it is acceptable to show unfinished work since it is seen as a reassurance that the team is moving in the wanted direction, which can save the team from completing unnecessary work. The interviewed channel strategist feels that the change is positive and facilitates better teamwork but recognizes that this change can cause resistance. Kennedy agrees by stating that it takes courage from employees to be able to present unfinished work to a client.

Overall, the direction from the marketing agency side is toward closer teamwork with the client, but the mindset change on both sides may take time. Mäkinen comments that customers have become more “rigid, bureaucratic, slower, and hierarchic” over the years, which slows down the process on both sides. In fact, the company needs often seem to clash with the marketing professionals’ views when “our job is to sell them these [agile] services, but the reality is that at the same time they [clients] want measurability and predictability but that makes everything slower” (Mäkinen). This was also mentioned by Cass, who found the agency setting particularly difficult for Agile teams if the other side is not using an Agile method. As previously stated in this study, Agile Marketing brings the earlier mentioned benefits to teamwork and collaboration, but despite this, the interviewees report difficulties in getting clients on board.

5. CASE EXAMPLES

In this section the paper will examine three cases where a company has used Agile Marketing, to showcase a real-world example of the implementation. The cases will be analysed by comparing them to the aforementioned findings of the interviews. This will give the exploratory research tangibility through real-world examples and

better demonstrate the practicalities of Agile Marketing. The companies have been chosen from different fields of business to provide a better understanding of Agile Marketing across different industries.

5.1 Case 1: Logistics Software Company

Company X sells logistics software that helps organisations with large vehicle fleets stay compliant with the local traffic requirements and ensure that the vehicles are safe and legal to operate. The company's goal was to break into a niche market of emergency vehicles.

Agile Marketing

The company chose to use an Agile Marketing approach to break into the market. First, the discovery phase had an initial hypothesis that if the target customers, operations managers, knew about the product, they would automatically want to purchase it. However, after validating the hypothesis by consulting the potential buyers, this was found to be false as the operations managers did not identify enough value in the product. With this information, the company realised that they needed to determine the correct people to market to. In other words, the company needed to get closer to the people whom the product brought value. Relationships with these key personnel needed to be well developed to ultimately influence the operations managers. To find the key personnel, they first studied the customer journey and experimented to discover whom the product brought the most value. However, the goal was not to sell the product to these key people but rather to gather data from them.

The company tested many hypotheses around finding the right people. For example, building a relationship with the patients in the emergency vehicles was not found beneficial, as the product did not bring direct value to them. With iterative testing, the company narrowed the key personnel to be engineers. Even though they did not possess any direct purchasing powers, it was still crucial that the engineer wanted to use the software, which made them an essential part of the purchase decision. Building a relationship with the engineers was a necessary step in reaching the operations managers who had the purchasing power. These findings were

concluded through testing hypotheses such as: whether the engineers wanted to have a relationship with Company X and if the engineer's opinion about a new supplier, Company X, would influence the top decision-makers who had the purchasing power. The gathered data showed a positive correlation.

The next objective was to find how to build these relationships. Since engineers spent most of their hours working with the vehicles, they were difficult to reach. It was found that the engineers repairing emergency vehicles needed to have a certain certificate. Company X started to test several potential touchpoints to reach this specific target group. One of the touchpoints was trade shows, but since the engineers mainly attended workshops and seminars, it was difficult for company X to reach the engineers in this setting. Another experiment involved sending direct marketing material to the certified engineers, such as shirts and letters, but this also failed to strengthen the relationship.

Through research, it was revealed that the certified engineers organized informal meetups amongst their peers where they discussed possible problems in their field. It became clear after running an experiment that these meetings were an easy way to capture the engineer's attention. This led company X to send their employees to attend these meetings. It was found that rather than pitching or selling, the most effective way of marketing and relationship building was to be around the engineers in a relaxed setting.

The meetups also provided a vast amount of valuable information about the engineers' everyday problems, resulting in beneficial data for company X. The data showed that the company should develop a solution specifically for emergency vehicle repair. To further validate the needs, company X contacted their existing customer base of two companies and experimented on how they would react to a hypothetical offering, constructed from the information gathered from the engineers. The validation phase was done through a customer support team that examined if the needs reported from the engineers were specific to one case or relevant across the emergency vehicle market.

When the reported needs were discovered to be relevant across the emergency vehicle niche, company X used cross-functional collaboration by sending the information gathered by the marketers to the product developers. The product developers were part of the delivery phase by modifying the software according to the needs. Functionally the original product remained similar, but the developers modified the language to be more suitable for the specific field and added features specifically designed for emergency vehicles. Also, the company found that the emergency vehicle regulations differed based on the state. With accurate data, the company was able to update the software according to the targeted area's regulations, which was also something their competitors did not offer. These modifications were able to elevate the product to gain a competitive advantage through differentiation. This led the engineers to advocate the product to their top managers. Also, when company X contacted the decision-makers, they were able to differentiate from their competitors by offering specialized products catered to their needs. These actions led the company to have a significantly greater conversion rate and increase in revenue.

Traditional marketing

Suppose company X had chosen to use traditional marketing; they would have assigned the marketing team to propose a unique selling proposition for the original logistics software. Without the agile iterative testing process, it is not likely that the company would have specified the product for emergency vehicles which would have led to the loss of potential. In this case, only the campaign's success would have been assessed. This proposes multiple issues such as not being able to pinpoint why the campaign was or was not successful and can lead to wasted budgets if the mistakes are repeated.

Analysis

Agile Marketing emphasizes focusing on creating customer value; therefore, the company using an agile approach started the marketing planning by identifying target people for their company, not necessarily the buyers, but the actual product users. The iterative testing process was a key factor in finding and reaching the engineers that were able to give valuable data on their needs. With an agile approach, testing in an iterative manner and validating hypotheses, the company

was able to identify concrete issues by using the gathered data. They were then able to identify real customer pains and solve them rather than create non-existent ones. The company leveraged cross-functional teams and moved the information from the users to product development to better the company's offering according to customer needs and enhance customer value. The process was lightly planned to allow the iteration results to direct the actions.

With a traditional approach, the company would not have had the data needed to modify their offering, which eventually led the company to acquire more sales. Another problem with a traditional approach is with, for example, campaigns conducted without testing and iteration; it is difficult to pinpoint the success factors and utilize them in repetitions. With an Agile Marketing approach, the data gathered through iterations gives results that can be broken into parts and analysed to find the success factors in specific situations. This element helps marketers repeat the successful work, in this case communicating with the engineers. The notable difference between the Agile Marketing approach contrarily to traditional marketing was that with an agile method, the marketing team had actual data to support their decision making.

5.2 Case 2: Entrepreneur Support Organisation

A Yukon based Entrepreneur support organisation's mission is to support the development of start-ups in local areas. The area did not have many start-ups, and the organisation's goal was to increase innovation in the community and encourage people to start businesses by funding new projects. An additional goal was to encourage aspiring entrepreneurs to move to Yukon. In this case, the organisation hoped to attract new partners to fund the projects and work with them in the start-ups that would come from the organisation. The organisation had two existing partners but wanted to widen their circle since they were unable to use the same ones, as they already supported them with significant funding. The end goal for the organisation was to diversify the partner base so that they would not have to rely on such few companies.

Agile Marketing

An Agile Marketing approach was selected for this case. First, the organization had to identify which companies would be interested in sponsoring their work. They utilized a relationship map to help determine which companies would be most likely to fund them. Through the discovery phase, they found that the optimal way was to build value propositions around the type of program they were running and approach companies specifically relevant to that type of program. For example, one of the programs in the organization involved 3D- graphics and design: since there is a lot of oil extraction in Yukon and the local companies needed newly designed equipment relevant to the industry. Another program was built around tourism since Yukon has a long snow season but not many tourists and they wanted to increase innovation around the theme to attract visitors. Next, they ran experiments to specify the value proposition of each individual program in a particular type of company. This led the organization to identify multiple companies in the area that would be fit for the value proposition.

In the validating phase, they were able to narrow down the options into the five most promising companies. These companies were chosen based on their core values and alignment with the organization's values. These findings were done with a combination of desk research and conducting interviews with the prospects. Testing their hypothesis was a big part of the interviews. These hypotheses were, for example: "If we were to run a program that is focused on x would you be interested in being involved in something like this?". The feedback was helpful and gave additional data to determine, for example, at what times the companies decided their budgets and what type of programs they were willing to support. This feedback was then transferred back to the organization that was able to modify its offerings according to the data. For example, the organization set up multiple new start-up programs that would align with the prospects' interests, such as programs dedicated to women or specific fields.

Another crucial finding through the interviews was that the potential funders wanted to know who else was supporting the organisation. They found that if they mentioned that a specific company Y supported them, others would be more likely to do so as

well. The organisation set a system to test this with other prospects and found a positive correlation.

The results showed that by customizing their offerings with the data gathered through the iterative testing process, the entrepreneur support organisation was able to gain more partners than previously.

Traditional Marketing

Traditionally marketers are asked to develop a marketing campaign to drive sales by a specific date. The concrete deliverables can be a TV advertisement, webpage, social media post, etc. Especially email campaigns, where the goal is to get the reader to click on a website, are popular due to the low costs. However, the click-through rate is often extremely low since the receivers often fail to identify any value in the message. Therefore, the success of this style is difficult to predict. Furthermore, it is not likely that the conversion rate would have been at the same level as with agile, based on the responses the company gathered during the first round of interviews. At that time, many prospects did not find suitable programs in the organization that they would have been willing to fund.

Suppose the entrepreneur support organization had chosen to use a traditional marketing strategy. In that case, there is a possibility that without the iterative testing process, the marketing team would not have had the information to specify the value proposition of each individual program for a particular type of company. This part was a crucial success factor, as it helped the company define their offering according to the target company rather than staying on the general level of being an entrepreneur support organization looking for funding.

Analysis

Using an agile approach that involved iterative testing and gathering data helped the organisation increase their conversion rate and therefore succeed in getting funding. The findings from the data, such as finding that by mentioning company Y, the organization was more likely to get other companies on board, were crucial success factors. In addition, by interviewing prospective customers, the organization was able to create real customer value through setting up programs that would benefit both

parties. Emphasizing customer value, data usage, and iterative testing are fundamental principles of Agile Marketing that were applied successfully in the case.

These case studies are examples where the use of Agile Marketing has directly impacted the company's performance through adaptation to the market. These findings support the conceptual framework introduced in section 2.5, constructed based on the literature review.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Main Findings

The main findings of this study will be presented through the research questions introduced in section 1.3. As the format of this study is exploratory research, the main themes from the interviews are visible in the findings and conclusion.

R1: What are the key changes in the marketing environment in the digital era?

The findings of this study regarding the key changes in the marketing environment can be summarized in three categories that all stem from the fast pace of global technological advancements. The first key theme for marketers is the change in customer journeys that has increased the power of customers. This has driven companies to leverage data to track customers to stay competitive. The second theme is the increase in distribution channels that has expanded the workload of marketers and made long term plans insufficient for companies that aim to respond to new trends and emerging channels. Finally, the third theme covers the causes of globalization and digitalization, where the scale of matters has changed; the marketers who are able to create media grabbing content can benefit from internet word of mouth to reach audiences across the internet relatively affordably. The findings conclude that the marketing environment is becoming increasingly complex and demanding during the digital era.

R2: How are marketing professionals responding to changes in the marketing environment?

The study concludes that the interviewed marketing professionals have found Agile Marketing to help “manage the chaos”, that is the fast-paced and complex marketing environment. The fundamentals of Agile Marketing, such as iterative testing and short cycles, have helped marketers to validate their hypotheses and become flexible with their plans. By validating the hypothesis, marketers are aware of the current customer needs and can respond accordingly, therefore enhancing the customer-centricity of their business. With shorter cycles and avoiding excessive planning, the company is more agile and changes in the marketing environment have become less disruptive as the responsiveness has increased.

R3: Does the use of Agile Marketing enhance the performance of marketing units/agencies?

The case studies and the interviews indicate a positive correlation between Agile Marketing and enhanced performance. This is mainly due to the processes that emphasize customer centricity and iterative testing, continuously improving the company’s offerings according to the gathered data. These changes from traditional to Agile Marketing has, in the discussed cases, increased the performance, competitiveness, or profits of the companies in question.

R4: What are the challenges associated with Agile Marketing?

The main challenge when implementing Agile Marketing is change management. Employees can resist change for multiple reasons, such as uncertainty or lack of knowledge of the topic. The second challenge is found in agency settings, where the customer companies have become increasingly bureaucratic, which has made it difficult for marketing professionals to implement new agile ways of working despite its benefits.

6.2 Implications for International Business

The findings and analysis include both Finnish and foreign respondents, which broadens the scope of research outside of Finland. The foreign respondents are limited to three unique experiences from the US, Germany, and Canada. The

interview data did not reveal notable differences based on the country of origin. However, due to the small sample size in each foreign country, the study has limitations, and it is not able to provide sufficient evidence that these results are liable in an international context.

However, the aforementioned changes in the marketing environment are a global phenomenon which makes the topic of Agile Marketing notable in the international markets. Therefore, this topic is relevant across the borders, and Finnish marketing professionals are part of a local phenomenon rather than local. Furthermore, marketers across the globe are battling with the same phenomena of an increasingly complex and connected world.

Also, an aspect to consider is the increased globalization. The companies that are able to succeed and gain a competitive advantage in the current complex marketing environment, no matter the nation, can also compete with the local companies. Therefore, it is essential to investigate outside the borders to stay competitive. The findings show that Finnish marketers are using an Agile Marketing approach and other marketers from other countries are as well; therefore, they can be experiencing similar benefits and challenges. This study, even though including a majority of interviewees from Finland, can be used as a basis to study other nations as well.

6.3 Limitations of Research

This study can be considered limited to a small sample size of five Finnish marketing professionals and three foreign marketing professionals. However, according to Patton (2002), semi-structured in-depth interviews are able to give an in-depth understanding of the topic if the participants are information-rich, like in this study.

Also, the interviewees are essentially from marketing agencies, with only a few with perspective from the client-side or company's marketing unit. Therefore, the reader should be aware of the limited perspective of this study.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

The literature review concluded that it would be beneficial to determine measurements and an evaluation scale for Agile Marketing to better understand the impact of it. However, the results found from the interview data were inconclusive, where every respondent either used different methods or did not use any measurement metrics. Therefore, this study suggests future research to determine the optimal way of evaluating and measuring the results of implementing Agile Marketing.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked in the marketing industry?
2. What is your current role and how would you describe it?
3. Have you seen a change in the marketing industry in recent years following the digital revolution?
4. How have you or your company adapted to the change?
5. Are you familiar with Agile Marketing?

6. Yes

6.1 Has your company or a company you work at used an Agile Marketing approach? If yes, for how long?

Yes

6.3 What is Agile Marketing to you or your company?

6.4 Who was involved, the whole company or only the marketing unit?

6.5 When did you first implement Agile Marketing?

6.6 Why was Agile Marketing implemented?

6.7 How have you been a part of the implementation of Agile Marketing?

6.8 How is Agile Marketing implemented?

- Unstructured or structured approach?

6.9 (Where) have you seen benefits?

6.10 (Where) have you faced challenges?

6.11 (With what) How do you or how does your company measure the effects of Agile Marketing?

No

6.12 How would you describe Agile Marketing?

6.13 Can you tell why doesn't your company use an Agile Marketing approach?

6.14 Do you see the implantation as a challenge?

6.15 Is there possible benefits for not implementing Agile Marketing?

6. No

7. What would you say are the key factors to stay competitive during the digital era?

8. How do you or your company achieve these?

9. What to you or to your company have been the biggest challenges in the digital era in marketing?

10. Do see any specific trends for your main market or home country when it comes to Agile Marketing?

11. What else would you like to share? What have we not focused on?