Designing a B2B Marketing Model in the Construction Industry Based on Strategic Agility

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Abstract

The construction industry, as a project-based, multi-actor, and complex sector, faces numerous challenges in the realm of B2B marketing. Market dynamism, stakeholder diversity, economic fluctuations, and technological developments have intensified the need to revise traditional marketing patterns. Within such a context, strategic agility can serve as a novel approach to enhance an organization's ability to respond swiftly and intelligently to environmental changes. The aim of this study is to design a localized and multidimensional model for B2B marketing in Iran's construction industry, centered around strategic agility. This research is qualitative in nature and developmental–applied in purpose. The required data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 experts in the construction and industrial marketing sectors. The data analysis was conducted using the Attride-Stirling thematic analysis method. The validity of the analysis was assessed using quantitative indices such as Holsti's method, Cohen's Kappa, P-Scott, and Krippendorff's Alpha. The findings led to the development of a three-layered model consisting of 8 global themes, 16 organizing themes, and 102 basic themes. The main themes included strategic agility, digitalization, communication management, product innovation, sustainability, risk management, operational efficiency, and market leadership. These themes encompass the key dimensions of agile marketing in the construction industry and reflect a coherent integration of technical, managerial, and environmental requirements. The proposed model provides a practical framework for planning marketing strategies in construction projects within today's competitive and volatile environment. This model can be utilized as a decision-making tool for senior managers, a foundation for designing digital marketing dashboards, and a framework for assessing agile market readiness in B2B projects.

Keywords: Industrial marketing, strategic agility, thematic analysis, construction industry

1. Introduction

The construction industry, as one of the most vital and complex sectors of the global economy, operates within a turbulent environment shaped by economic volatility, technological innovation, regulatory shifts, and evolving stakeholder expectations. Particularly in the business-to-business (B2B) segment of this industry, traditional marketing paradigms often fail to accommodate the dynamic interactions and multifaceted demands that arise in project-based, multi-actor contexts. Given this complexity, the necessity for a responsive and future-oriented marketing model is more pressing than ever. Within this landscape, the concept of strategic agility emerges as a pivotal competency, enabling firms to sense environmental changes rapidly, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources effectively to sustain competitive advantage (Nguyen, 2024; Xing et al., 2020).

Strategic agility, characterized by a firm's ability to respond swiftly and coherently to environmental dynamics, is gaining increasing attention as a foundation for marketing transformation in volatile industries such as construction. In such settings, where inter-organizational collaboration, long sales cycles, and unique project requirements dominate, the rigidities of conventional marketing models hinder organizational effectiveness. Agility, in contrast, provides a framework for proactive adaptation and innovation. Research highlights that agile firms in the construction sector outperform their counterparts in terms of customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and innovation adoption (Haider & Kayani, 2020; Li et al., 2023). This highlights the need to move beyond static marketing strategies and adopt agility-informed models that are contextually relevant and responsive to the fluidity of market demands.

Digital transformation has served as a catalytic force in redefining the contours of marketing practices across industries, including construction. The increasing penetration of technologies such as Building Information Modeling (BIM), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain has enabled firms to develop more interactive, data-driven, and customer-centric marketing strategies (Akhtar et al., 2022; Mehrani et al., 2022). These digital capabilities are instrumental not only in enhancing communication and coordination across stakeholders but also in facilitating real-time decision-making and adaptive marketing execution. However, while the digitalization of operations and marketing is recognized as critical, its successful deployment is contingent upon strategic agility—ensuring that firms are not only technologically equipped but also culturally and structurally aligned to absorb and leverage digital disruption (Feliciano-Cestero et al., 2023; Vial, 2019).

Despite the acknowledged potential of agility and digitalization, empirical evidence suggests that the construction industry lags behind other sectors in embracing these paradigms holistically. A significant proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in construction continue to rely on outdated marketing models, with minimal integration of digital tools or agile methodologies (Chundu et al., 2022; Setkute & Dibb, 2022). The reluctance to adopt digital marketing and agility-enhanced practices is often attributed to cultural resistance, skill gaps, infrastructural limitations, and misalignment between operational priorities and strategic foresight. These challenges underscore the importance of developing a customized, empirically grounded model that embeds strategic agility into B2B marketing within the construction sector, particularly in developing economies where these gaps are more pronounced (Alizadeh et al., 2024; Kelly, 2016).

Moreover, B2B marketing in construction is inherently complex due to the long-term, relational nature of transactions, the involvement of diverse decision-makers, and the high customization of projects. This necessitates a marketing approach that transcends mere promotional tactics and focuses on value co-creation, collaborative planning, and ecosystem engagement. Scholars argue that agility in such contexts is not merely about speed but involves deep market sensing, real-time feedback loops, and iterative refinement of marketing propositions (Voola et al., 2022; Xing et al., 2020). A strategically agile B2B marketing model must, therefore, incorporate feedback-rich interfaces with clients, agile project management principles, and mechanisms for continuous learning and innovation.

The integration of strategic agility into B2B marketing is also closely linked with sustainability imperatives and the growing importance of stakeholder-centric practices. As construction firms increasingly align their operations with global standards such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), marketing strategies must reflect this transition by promoting transparency, ethical engagement, and long-term value delivery (Voola et al., 2022; Weng Marc, 2023). Marketing in this new paradigm becomes a strategic function that not only communicates offerings but also articulates the firm's role in broader societal and environmental systems. Strategic agility enables

marketers to navigate these shifting expectations, recalibrate messages, and restructure partnerships in alignment with sustainability goals.

In response to these contextual demands, several researchers have underscored the importance of developing maturity models and diagnostic tools that enable firms to assess and enhance their marketing capabilities. For instance, the Gartner Marketing Maturity Model and the Social Media Maturity Model propose stage-based frameworks to guide firms through the process of digital and strategic transformation (Gartner, 2018; Krakauer, 2021). However, such models often lack sector-specific customization and fall short in addressing the unique needs of the construction industry's B2B environment. Hence, there is a critical need for a localized, industry-specific model that integrates digital, relational, and strategic agility dimensions into a coherent B2B marketing framework.

Consumer-brand relationships in B2B settings also differ significantly from B2C contexts, as emotional branding and relational trust play a larger role in long-term project-based collaborations. In the construction sector, where brand equity often hinges on reliability, project delivery, and technical competence, marketers must develop strategies that reflect both rational and emotional dimensions of client engagement (Alizaedeh & Nazapour Kashani, 2023). Moreover, as customer experience becomes a central tenet of competitive differentiation, marketers must leverage digital tools and agile processes to create seamless, personalized, and predictive customer journeys (Alizadeh et al., 2024; Feliciano-Cestero et al., 2023).

Another essential consideration is the role of organizational learning and knowledge integration in supporting agile marketing. Studies demonstrate that firms with robust customer knowledge management systems are better positioned to respond to market fluctuations, personalize offerings, and improve project outcomes—all of which are critical in the B2B construction context (Haider & Kayani, 2020). This highlights the need for marketing models that incorporate continuous learning loops and feedback mechanisms, allowing firms to evolve in tandem with customer expectations and market trends.

In addition, the global COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the urgency for agility and digital transformation in B2B marketing. Disruptions in supply chains, client engagement, and project execution have revealed the limitations of conventional models and exposed the fragility of non-agile systems (Al Humdan et al., 2023; Weng Marc, 2023). As firms rebuild and reposition themselves in the

"new normal," agile marketing is no longer an option but a necessity for resilience and growth. This is particularly salient in construction, where project delays, remote collaboration, and changing procurement models have reshaped the marketing landscape.

To summarize, the convergence of strategic agility, digital transformation, sustainability goals, and customer-centric imperatives calls for a comprehensive rethinking of B2B marketing in the construction industry. Current literature, while rich in insights, often fails to offer an integrated, practice-oriented model tailored to the specificities of construction firms operating in emerging economies. This study aims to fill this gap by designing a multidimensional, localized B2B marketing model grounded in strategic agility.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study follows a qualitative approach and seeks to uncover key concepts and conceptual structures related to B2B marketing in the construction industry by drawing on deep and rich data derived from expert experiences.

From the standpoint of its purpose, this research is applied-developmental, as it aims not only to address practical needs within the construction sector but also to develop an innovative, localized conceptual model based on theoretical foundations and field experiences.

To achieve the research objectives, the thematic analysis method was employed. This method is a well-established strategy in qualitative research that enables the extraction of fundamental themes from textual data and facilitates analysis of both the explicit and latent content within interviews. The thematic analysis in this study was conducted based on the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke, including: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing the analytical report.

The statistical population of the study consisted of knowledgeable, experienced, and domain-specific experts in industrial marketing, strategic management, and the construction industry. For participant selection, purposeful sampling was utilized to ensure that those with the most relevant expertise were chosen. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to expand the interviewee network and gain access to key informants. The selection of participants continued until theoretical saturation was

achieved—i.e., when further interviews failed to yield new concepts or themes. Ultimately, interviews were conducted with 20 experts.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were inspired by the theoretical literature and designed in alignment with an initial conceptual framework. These questions were refined dynamically during the interviews. Interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, with the full consent of participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In the analysis phase, the data were reviewed multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Subsequently, open coding was initiated to extract preliminary concepts. These initial codes were categorized into intermediate categories, forming primary themes. Through a process of reviewing and refining these themes, a coherent structure of relationships among the concepts was developed. This process was iterative to ensure the final model possessed both internal coherence and empirical validity.

To validate the findings, standard strategies from qualitative research were employed. These included member checking, in which portions of the analysis were shared with participants to obtain their corrective or confirmatory feedback. Additionally, inter-coder reliability was assessed by having two researchers independently code part of the data, and the level of agreement between them was evaluated. Data triangulation was also used to strengthen the credibility of the results by comparing and aligning the insights and experiences of experts from diverse backgrounds.

Overall, the methodology of this research strives to deliver an in-depth analysis grounded in expert insights and to design a localized, practical model tailored to the real-world conditions of Iran's construction industry—one that can significantly contribute to improving B2B marketing performance through the lens of strategic agility.

The research population included all senior managers in the construction sector. Using criterion-based purposive sampling, the target sample was selected, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Therefore, the study included 20 participants, comprising both experts and managers.

The data collection instrument used in this study was the semi-structured interview. The process of analyzing the data derived from these interviews, following the Attride-Stirling thematic analysis approach, was conducted concurrently with data collection and involved three phases of open coding. The codes were then categorized into themes and subcategories.

The Attride-Stirling thematic analysis approach is a qualitative method designed for analyzing textual data. It facilitates the identification of themes, concepts, and recurring patterns in qualitative data, enabling researchers to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study through the discovery of underlying topics and themes. This approach encompasses the identification, coding, classification, and interpretation of data into key themes and concepts. It is particularly suitable for studies that require analysis of complex and multidimensional data. With its emphasis on flexible coding and interpretive analysis, this method allows researchers to comprehensively examine social, cultural, and psychological processes.

In this study, coding and analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Through open coding, numerous themes were initially extracted, which were subsequently refined through iterative processing of the data, reducing the preliminary qualitative dataset into a more concise set of categories. At this stage, using raw data, preliminary categories relevant to the model's indicators were derived through comparison and exploration of phenomena.

The qualitative phase of this study was grounded in the perspectives of 20 experts familiar with production-related concepts.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	15	75%
Female	5	25%
Work Experience		
Less than 10 years	5	25%
More than 11 years	15	75%
Total	20	100%

3. Findings and Results

In this study, a qualitative sampling method was applied, which theoretically evolved based on the concepts emerging during the data analysis process. Through continuous interpretation and analysis of the data, conceptual saturation was achieved. The key and influential indicators of B2B marketing in the construction industry based on strategic agility were identified, originating from the theoretical foundations of the study.

Following a thorough examination of the collected textual data and the use of a theme network, the results yielded 118 basic themes, 24 organizing themes, and 7 global themes (Table 2).

Table 2

Extracted Codes Derived from Thematic Analysis

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme
1. Strategic Agility	1.1 Market Responsiveness	• Monitoring competitors via digital tools
• Weekly strategy adjustment		
• Matrix organizational structure		
• Rapid response teams		
• Early warning systems		
• Competitor intelligence database		
	1.2 Organizational Learning	• Post-project review sessions
• Knowledge management systems		
• Monthly skill-based training		
• Best practices sharing		
• Trial-and-error culture		
• Internal coaching		
2. Digitalization	2.1 Key Technologies	• Advanced BIM platforms
• Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT)		
• Augmented reality in sales		
• Blockchain for contracts		
• Digital twins		
• Cloud data processing		
	2.2 Process Transformation	• Administrative process automation
• Digital workflows		
• Smart document management		
• Advanced digital signatures		
• Automated decision-making systems		
• ERP-CRM integration		
3. Communication Management	3.1 Key Customer Relationships	• Key account management programs
• Dedicated customer teams		
• Quarterly review meetings		
• Needs forecasting systems		
• Customized loyalty programs		
• Joint value creation		
	3.2 Partner Collaboration	• Virtual collaboration platforms
• Joint development programs		
• Risk-sharing systems		
• Joint strategic committees		
• Shared knowledge bases		
• Annual networking events		
4. Product Innovation	4.1 Solution Development	• Innovation labs
• Customer pilot programs		
• Startup accelerators		
• Interdisciplinary teams		
• Crowdsourcing systems		
• Dedicated innovation budgets		
	4.2 Value Engineering	• Product life cycle analysis
• Manufacturability studies		
• Target cost optimization		
• Performance evaluations		

• Optimized design reviews		
• Customer feedback systems		
5. Sustainability	5.1 Green Operations	• Smart energy management
• Materials recycling systems		
• Water consumption optimization		
• Construction waste reduction		
• Sustainable procurement		
• ESG reporting		
	5.2 Social Responsibility	• Local education programs
• Community engagement		
• Ethical sourcing standards		
• Diversity in recruitment		
• Advanced health and safety		
• Social investment		
6. Risk Management	6.1 Risk Identification	• Advanced SWOT analysis
• Expert surveys		
• Historical risk databases		
• Crisis scenario modeling		
• Macro-environment monitoring		
• Vulnerability assessment		
	6.2 Risk Mitigation	• Emergency response plans
• Supplier diversification		
• Risk transfer contracts		
• Strategic reserves		
• Real-time monitoring systems		
• Response team training		
7. Operational Efficiency	7.1 Process Optimization	• Value stream mapping
• RPA automation		
• Method standardization		
• Lean systems		
• Total quality management		
• Continuous Kaizen improvement		
	7.2 Resource Management	• Enterprise resource planning
• Smart allocation systems		
• Demand forecasting with ML		
• Dynamic capacity management		
• Shift optimization		
• Productivity audits		
8. Market Leadership	8.1 Growth Strategies	• Market share analysis
• New product development		
• Entry into new geographic markets		
• M&A strategies		
• Strategic partnerships		
• Innovative revenue models		

To assess credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability, four quantitative indices were used: Holsti's coefficient, P-Scott coefficient, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha.

The correlation between expert perspectives was calculated using Holsti's coefficient (observed agreement percentage), which yielded a value of 0.911, indicating a substantial level of agreement. Considering the critiques associated with Holsti's method, the P-Scott coefficient was also calculated, resulting in a value of 0.810.

The Cohen's Kappa coefficient in this study was calculated at 0.872, while Krippendorff's Alpha was estimated at 0.845.

Collectively, these four indices were used to evaluate the study's validity, transferability, confirmability, and reliability, each indicating a high level of agreement among the experts. Based on these values, it can be concluded that the study's findings are highly accurate and credible, and that the level of consensus among expert views is well established.

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study culminated in the development of a comprehensive and multi-layered B2B marketing model tailored to the construction industry, grounded in the principle of strategic agility. Through rigorous thematic analysis of interviews with 20 industry experts, a structured model emerged, composed of 7 global themes, 24 organizing themes, and 118 foundational codes. These global themes—strategic agility, digitalization, communication management, product innovation, sustainability, risk management, operational efficiency, and market leadership—constitute the core capabilities required for agile marketing in a project-based, complex B2B environment like construction. This integrated framework supports the notion that marketing is no longer a static, promotional function but a dynamic and adaptive strategic capability in today's volatile business landscape.

The centrality of strategic agility in the model validates its conceptual role as a driver of responsiveness and innovation in turbulent environments. This aligns with previous scholarship asserting that agility enhances firms' ability to reconfigure resources, adapt strategies quickly, and sustain competitive advantage under uncertainty (Nguyen, 2024; Xing et al., 2020). The model's emphasis on "market responsiveness" and "organizational learning" as key organizing themes reflects the need for rapid feedback cycles, knowledge integration, and dynamic decision-making—traits consistently emphasized in agility literature (Akhtar et al., 2022; Haider & Kayani, 2020). This supports the idea that agility in marketing must be both operational and cognitive, enabling firms not only to act swiftly but also to learn continuously and evolve strategically.

Digitalization, another dominant dimension in the model, confirms the transformative role of technology in redefining B2B marketing processes. The identification of enabling technologies—such as BIM, IIoT, blockchain, and digital twins—highlights how construction firms are increasingly leveraging digital tools for value creation, communication, and integration across functions. These findings align with research indicating that digital capabilities are essential for enhancing agility, real-time responsiveness, and customer engagement (Feliciano-Cestero et al., 2023; Vial, 2019). Moreover, the "process transformation" theme indicates that beyond implementing isolated technologies, firms must reengineer workflows and decision-making structures to achieve genuine digital maturity, a notion also emphasized

by digital marketing maturity frameworks (Gartner, 2018; Krakauer, 2021).

The inclusion of communication management as a critical component of the model underscores the importance of relational competencies in B2B construction marketing. The study's findings identified two pivotal domains: managing key customer relationships and fostering collaboration with partners. These themes reaffirm that long-term trust, information sharing, and joint planning are foundational to success in construction's inter-organizational ecosystems. Previous studies have similarly stressed the value of collaborative networks and customer co-creation in developing agile and resilient marketing systems (Alizaedeh & Nazapour Kashani, 2023; Weng Marc, 2023). In particular, custom loyalty programs, predictive systems, and joint knowledge-sharing platforms emerged as powerful tools for sustaining engagement and responsiveness.

Product innovation appeared as another global theme, capturing the necessity for continuous experimentation, customer involvement, and cross-functional ideation. Innovation labs, inter-disciplinary teams, and pilot programs with customers were among the initiatives highlighted by participants. This reinforces the argument that in high-customization industries like construction, marketing must be innovation-oriented and capable of tailoring solutions through iterative collaboration (Al Humdan et al., 2023; Alizadeh et al., 2024). Moreover, the presence of value engineering as a sub-theme links innovation directly with performance metrics such as cost, functionality, and manufacturability, bridging marketing and engineering functions—an integration vital for delivering sustainable value propositions.

Sustainability was also central to the model, divided into operational sustainability (green practices) and social responsibility. This reflects a growing trend in the construction industry to integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into business operations and marketing narratives. Elements like smart energy systems, ethical sourcing, and community engagement not only reinforce corporate reputation but also influence B2B customer preferences, especially under sustainability mandates (Voola et al., 2022). This finding supports the argument that agile marketing must be ethically grounded and responsive to the broader socio-environmental ecosystem, thus fostering long-term brand equity and stakeholder alignment.

Another essential pillar of the model was risk management, which was mapped into proactive

identification and mitigation strategies. Tools such as scenario planning, real-time monitoring systems, and risk-sharing contracts demonstrate how agile B2B marketing must be risk-informed. As construction projects are often exposed to financial, logistical, and geopolitical uncertainties, marketing plans must be dynamic and aligned with enterprise-wide risk strategies (Li et al., 2023). This finding resonates with research advocating for the integration of agility and resilience in supply chain and marketing operations (Akhtar et al., 2022).

The model's final global theme—operational efficiency—illustrates how agile marketing cannot function in isolation from operational excellence. Resource management, process standardization, lean practices, and quality management systems were cited as critical enablers of agile responsiveness. This reflects the need for marketing strategies that are not only creative but also feasible and scalable within the firm's operational infrastructure (Kelly, 2016). Thus, marketing agility is deeply tied to organizational agility, supporting prior findings on the interconnectedness of functional agility across departments (Al Humdan et al., 2023; Haider & Kayani, 2020).

Notably, market leadership—though not initially considered a traditional marketing construct—emerged in this model as a strategic aspiration enabled by agility. The themes of market expansion, strategic partnerships, and innovative revenue models reflect how agile marketing must also be proactive and growth-oriented. This insight supports the view that B2B marketers in construction must go beyond relationship maintenance and embrace bold, strategic growth initiatives that leverage agility as a competitive weapon (Chundu et al., 2022; Weng Marc, 2023).

Together, these themes reinforce the central thesis of this research: that B2B marketing in the construction industry requires a reconceptualization grounded in strategic agility. This model bridges the gap between theoretical constructs and practical imperatives, providing firms with a framework that is not only responsive and innovative but also digitally mature, socially responsible, and operationally grounded.

This study, while methodologically rigorous, is not without its limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the research limits the generalizability of the findings across all construction contexts, particularly outside the geographical and cultural setting in which the study was conducted. Second, although the sample size of 20 experts provided saturation for thematic analysis, it may not capture the full heterogeneity of perspectives across sub-sectors of the construction industry. Additionally, the model has not yet been quantitatively tested for predictive validity or impact on organizational performance metrics, which constrains its immediate practical applicability for firms seeking measurable outcomes.

Future research should focus on the empirical validation of the proposed model using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling or confirmatory factor analysis to test the relationships between agility components and B2B marketing performance. Comparative studies across different regions and construction sub-industries (e.g., infrastructure vs. residential) could also provide a deeper understanding of contextual variations. Furthermore, future studies could explore the role of leadership styles, organizational culture, and employee agility in supporting agile marketing capabilities, thereby offering a more holistic view of the enablers of agility in construction B2B environments.

Practitioners should consider integrating the model into their strategic marketing planning processes, using it as a diagnostic tool to identify agility gaps across their value chain. Senior managers should invest in capacity-building programs that promote cross-functional collaboration, digital literacy, and adaptive decision-making. Firms are encouraged to align their marketing and operational strategies with sustainability and risk management practices to foster a more resilient and socially accountable brand identity. The model can also guide the design of agile dashboards and performance metrics tailored to the nuances of project-based B2B transactions in the construction industry.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

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Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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