

Marketing Agility in Volatile, Uncertain, Complex & Ambiguous (VUCA) contexts: A
Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract

Firms increasingly need to be customer-focused and adaptable to changing markets.

Marketing agility (MA), a dynamic capability, supports an organization to respond to market changes faster, often resulting in performance benefits. While MA provides advantages in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts, limited research exists that inform MA conceptualization and practice in VUCA contexts. Furthermore, conceptualization of MA has resulted in many, often overlapping, constructs. In this review, we searched four databases and used snowballing to arrive at a corpus of 27 articles. The corpus is summarised using the Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methodology framework, with an emphasis on practical implementation. From our findings, we offer propositions in response to our research question that addresses an important research gap, and future research directions are discussed. We advance theory and offer conceptual clarity by finding that MA in VUCA contexts may be reimagined using seven overarching constructs and summarizing extant literature that will benefit academics and practitioners.

Keywords

dynamic capabilities, marketing agility, sensemaking, systematic literature review, TCCM, VUCA

Data Availability Statement

We have not generated any datasets in researching and documenting this review. All data or research used in analysis has been referenced.

1. Introduction

Recent events profoundly affect both supply and demand of products and services (Liljenberg, 2022; Whelan et al., 2021), with marketing having societal and commercial roles in managing resources during significant unknown states of the market (Wilkie & Moore, 2003). When firms have needed to adapt, practitioners are progressively implementing marketing agility (MA) (Balis, 2021). Yet, there is limited research into MA (Asseraf et al., 2019) and how it is implemented during volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) markets.

MA is a dynamic capability that combines agile processes with marketing practice such as strategy formulation, planning, and implementation (Gomes et al., 2020; Osei et al., 2019) and is distinct from traditional marketing processes in that change is frequent and strategic agility is necessary for success (Asseraf et al., 2019). It makes an organization, business unit, or product line market-focused and faster to respond to market changes. This often results in market and financial performance benefits (Kalaighnam et al., 2021; Khan, 2020), and marketing is increasingly measured by performance contributions to the firm (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007).

Marketing thought may be traced to the ancient Greeks, with the subject initially considered from an economics perspective (Wilkie & Moore, 2003) while marketing as an independent topic originating in the early twentieth century (El-Ansary et al., 2018). Agile methods, however, developed in the early 1990s and gained prominence following the publishing of the Manifesto for Agile Software Development (Beck et al., 2001), and are used in many domains, including government, manufacturing, and software development (Madsen, 2020). Marketing using agile methods, MA, is a relatively new topic (Zhou et al., 2019).

Practitioners describe MA as providing advantage during different levels of VUCA (Hughes & Chandy, 2021; Lewnes, 2021), while academics note the need for researching existing theory in the context of VUCA markets, including COVID-19 (Buckley, 2020; Christianson & Barton, 2020). However, there is limited research into MA in VUCA. Furthermore, Bergkvist and Eisend (2020) note evolution of concepts and constructs via debate, evaluation, and reassessment is necessary. This is needed to avoid fragmentation whereby definitions and naming are inconsistent, thus hampering comparative research and resulting in ill-defined conceptual boundaries and concept proliferation (Suddaby, 2010; Teas & Palan, 1997).

In this study, we review extant research on MA. Reviews are valuable in providing an overview of a research domain, highlighting research gaps, and advancing conceptualization (Fisch & Block, 2018). Previous reviews of MA focused solely on international marketing (IM) (Gomes et al., 2020) and bibliometric methods (Thümler, 2023). The current study differs in considering MA as comprising domestic and international markets, and is investigated via a systematic literature review (SLR).

This study's aims are threefold: to integrate and synthesize existing MA research, identify gaps in the knowledge, and provide future research possibilities that will advance the topic's understanding (Paul et al., 2021). The aims are addressed systematically by addressing the research question; *what are the foundational constructs of MA?* The outcomes of this study may be used by practitioners in informing marketing decisions in VUCA markets, and by academics in applying a consistent framework to define and conceptualize MA and identifying areas requiring further research.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The *review approach and literature selection* section describes how the corpus was determined and collected and the data analysis methods. Findings are then provided, followed by discussion, propositions, and future research

recommendations. Finally, implications for practitioners and academics are presented. This study contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of marketing in concluding that MA comprises seven overarching constructs and aids marketing in VUCA markets.

2. Review approach and literature selection

2.1 Review approach

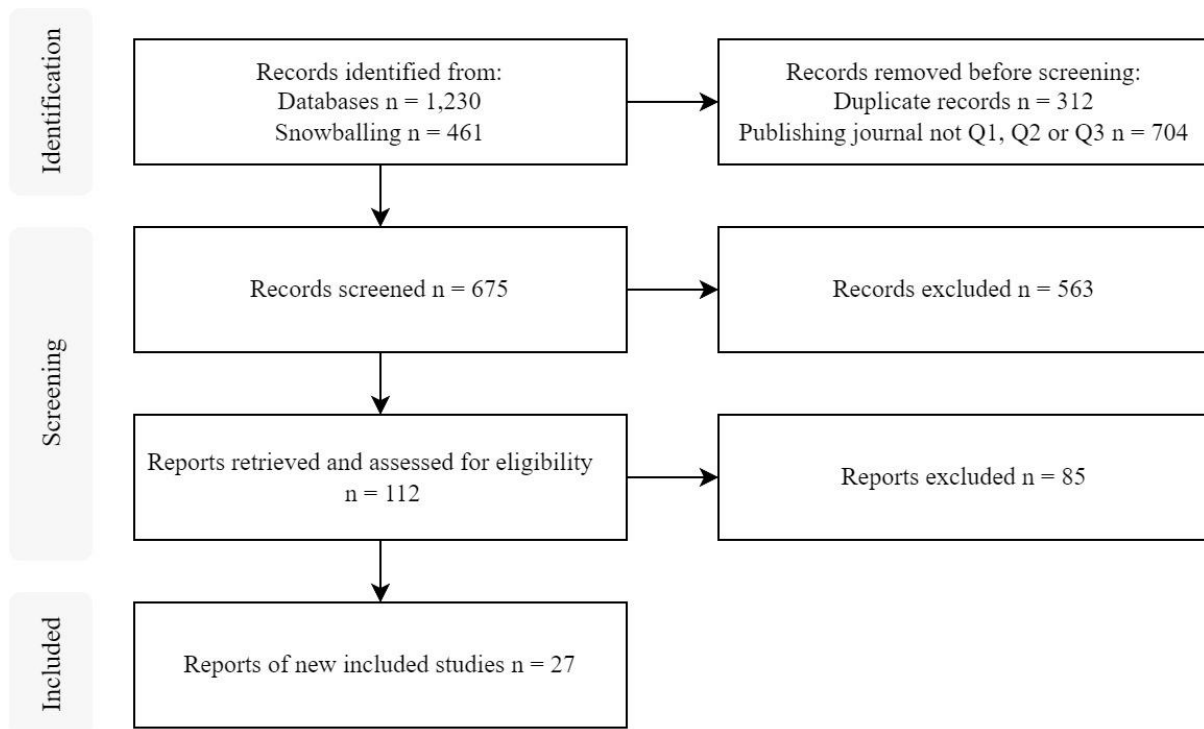
SLRs benefit from methodical literature selection and analysis (Fisch & Block, 2018; Kuckertz & Block, 2021) and, as such, this review combines the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement guidelines (Page et al., 2021) with the Theory, Construct, Characteristics, and Methodology (TCCM) framework (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). PRISMA is used in searching the literature for review and screening, while TCCM provides the framework for presenting the literature review results, with an aim of TCCM being the synthesis of past research and identification of future research opportunities. Furthermore, as theory may benefit practice (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016), we discuss practical implications reported in the literature. Relevant terms are re-interpreted across studies where appropriate for categorization and understanding. For example, Hagen et al. (2019) and Poolton et al. (2006) use the phrase *agile marketing*, which we classify as analogous to *marketing agility*.

2.2 Literature selection

The literature search and selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of review search and selection



Eligibility and ineligibility criteria were defined to search, screen, and select studies relevant to the research question. Initial data included were required to meet all of the following; contain the words *agile* or *agility*, and *marketing* in the title, abstract, or keywords fields, be published in an academic journal, constitute peer-reviewed research articles on MA, and be in the English language.

Searching was performed in September 2023 with records stored in Endnote software. A research librarian assisted in the selection of information sources and search strategies.

Preliminary search comprised both database searching and snowballing since it is agreed that the combination of database searching and snowballing results in a more thorough literature discovery (Hiebl, 2021).

The EBSCOhost, Emerald Insights, Scopus, and Web of Science database searches returned 1,230 records. Snowballing involved searching Scopus for papers containing *marketing agility* or *agile marketing* in the title field. Backward and forward snowballing was then performed using the three papers returned with the highest number of citations (Hagen et al.

(2019), Kalaignanam et al. (2021), and Zhou et al. (2019)), with snowballing discovering 461 records.

Three hundred and twelve duplicate records were subsequently identified and removed. The remaining records were then assessed whether they were published in a journal indexed and ranked as Q1, Q2 or Q3 in SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SCImago (n.d.), 2022). This resulted in the removal of 704 records, which led to 675 remaining records. The next phase involved scanning the record titles, keywords, and abstracts to determine if each record was 'in' or 'out' based on initial factors provided by Kalaignanam et al. (2021); iteration, speed, sensemaking, adaptation, and executing marketing decisions. The concepts by Kalaignanam et al. (2021) were selected as theirs was the most recent MA conceptual paper. Where we were unsure whether a record should be 'in' or 'out,' the article was considered 'in,' thereby allowing for a more inclusive review with full-text screening. One-hundred and twelve records remained after this screening.

The full text papers of the remaining records were then assessed as to whether the research focus included both marketing and agile concepts and the primary focus of the paper was marketing agility. This assessment eliminated 85 records and culminated in the corpus of 27 studies shown in Table 2.

3. Theoretical background of MA research

First, in accordance with the TCCM framework, the theoretical lenses through which MA is perceived are described. Then, countries and industries of studies that provide the context are listed, and the corpus's subject-relatedness is identified. We then move to the characteristics of the studies, including constructs and measures. Methodologies used in MA research are investigated, and finally we list recommendations for practice.

The prominent theories in the MA literature are summarised in Table 1. Marketing may be distinguished in local and international contexts (Morgan, Feng, et al., 2018), with 12 papers studying domestic markets and 15 researching an international marketing context. Nineteen articles perceive MA from a dynamic capabilities theoretical lens, and 12 consider strategic agility.

Table 1

Leading theoretical lenses in the corpus

Theoretical Lens	Count	References
Agility	18	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Hughes and Chandy (2021); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Lewnes (2021); Li et al. (2019); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021, 2022); Osei et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarba et al. (2023); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thourunroje and Racela (2021); Thrassou et al. (2018); Thümler (2023); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019); Zhou et al. (2019)
Marketing (in domestic markets)	12	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan et al. (2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2021, 2022); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thrassou et al. (2018); Thümler (2023); Zhou et al. (2019)
International marketing	15	Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Hughes and Chandy (2021); Khan (2020); Lewnes (2021); Li et al. (2019); Moi and Cabiddu (2020); Osei et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Tarba et al. (2023); Thourunroje and Racela (2021); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019)
Dynamic capabilities	19	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021, 2022); Osei et al. (2019); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thourunroje and Racela (2021); Thrassou et al. (2018); Thümler (2023); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019); Zhou et al. (2019)
Strategic agility	12	Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Li et al. (2019); Moi and Cabiddu (2022); Osei et al. (2019); Tarba et al. (2023); Thrassou et al. (2018); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019)

3.1 Agility

Agile methods emphasize speed of delivery, flexibility, collaboration, and customer engagement (Sommer, 2019), with MA combining marketing with agile capabilities (Khan, 2020; Thoumrungroje & Racela, 2021). Kalaiganam et al. (2021, p. 36) define MA as "the extent to which an entity rapidly iterates between making sense of the market and executing marketing decisions to adapt to the market," with IMA being MA in international markets (Elo & Silva, 2022; Gomes et al., 2020). MA differs from traditional marketing in that change in the business environment is rapid and dynamic (Kalaiganam et al., 2021), and MA requires flexibility in adapting to such business environments (Khan, 2020).

Advantages of MA include enhanced change and adaptation (Moi & Cabiddu, 2022), which leads to superior competitive advantage through reduced costs, increased customer satisfaction, and greater financial returns (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020; Moi & Cabiddu, 2020; Poolton et al., 2006). Lower marketing costs (Poolton et al., 2006), higher profits (Ozsomer et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2019), and higher investor valuations (Kalaiganam et al., 2021) are the additional noted advantages. Nevertheless, not all organizations will benefit from MA. For example, organizations that employ standardized product manufacturing (Li et al., 2019) and those with the need for long lead times (Abramovich, 2018, as cited in Kalaiganam *et al.*, 2020) may not be suited for MA. Furthermore, the iterative nature of MA can also cause instability and unpredictable outcomes (Khan, 2020) and dilute brand meaning through, for example, inconsistency in branding arising from the speed of marketing change (Kalaiganam et al., 2021).

Agile research often refers to the principals that encompass agility, such as the Manifesto for Agile Software Development (Beck et al., 2001). The manifesto describes guidelines that inform agile best practice in many disciplines. In addition, agile is often implemented using frameworks such as Scrum and DSDM (Sommer, 2019). Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021),

Moi and Cabiddu (2020) and Thümler (2023) reference the manifesto, and Hagen et al. (2019) and Kalaignanam et al. (2021) alone refer to agile frameworks.

3.2 Marketing and international marketing

Marketing is a broad and evolving topic (Webster & Lusch, 2013) and is defined as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association, 2017). Marketing has many perspectives, such as theoretical and philosophical (Albaum, 1992), with marketing practice consisting of three practical inter-related activities; marketing planning, strategy formulation, and implementation (Dibb et al., 2014; El-Ansary, 2006; Morgan, Whitler, et al., 2018).

Marketing planning is the structured sequence of activities that defines an organization's objectives and the actions to achieve them (Asseraf et al., 2019; Moi & Cabiddu, 2021).

Marketing strategy is “an organization’s integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives” (Varadarajan, 2010, p. 128). Marketing implementation is the processes and activities that deliver the strategy (El-Ansary, 2006). Marketing practice may differ in local and international contexts, for example, Osei et al. (2019) describe the varying challenges in the distribution of products across markets such as Ghana, South Africa, and the U.K.

International marketing is a complex subset of marketing that is differentiated by a focus on foreign markets and is typified by VUCA (Akaka et al., 2013; Buckley, 2020; Morgan, Feng, et al., 2018); for example, culture and government support may vary by foreign market (Sousa & Tan, 2015). The interrelated nature of marketing and international marketing is seen in the concepts' long and overlapping histories; Smith (1776), for example, is oft-

referenced in both marketing and international marketing studies (e.g., Chen et al. (2016) and MacInnis (2011)). Together marketing and international marketing are concerned with the marketing mix (Akaka et al., 2013; Mandler et al., 2021). The distinction between MA studies in domestic and international markets is discussed further in the following 'contexts of MA research' section.

3.3 Dynamic capabilities

Capabilities are how organizations learn and utilize assets to create a competitive advantage, with the two firm-level categories being ordinary capabilities and dynamic capabilities (Schoemaker et al., 2018; Teece, 2017). Ordinary capabilities are operations-focused, whereas dynamic capabilities are strategic and market-focused (Teece, 2017). Akin to agility, MA is a dynamic capability (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019) with dynamic capabilities focusing on the customer, flexibility, speed, and change (Osei et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2019). D.J. Teece is widely referenced in the corpus and defines dynamic capabilities as "the firm's capacity to innovate, adapt to change, and create change that is favorable to customers and unfavorable to competitors" (Teece et al., 2016, p. 18).

3.4 Strategic agility

Strategic agility is considered an antecedent to MA (Kalaiganam et al., 2021). Strategic agility is "the ability to exploit, or create to one's advantage changing patterns of resource deployment in a thoughtful and purposeful but also fast and nimble way rather than remain hostage to stable pre-set plans and existing business models" (Doz, 2020, p. 1). Asseraf et al. (2019) describe the paradox of strategic agility whereby strategy suggests committing to a particular course, whereas agile necessitates flexibility and change.

4. Contexts of MA research

Table 2 summarises each study's region and industry traits. The regions and industries studied vary, with industries ranging from large organizations to SMEs with differing industry types. Notably, Li et al. (2019) is the sole study where a portion of the sample is identified as not-for-profit organizations.

Table 2

Regions and industries studied

Article	Region of study	Industry characteristics
Alghamdi and Agag (2024) – Forthcoming	Saudi Arabia	Retailers
Asseraf et al. (2019)	Israel	Exporters with more than nine employees
Elo and Silva (2022)	Finland, Israel, former U.S.S.R. countries, U.S.A.	Diaspora entrepreneurs
Gomes et al. (2020)	International	N/A (review of prior studies)
Hagen et al. (2019)	International	Entrepreneurial internationalizers
Hajli et al. (2020)	Finland, Canada, U.K.	Digital services
Hughes and Chandy (2021)	Africa	Digital services
Kalaignanam et al. (2021)	U.S.A.	Large organizations
Khan (2020)	Pakistan	Exporters
Khan et al. (2022)	Pakistan	Entrepreneurial firms
Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021)	Jordan	Hotels
Lewnes (2021)	International	Software
Li et al. (2019)	China	Exporters with sales over US\$700k p.a. (inclusive of state-owned firms)
Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023)	Poland	Tourism and hospitality
Moi and Cabiddu (2020)	International	Large online property rental
Moi and Cabiddu (2021)	Italy	Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions tourism.
Moi and Cabiddu (2022)	Italy	Business-to-business sector
Osei et al. (2019)	U.K. and Africa	Large-sized fruit and juice supplier
Ozsoy et al. (2023)	Japan, Turkey	Multinational corporations
Poolton et al. (2006)	U.K.	SME Manufacturer
Tarba et al. (2023)	International	N/A (editorial)
Tarn and Wang (2023)	Taiwan	Service industries

Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)	Thailand	SME exporters
Thrassou et al. (2018)	Europe	Medium and large-size family businesses
Thümler (2023)	International	N/A (review of prior studies)
Vaillant and Lafuente (2019)	Spain	Entrepreneurs
Zhou et al. (2019)	China	Food processors with a turnover of more than US\$3m p.a.

Journals are primarily ranked as Q1, the top-quality quartile, and most journals publish in the marketing or business and management fields.

Table 3 shows the publishing journals, the quality of each journal per SCImago (n.d.) (2022), and the primary journal field (Archambault et al., 2011). International Marketing Review (IMR) has published six papers; five were published in an IMA special edition (volume 36, issue number 2) that included Asseraf et al. (2019), Hagen et al. (2019), Li et al. (2019), Osei et al. (2019) and Vaillant and Lafuente (2019). The term *international marketing agility* appears to have been coined in this IMR special edition. Gomes et al. (2020), in their review of the special edition papers, was later published in IMR. Journals are primarily ranked as Q1, the top-quality quartile, and most journals publish in the marketing or business and management fields.

Table 3

Journals publishing MA research

Journal	SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) Quartile	Primary Field	Article Count	Article References
Business: Theory and Practice	3	Economics	1	Thümler (2023)
International Marketing Review	1	Marketing	6	Asseraf et al. (2019); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Li et al. (2019); Osei et al. (2019); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019)

Journal of Marketing	1	Marketing	3	Hughes and Chandy (2021); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Lewnes (2021)
Industrial Marketing Management	1	Marketing	2	Hajli et al. (2020); Zhou et al. (2019)
International Business Review	1	Business & management	1	Khan (2020)
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	Sport, Leisure & Tourism	1	Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023)
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research	1	Business & management	1	(Khan et al., 2022)
International Small Business Journal	1	Business & management	1	Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)
International Studies of Management & Organization	2	Business & management	1	Thrassou et al. (2018)
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	1	Marketing	1	Moi and Cabiddu (2022)
Journal of International Marketing	1	Marketing	1	Ozsomer et al. (2023)
Journal of Management and Governance	2	Business & management	1	Moi and Cabiddu (2020)
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	1	Marketing	1	Alghamdi and Agag (2024)
Journal of World Business	1	Business & management	1	Tarba et al. (2023)
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2	Marketing	1	Poolton et al. (2006)
Problems and Perspectives in Management	3	Business & management	1	Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021)
Thunderbird International Business Review	2	Business & management	1	Elo and Silva (2022)
Tourism Management	1	Sport, Leisure & Tourism	1	Moi and Cabiddu (2021)

Besides the concentrated papers in IMR, the Journal of Marketing has published three papers in volume 85, issue number 1. The remaining papers were published in separate journals.

5. Characteristics identified in MA research

5.1 Marketing agility constructs

There are 13 constructs named in the corpus as comprising MA (termed *secondary constructs* in Table 4) that we have summarised into seven overarching constructs: marketing practice, organizational characteristics, relationships, responsiveness, robustness, speed, and sense and respond, and sensemaking. In summarizing the secondary constructs into overarching constructs, we adapted the data analysis process of Hagen et al. (2019). We first analyzed how the secondary constructs were described in the corpus and determined that seven overarching constructs were present. After broadly defining the overarching constructs, we aggregated the secondary constructs into overarching constructs. Notably, we combined *sense and respond*, and *sensemaking* as they share some properties, although extensive theory exists for each; similarities and distinctions, as in the corpus, are explained further.

Table 4

MA constructs described in the corpus

Overarching Construct	Secondary construct	Articles
Marketing practice	Product, price, promotion, etc.	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Asseraf et al. (2019); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaiganam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Li et al. (2019); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021); Osei et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Poolton et al. (2006); Thourungroje and Racela (2021); Thrassou et al. (2018); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019); Zhou et al. (2019)
Organizational characteristics	Organizational characteristics	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaiganam et al. (2021); Lewnes (2021);

		Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); (Moi & Cabiddu, 2022); Osei et al. (2019); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)
	Human resource capabilities	Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2022); Osei et al. (2019); Poolton et al. (2006)
Relationships	Co-ordination	Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hughes and Chandy (2021); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021, 2022)
	Commitment	Gomes et al. (2020)
Responsiveness	Responsiveness	Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Khan (2020); Moi and Cabiddu (2022); Osei et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarn and Wang (2023); Zhou et al. (2019)
	Iteration	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Elo and Silva (2022); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); (Khan et al., 2022); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2022)
Robustness	Robustness	Osei et al. (2019); Poolton et al. (2006)
	Flexibility	Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Gomes et al. (2020); Hagen et al. (2019); Khan (2020); (Khan et al., 2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2022); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)
	Adaptability	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)
Sense and respond, and sensemaking	Sense and respond, and sensemaking	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Elo and Silva (2022); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021); Zhou et al. (2019)
	Proactiveness	Osei et al. (2019); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarn and Wang (2023)
Speed	Speed	Asseraf et al. (2019); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021)

5.1.1 Marketing practice

Marketing practice is widely discussed from both tactical and strategic perspectives (Khan, 2020), with planning receiving limited analysis. The strategic perspective views strategic agility as a necessary precursor (Hagen et al., 2019). The tactical viewpoint is concerned with implementing strategy (Khan, 2020). Marketing activities and capabilities are central to MA decisions and actions (Khan, 2020; Thoumrungroje & Racela, 2021).

The marketing mix is commonly grouped into the 4Ps (product, price, place/distribution, promotion) and is part of, and informed by, marketing strategy (Das et al., 2021; Wichmann et al., 2021). Table 5 illustrates quantitative instruments that measure the marketing mix or strategy. Asseraf et al. (2019) note that measuring individual elements of the marketing mix is beneficial over measuring aggregate marketing constructs; all studies, where measurement instruments are available, measure individual elements however, measurement of all the marketing mix elements is restricted to three studies (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). The three studies that measure each element of the marketing mix (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019) measure the 4Ps.

Table 5

Marketing mix elements measured in quantitative studies

Element	Article	Article Count
Product	Asseraf et al. (2019); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Li et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Tarn and Wang (2023); Zhou et al. (2019)	7
Price	Khan (2020); Li et al. (2019); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)	3
Place/Distribution	Khan (2020); Li et al. (2019); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021); Zhou et al. (2019)	4
Promotion	Khan (2020); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021); Zhou et al. (2019)	4
Planning and strategy	Asseraf et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023)	2

Marketing findings in quantitative studies demonstrate that marketing program adaptation mediates the influence of MA on firm performance (Khan, 2020). Furthermore, marketing planning positively moderates MA planning flexibility, promotion adaptation is more beneficial than product adaptation, and marketing planning provides a necessary base for enabling agility and has a more significant impact than flexibility maintenance (Asseraf et al., 2019).

5.1.2 Organizational characteristics

Organizational characteristics are those internal to the organization, such as leadership, employee, team, and organizational factors (Kalaiganam et al., 2021). The features necessary to enable MA may span the entire organization, business units, or product portfolios (Gomes et al., 2020). Organizational characteristics include elements such as considering the marketing function as boundary-spanning (as opposed to a silo-based marketing function), adapting human resource processes to hire people that will support an agile process, enabling employee collaboration, and implementing technology to support successful MA (Hagen et al., 2019; Kalaiganam et al., 2021; Moi & Cabiddu, 2020, 2022; Thourunroje & Racela, 2021). Furthermore, MA positively impacts new technology adoption with complexity as a moderator (Thourunroje & Racela, 2021), and innovation capability mediates the relationship between MA and financial performance (Zhou et al., 2019).

5.1.3 Relationships

Relationships are stakeholder interactions within and external to the organization, including customers, suppliers, competitors, employees, regulatory bodies, and shareholders (Gomes et al., 2020; Moi & Cabiddu, 2020; Thourunroje & Racela, 2021). Relationships facilitate MA; Osei et al. (2019) describe the importance of relationships in the context of positive employee relations to reduce staff shortages and, with customer-focus necessary for MA

success (Hagen et al., 2019), staff shortages may impact customers negatively. Moi and Cabiddu (2020) discuss positive customer relationships where the organization provides a digital platform for the customer to add content to property rental listings, while Elo and Silva (2022) highlight the benefits of positive relationships with licensing authorities.

5.1.4 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the firm's characteristic of being proactive and reactive in addressing customers, the market, and partners (Gomes et al., 2020; Hagen et al., 2019; Osei et al., 2019). Responsiveness facilitates reaction to changes in requirements (Khan, 2020), with Poolton et al. (2006) describing an outcome being the firm maturing from a fire-fighting mode to being customer-centered. Studies highlight the need for iteration (Kalaiganam et al., 2021) and experimentation (Moi & Cabiddu, 2021), and responsiveness is central to enabling these small-bets approaches to marketing (Hagen et al., 2019).

5.1.5 Robustness

Robustness is about strengthening the processes upon which marketing relies to enable flexibility and adaptability. Processes include those that the organization can control; for example, COVID-19 counter-measures restricted in-person meetings however the robustness of change processes enabled Adobe to hold virtual events (Lewnes, 2021). Robustness includes continuous learning and improvement (Kalaiganam et al., 2021; Moi & Cabiddu, 2021) and helps firms cope with turbulence (Osei et al., 2019). Robustness findings include that serial entrepreneurs showing process agility have greater export propensity levels (Vaillant & Lafuente, 2019), and flexibility maintenance is positively related to MA (Asseraf et al., 2019).

5.1.6 Sense and respond, and sensemaking

Sense and respond, and sensemaking are concerned with understanding and acting on market information. The sense and respond study by Roberts and Grover (2012) is widely referenced in the corpus (e.g. Elo and Silva (2022), Khan (2020), Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021)), while sensemaking studies such as Maitlis (2005) and Weick (1993) are referenced in articles published during or after COVID-19 (e.g. Kalaiganam et al. (2021); Moi and Cabiddu (2022)). While the corpus does not differentiate sense and respond and sensemaking, the theories notably differ (Roberts & Grover, 2012; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking is reactive whereas sense and respond is either reactive or proactive. Sensemaking is an organizing process while sense and respond is considered a capability, and sensemaking has its origins in “low probability/high consequence events” (Weick, 1988, p. 305), such as responding to viruses (Weick, 2005).

5.1.7 Speed

Speed of decision-making, and action, are needed for successful MA (Li et al., 2019; Vaillant & Lafuente, 2019). Speed is related to understanding that decisions are made with the available information at a point in time (Kalaiganam et al., 2021), and circumstances may change, thus favoring the aforementioned iterative and experimental approach (Hagen et al., 2019). Poolton et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of speed by noting the advantage of reacting and responding to customer changes at short notice.

5.2 Moderators & outcome measures of MA

While summarizing constructs, it was noticed that VUCA and performance are prominent variables, mediators, or moderators in quantitative studies, as illustrated in Table V. We thus now describe the overarching constructs further in addition to VUCA and performance.

Table 6

VUCA and performance measurement in quantitative studies

Topic	Item	As Dependent variable	As Independent variable	As Mediators and moderators
Performance	Financial performance	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Zhou et al. (2019)		
	Market performance	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Asseraf et al. (2019); Khan (2020); Ozsomer et al. (2023)		
	Foreign direct investment		Li et al. (2019)	
VUCA	Market complexity			Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Khan (2020); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021)
	Market turbulence			Zhou et al. (2019)

5.2.1 Performance

Seven papers include financial and market performance measurement items however, further studies are needed on agile method implications on performance (Asseraf et al., 2019).

Financial and market performance are differentiated; financial measurements include profit margin and profitability (Khan, 2020; Ozsomer et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2019), and market performance measurement includes market share, sales growth, and increased sales to existing customers (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020). Li et al. (2019) find that upstream foreign direct investment (FDI) in the service industry leads to greater downstream export quality than in the manufacturing industry. Alghamdi and Agag (2024), Asseraf et al. (2019)

and Khan (2020) find that MA positively influences market performance, while Khan (2020) and Zhou et al. (2019) determine that MA leads to superior financial performance.

5.2.2 *Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity*

VUCA is widely discussed in the corpus, particularly in the context of sense and respond, and sensemaking, yet limited studies empirically measure the impact of VUCA on MA. Khan (2020) and Zhou et al. (2019) find MA benefits accentuated in complex markets however, Khan (2020) warns that in high complexity, sensing and iteration may become too rapid. MA enhances Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) technology adoption and perceived technology advantages in complex markets (Thoumrungroje & Racela, 2021), and Asseraf et al. (2019) contend that agile is crucial in highly dynamic environments. COVID-19 has increased VUCA in both domestic and international markets (Buckley, 2020) and the need for MA research in VUCA markets (Kalaiganam et al., 2021)..

6. Methodology adopted in MA research

Determining existing paper types and methodologies may help discover research opportunities and provide fresh perspectives on a topic (Palmatier et al., 2017). Table 7 illustrates the type of papers in the corpus: Gomes et al. (2020) review five quantitative papers to conceptualize IMA, with the other review being Thümler (2023) who reviews 75 studies via bibliometric analysis. Lewnes (2021) and Hughes and Chandy (2021) provide commentary on Kalaiganam et al. (2021) while Tarba et al. (2023) is an editorial, and the remaining studies are primary research.

Table 7

Types of articles

Article Type	Article Count	Article References
Review	2	Gomes et al. (2020); Thümler (2023)

Commentary	3	Hughes and Chandy (2021); Lewnes (2021); Tarba et al. (2023)
Primary Research	22	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Asseraf et al. (2019); Elo and Silva (2022); Hagen et al. (2019); Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Li et al. (2019); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021, 2022); Osei et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Poolton et al. (2006); Tarn and Wang (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021); Thrassou et al. (2018); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019); Zhou et al. (2019)

Table 8 summarises the methodology of the MA primary research papers. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method methodologies are used. Closed-ended questions are used in all quantitative and mixed-methods surveys besides Li et al. (2019) who analyzed an existing government dataset. Qualitative interviews comprised structured and semi-structured interviews, as well as critical reflection research methodology with sample sizes ranging from four (Asseraf et al., 2019; Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2023) to 30 (Thrassou et al., 2018). The sample size for quantitative questionnaires ranges from 100 (Khan, 2020) to 677, with a median of 195.

Table 8

Methodology and methods in MA primary research

Methodology	Method	Article Count	Article References
Quantitative	Questionnaire	9	Alghamdi and Agag (2024); Khan (2020); Khan et al. (2022); Khraim and Al Afaishat (2021); Li et al. (2019); Ozsomer et al. (2023); Thoumrungroje and Racela (2021); Vaillant and Lafuente (2019); Zhou et al. (2019)
Qualitative	Interview	3	Hajli et al. (2020); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Thrassou et al. (2018)
	Case study	8	Elo and Silva (2022); Hagen et al. (2019); Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2023); Moi and Cabiddu (2020, 2021, 2022); Osei et al. (2019); Poolton et al. (2006)

Mixed-method	Quantitative survey and in-depth interviews	2	Asseraf et al. (2019); Tarn and Wang (2023)
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7. Practical Implications

Marketing agility is increasingly adopted by organizations and practitioners may take steps in implementing and enhancing MA (Balis, 2021). The literature makes numerous recommendations for practice that are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

MA practical implications

Practitioner Recommendation	Comments
Consider marketing as a boundary spanning function	Marketing influences finance, production, and most other business units, while marketing requires flexibility and input into decision making to meet customer needs (Hagen et al., 2019; Ozsomer et al., 2023).
Encourage strategic and organizational agility	Strategic and organizational agility are beneficial in supporting the flexibility and responsiveness required from marketing agility, for example decision making delegation, and rapid allocation of resources (Asseraf et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2019).
Implement information technology such as data analysis platforms	Information technology aids in communication and sense and respond capabilities enabling agility (Alghamdi & Agag, 2024; Hajli et al., 2020; Thoumrunroje & Racela, 2021).
Scenario planning	Identifying and planning for scenarios in advance may alleviate knowledge gaps in market uncertainty (Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2023; Moi & Cabiddu, 2020).
Train staff in agile methods	Agile practices are learned, and employee support is needed to realize successful agile implementation (Khan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).
Focus on customer needs and wants	Customer focus helps in matching the marketing mix to market demands. For example, engage customer feedback in prototyping, and release products and services early and then adapt based on feedback (Hagen et al., 2019; Kalaignanam et al., 2021; Thrassou et al., 2018).

Hire diversity of thinking	Diversity of skills, and experience in teams aids problem-solving and quicker adaptation to change (Kalaiganam et al., 2021).
Implement marketing mix decisions considering the level of VUCA	Varying VUCA severity in the market may require marketing mix adaptation (Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2023).
Consider agility a long-term investment	Marketing agility takes time to implement, and ongoing prioritization, such as new employee training (Khan et al., 2022; Moi & Cabiddu, 2021; Poolton et al., 2006).
Ensure supplier flexibility	Supplier flexibility may be needed to meet rapidly changing customer demands (Li et al., 2019; Osei et al., 2019).
Implement knowledge management systems	Knowledge informs future actions, thus benefits speed and accuracy in marketing decisions. Hence, capturing and sharing knowledge helps marketing agility (Zhou et al., 2019).

8. General discussion and future research directions

Multiple names for the same construct are common in emergent topics (Bergkvist & Eisend, 2020) however, consistency of construct terminology is necessary for measurement validity and to aid cross-study research (Podsakoff et al., 2016; Teas & Palan, 1997). Summarizing many constructs into a set of key constructs aids the advancement of a topic (MacInnis, 2011). Thus, in response to the research question, constructs with consistent meaning were grouped into seven overarching constructs: marketing practice, organizational characteristics, relationships, responsiveness, robustness, sense and respond, and sensemaking, and speed. Marketing practice comprises decisions and actions that may vary in domestic and international contexts. Organizational characteristics enable MA and are internal to the organization. Relationships involve stakeholders, especially customers. Responsiveness is taking decisive action. Robustness is having the processes, resources, culture, and relationships to be responsive. Sense and respond, and sensemaking is being proactive and reactive to market changes that require a response. Finally, speed underlies all practices and processes in MA. In addition, the corpus highlighted that VUCA is a widely considered

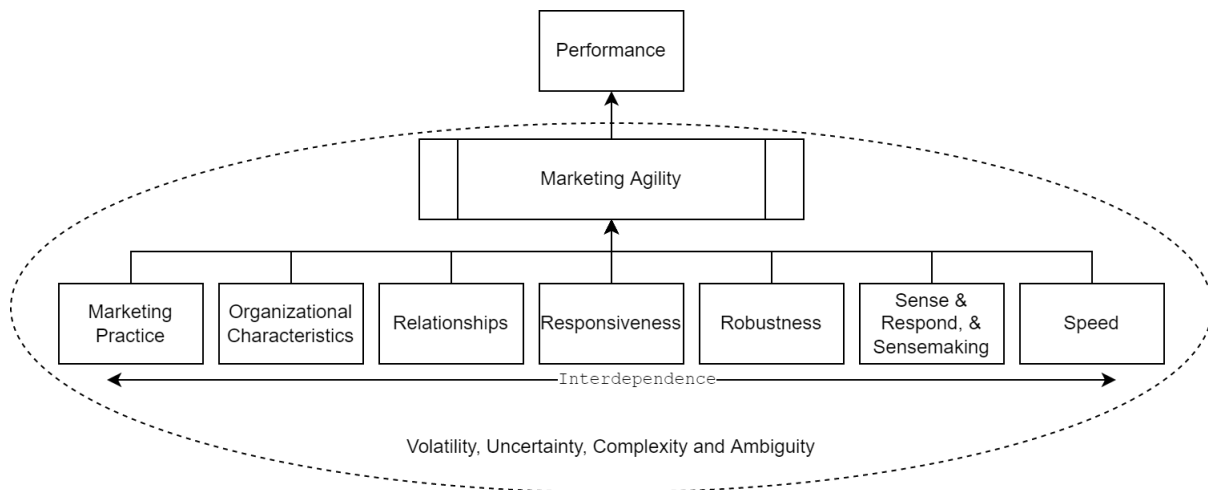
moderator of MA and market, and financial performance are measured outcomes. As such, it is proposed that:

Proposition 1: MA is a concept comprising the foundational constructs of marketing practice, organizational characteristics, relationships, responsiveness, robustness, Sense and respond, and sensemaking, and speed, with performance being moderated by VUCA.

The summarization of research question findings is illustrated in Figure 2,

Figure 2

Conceptualization of marketing agility



The limited research of MA in VUCA is a research and practice gap. The role of VUCA on MA performance has been measured (e.g., Khan (2020)) however, the ambiguity that COVID-19 presented has limited MA research (Kalaignanam et al., 2021). Furthermore, it was found that the organizing process of sensemaking will benefit from further research, particularly in significant ambiguity. Dynamic capabilities are well-suited to addressing significant ambiguity (Teece et al., 2016) and sensemaking is a theory through which responses to ambiguity may be understood (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking research in new contexts and topics is encouraged (Christianson & Barton, 2020), while MA research in significant ambiguity is lacking (Marketing Science Institute, 2020). We thus propose:

Proposition 2: Sensemaking is a plausible theoretical lens through which to perceive MA in ambiguity.

MA is under-researched (Kalaiganam et al., 2021), and consequently, the countries and industries studied are limited. Seventeen journals have published MA papers, with eight papers published in only two issues (IMR volume 36, issue number 2, and Journal of Marketing volume 85, issue number 1), making IMR the prominent publisher of MA articles. In addition, most articles have been published in marketing or business and management journals except for two sports, leisure and tourism journals and one economics journal. Further MA research will advance conceptualization of the topic and provide additional insights into MA. In addition, more research into MA in specific industries and contexts will further a deeper understanding.

Strategic agility is an antecedent of MA and is widely discussed. Strategic agility, including planning, is necessary for MA success (Asseraf et al., 2019; Gomes et al., 2020). Additional research into the relationship between strategic agility, MA, and performance may advance our understanding of these topics and their inter-relationships. For example, Lages et al. (2013) determined that international marketing managers adjust strategy when performance worsens and employ a cost or local-customization strategy based on competition. A similar study in understanding the relationship between strategic agility and marketing agility in international and local markets may provide indicators for improved performance.

Marketing managers' performance measures include input costs and financial contribution to firm performance (Hadrian et al., 2021; O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007), and studies found that MA often leads to positive performance. The relationship between marketing activities and performance outcomes is, nevertheless, nuanced and varied; for example, superior marketing capability leads to financial performance however, there are mediators and moderators such

as firm culture, learning, and technology (Moorman & Day, 2016). MA will benefit from future research exploring when and how MA results in positive performance outcomes and thereby, potentially, provide a pathway for practitioners to implement MA to understand how to attain and measure positive performance more precisely.

Current research focuses on for-profit organizations, with Li et al. (2019) the sole study acknowledging not-for-profit organizations. The scope of marketing has included not-for-profit (inclusive of government) organizations for many decades (Hunt, 1976) with reputable journals, such as the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, publishing marketing research specific to non-profit sectors. Likewise, agile processes are increasingly implemented in bureaucratic organizations (Mergel et al., 2018) however, it is natural to assume this may lead to conflict between the need for bureaucratic rigidity and the flexibility of agility (Janssen & van der Voort, 2020). Conversely, specific not-for-profit organizations may be adept with agile processes through high uncertainty in working environments, such as some humanitarian organizations, as described by Charles et al. (2010). In addition, government policies, including COVID-19 lockdowns, may profoundly affect many industries (Shultz et al., 2022). Future research into MA in these industries and the intersection of public policy and MA may prove to be of academic and practical interest.

Asseraf et al. (2019) recommend individually measuring marketing mix elements. When measuring all elements, authors in quantitative studies do so concerning the 4Ps (Asseraf et al., 2019; Khan, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). The 7Ps (the 4Ps and people, process, and physical evidence) is a means of gaining a comprehensive understanding of marketing in a pandemic (Das et al., 2021). It may be beneficial to have quantitative measurement of MA in VUCA regarding each element of the 7Ps.

Finally, digital firms have been studied in the literature, for example, Moi and Cabiddu (2020), as has digital transformation (Kalaigianam et al., 2021). Digital transformation and technology adoption has been pronounced in recent years (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Further research into the context of digital technology and transformation as a moderator of MA performance may be of value; an example is where the increased provision of telehealth affected the price the patient pays, delivery of the service (via telephone or digital), and the service components in that particular medical services could not be performed remotely (Agarwal et al., 2019; De Guzman et al., 2021).

9. Conclusion, contributions and limitations

Considering the research question, we analyzed the existing MA literature, identified gaps, and provided theoretical contributions and future research opportunities. Reviews are important in advancing a topic's knowledge (Post et al., 2020), and the findings are hoped to further the understanding of MA.

Practitioners note the importance of MA during and post-COVID-19 (Balis, 2021; Lewnes, 2021), and it is anticipated that practitioners will benefit from this research in several ways. The role of VUCA in MA is under-studied, and the significance of considering VUCA and sensemaking is presented. Mitigation of sensemaking-related events differ from those that are less ambiguous (Teece et al., 2016), thus, further research of MA in the sensemaking context may inform practical means of addressing significant ambiguity. Our synthesis of constructs will provide a succinct understanding of MA, and we summarise salient MA research in this article as well as offer practice recommendations in the corpus

Academics will benefit from this review of the extant literature; a past review has prioritized IMA (Gomes et al., 2020), but none have covered IMA and MA together as a single concept. We anticipate that the conceptualization of MA, based on existing research, will encourage

new perspectives on the topic (Kuckertz & Block, 2021) and promote a maturing and more consistent understanding of MA.

This study has limitations. First, our literature search has bias; search criteria excluded research in languages other than English, we searched four academic databases yet there may be studies not indexed by these databases, and our search terms may have missed relevant studies. Second, the low number of included studies may be considered suboptimal (Paul et al., 2021) however this may be considered identification for the need for further research, thus we included the need for further research in as a future research opportunity.

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11. Statements and declarations

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Competing interests

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.