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## **“Tourist consumer-driven agility: A framework for tourism marketing”**

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### **1 Introduction: Marketing Environment and Consumer Behavior in Digital Era**

Advancements in digital technologies have created a user-friendly interactive market and social environment for tourist consumers to more easily and efficiently create relationships, access information, complete transactions, and engage and interact online with tourism destinations and suppliers (Morrison, 2019). Business reports and intelligence suggest that tourism and digital technologies are fashioned for each other as these technologies are capable of adding value to all stages of tourism experience by offering interactive, supportive and engaging information (OECD, 2018; Deloitte Access Economics, 2019; Reportlinker, 2020). Consumers of all age groups were found to use SM platforms for all digital activities through their customer journey (Reportlinker, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2021). Likewise, tourist consumers constantly evolve, being influenced by and more dependent on social media (SM), digital platforms and user-generated content (UGC) by other individuals, and simultaneously influencing market trends, aspirations and expectations (Park et al. 2019). Given the experiential nature of tourism, it is believed that digital platforms and SM will continue to strongly influence tourists' decision-making (Cohen et al. 2014; Lu et al. 2018; Liu et al. 2020). SM, mobile devices, and travel apps with blogging, live-streaming and pictures sharing in turn exert considerable influence on the decision making of tourists and play an important role in supporting tourism-related activities (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019; Park et al. 2019). Tourism destinations and suppliers are increasingly utilizing the same platforms and channels to connect and engage consumers for various management and marketing purposes (Sotiriadis, 2017; Morrison, 2019). Tourism marketers have to better understand tourists' behavior, modify and their marketing strategies to co-evolve with digital technologies (Font & McCabe, 2017). The agile methodology is regarded as a valuable approach to address the related issues in the context of a digitalized market environment. The present conceptual paper constitutes an endeavor to suggest a workable framework interrelating the tourists' requirements to the actions of marketing communications through the agile marketing approach. The study aims to answer the question of “How can the agile marketing could be used more effectively in obtaining a mutually beneficial balance between the visitors' expectations and the tourism suppliers' offering of experiences?”. To address this question, a conceptual model is suggested, drawn on the theoretical bases of consumer decision journey (CDJ) (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Yachin, 2018) and of the model of 8Ps for integrated services marketing strategies (Kotler et al. 2019, Morrison, 2019). It is posited that the agile approach is the bridge/link between the requirements of consumers through the four stages CDJ and the marketing activities based on the 8Ps model. The ultimate aim is to provide guidance for marketers in designing and implementing marketing strategies in a flexible and adaptive manner.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Agile Marketing

Marketing agility is defined as the extent to which an organisation/company rapidly iterates between making sense of the market and executing marketing decisions to adapt to the market (Kalaigianam et al. 2021). Nowadays, digital technology allows marketers to engage in innovative new ways to meet consumers' needs far more effectively. But taking advantage of the new possibilities enabled by digital, marketers have to become agile (Edelman et al. 2016). Agile, in the marketing context, means using data and analytics to continuously source promising opportunities or solutions to problems in real time, deploying tests quickly, evaluating the results, and rapidly iterating. The agile methodology is an iterative, incremental process, constantly working with customer feedback; hence, is regarded as a valuable approach to addressing and responding quickly to changes in the market. Agile strives for simplicity, releasing things early and often, and iterating based on market reactions. The goals of Agile Marketing are to improve the speed, predictability, transparency, and adaptability to change of the marketing function (Agile marketing, 2017). AM involves anticipating and responding to early signs of change and turning them into an opportunity to either tap into the new market or expand the share in the existing market. Therefore, this approach enhances to adapt and respond to the market faster, identify and prioritize high-impact activities faster and deliver customer-centric outcomes

All principles of agile marketing methodology stand for effective tourism marketing. As Edelman et al (2016) underline, there are a number of prerequisites for agile marketing to work. An organization must have a clear sense of what it wants to accomplish with its agile initiative (e.g., which customer segments it wants to acquire or which CDJs it wants to improve) and have sufficient data, analytics, and the right kind of marketing-technology infrastructure in place. The main means is the analysis of the data to identify the opportunities in order to develop insights based on targeted analytics. The insights should aim to identify anomalies, pain points, issues, or opportunities in the DCJ of key customer or prospect segments (Edelman et al. 2016). Based on the above synoptic discussion, this paper argues that the AM is an adequate approach in the field of tourism marketing.

## 3. A Blended Approach: A Framework based on Two Models

The paper's aim is to propose a framework for implementing the agile marketing methodology in the tourism field. This framework was drawn on two models - i.e., the CDJ and 8Ps of services marketing, that are briefly presented in the following subsections.

### 3.1. Consumer/Customer Journey in Digital Era

Digital platforms and SM play a critical role in consumers' decision-making in the general social and market environment (Cohen et al. 2014; Sotiriadis, 2017). They are used by tourists as decision support tools in selecting the various components of their trip/holidays (Liu et al. 2020). In temporal terms, these choices occurred through the CDJ (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Yachin, 2018). Literature suggests that the CDJ consisted of four main stages: (i) consider; (ii) evaluate and buy; (iii) enjoy the experience; and (iv) post-consumption with support/advocate and bond. This study applies the above model and focuses on the implementation of marketing activities by tourism destinations and suppliers when there are going through their decision-

making process through the whole CDJ (pre-trip, during and post-trip). Table 1 depicts the four stages along with the consumers' actions and digital platforms' influences.

**Table 1.** The Consumer Decision Journey and Influence by Digital platforms

Stages	Digital platforms' influences and Consumers' actions
Consider	Tourist consumers consider an initial set of destinations, based on perceptions and exposure to various media and digital platforms.
Evaluate & buy	Tourist consumers adopt a set of criteria and evaluate the various options. Then, they purchase through digital platforms.
Enjoy the experience	Ongoing exposure on and through digital platforms. Tourists are enjoying the experience itself on destination. It is the actual visit of a place and platforms affect the choices related to activities on-site.
Advocate and Bond	Post-consumption experience: They share reviews and make recommendations and provide support. on various digital platforms

Source: Edelman (2010), Hudson & Thal (2013), Dimitriou & AbouElgheit (2019).

The study by Liu et al. (2020) examined the roles of SM - Need Generator, Supporter, Guider and Approver - in tourists and their choices regarding to each tourism component. Previous studies also highlighted the interinfluence between the various stages. From a marketing perspective and consumer behavior, the designed and implemented actions (strategies and tactics) by tourism destinations and suppliers aim to communicating and influencing the above digital activities performed by consumers, through the four stages of CDJ (Kotler, et al. 2019).

### 3.2 Marketing Implementation: The Marketing Mix

The approach of destination/tourism supplier marketing planning involves setting marketing objectives, crafting a marketing plan, monitoring the implementation of the plan and reporting on progress (control), evaluating the effectiveness of the marketing plan and measuring the performance (Morrison, 2019). DMOs and suppliers use the marketing plan as a guide for implementing their selected marketing activities. All tourism marketers have an arsenal of tools to use in appealing to visitors (existing and prospective). These tools are the '*Ps of marketing*'. The initial model of 4Ps was extended into an 8Ps model to address the unique aspects of marketing tourism and hospitality services (Kotler, et al. 2019). The principal tools/media are: product, price, place, promotion, packaging, programming, partnership and people. The marketing plan describes in detail how each of the 8 Ps of marketing (marketing mix) will be used for each target market to achieve that market's objectives for the upcoming period (Morrison, 2019). It is worth underlying two specific approaches. Digital marketing: It is the use of digital-format information and communication technologies (ICTs) to liaise with various audiences, to provide destination information and to promote the destination through various digital channels and techniques. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is the second approach. It is the coordination and integration of all a DMO's external communications and promotions to increase their effectiveness and consistency. The basic idea behind IMC is that an organization/company integrates all types of promotions, making sure that they are consistent in order to achieve greater effectiveness. The 8 components of marketing mix are all critical in achieving the related objectives. Therefore, there is an imperative for control/monitoring and evaluation procedures and measurements. An agile marketing plan must

include specific control and evaluation procedures and measurements for the activities. In this field the adequate evaluation measures or metrics, milestones and performance standards are very important. This crucial consideration leads us to our suggested framework.

#### 4. Proposed Framework for implementing Marketing Agility in Tourism

The suggested framework for designing and implementing the approach of agile marketing in the field of tourism comprises two pillars – consumer behaviour and marketing mix - linked by the agile marketing approach. The focus is on the left side (the tourist) for one simple reason; tourism is a consumer-driven activity. The tourists have their requirements in terms of tourism experiences; these demands are expressed with the digital activities performed through CDJ.

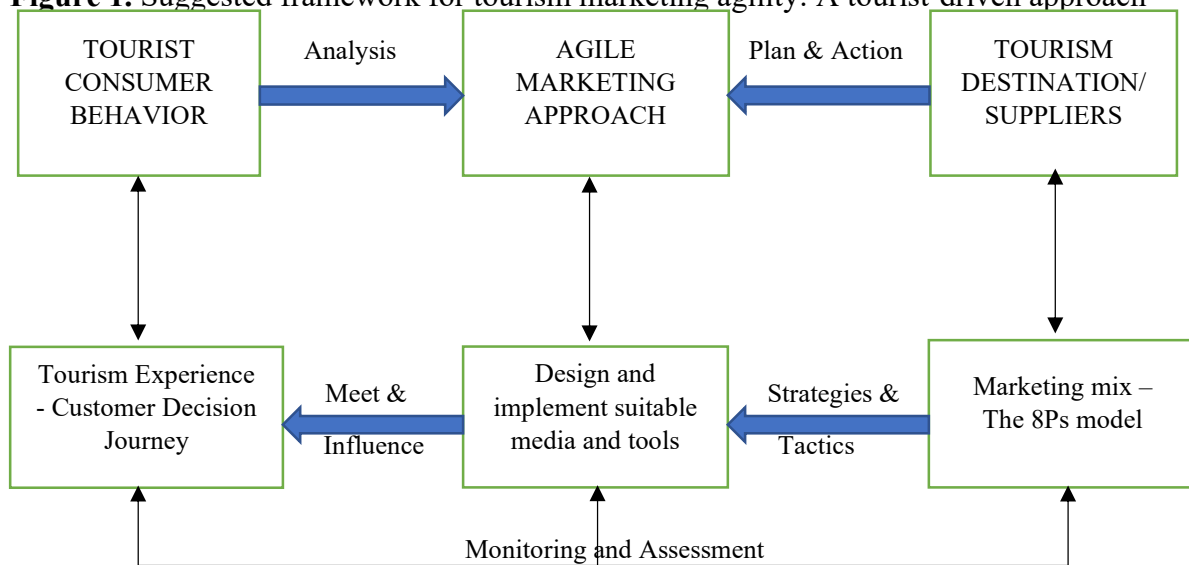
**Table 2.** Digital activities performed by tourists through the four stages of CDJ

Stage	Activities on digital platforms
Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Search on digital platforms and social networks for services</li> <li>• Make suggestions and determine the choice set of services.</li> </ul>
Evaluate & buy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify attributes to include in the selection criteria.</li> <li>• Preferences for tourism destinations and suppliers/services.</li> </ul>
Enjoy the experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using platforms as a learning tool about the visited places.</li> <li>• Digital platforms as an assisting tool/recommending guide.</li> </ul>
Support, advocate and bond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing recommendations and support</li> <li>• Sharing positive and negative practices in motivating tourists.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Sotiriadis (2017), Varkaris, & Neuhofer (2017), Wong et al. (2020).

Tourism destinations and suppliers should meet the expectations by designing and offering the appropriate set of experience opportunities and attempt to influence the tourists' digital activities by implementing the suitable marketing strategies. The communication actions should consider all available tools, based on the 8Ps model, and in an integrated manner (ICM). The main focus is on the tourists, that is the reason why the proposed framework is named tourist-driven marketing agility. The reason is simple: the needed input to perform effectively the marketing activities is coming from consumers' analytics provided on digital platforms.

**Figure 1.** Suggested framework for tourism marketing agility: A tourist-driven approach



Last, but not least, there is an imperative for monitoring the progress of marketing mix implementation, as well as evaluation of performance based on continuous feedback from tourists (data analysis). All above digital activities should be properly analysed, the digital technologies now provide the tools to do so. The approach of agile marketing is about working faster, smarter and more efficiently.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In 21st century and digitalized business and marketing environment everything changes extremely fast, it is essential to be flexible and adaptable to the market changes, to focus on business value and consumer needs in productive and cost-effective manner. The main underlying idea is flexibility and adaptability; agile allows companies to be on the move, to follow new trends and do exactly what is on demand, taking into account consumers' and market needs. Within this context, tourism destinations and suppliers have an unprecedented need for speed and flexibility. Nowadays, there is no more time to waste, and with easy access to data, DMOs and suppliers have a choice: Be agile and use data to inform quick test-and-learn activities and rapidly adjust to the market or follow the status quo and "wait for perfect". In this era of disruption DMOs and suppliers should develop the people, process, and marketing technology to adopt and implement agile marketing to improve the effectiveness of all elements and tools used. The agile approach is about putting into implementation tactics and media in a flexible and adaptable manner with the aim to increase efficiency and improve effectiveness. The suggested framework considering the topic of agility in the marketing field is a conceptual endeavor contributing to link/connect the two poles/sides (demand/consumer and supply/destination) through marketing actions.

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**MOTS-CLÉS:** Tourism experience, marketing agility, customer decision journey, integrated communications, 8Ps model.