Advanced ways of working introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the marketing services industry.

How did the pandemic give the chance to in-house agencies to flourish?

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International Business   Abstract

The purpose of this study is to show how the global pandemic of COVID-19 encouraged more
innovate ways of working to take place in marketing agencies. In addition, the research
demonstrates why the hybrid working model is the most flexible and convenient one for
both businesses and employees, while it shows evidence that prove not only how effective
are in-house agencies, but also how they are more efficient due to teleworking.

The report is based on deep academic research, the own experience of the author, a third-
party interview and data collection and analysis. The concepts of working from home, hybrid
model and their differences are analysed, while the author presents reasons why agencies
should consider offering in-house solutions.

 Within the thesis, there are recommendations that businesses could follow in order to keep
their employees and clients happy, and even attract new talents and customers.
Additionally, there is advice on how to adapt to the new situation of WFH in the different
scales, depending on the business sector. The pandemic accelerated the innovation in the
business world and broadened the horizons of both employers and employees. To sum up,
companies need to adapt to the new data if they want to stay competitive and flourish.

Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   Practical background

Recent history has shown that pandemics occur every 30-35 years, considering that there has been 9 influenza pandemics during the past 300 years. Of course, the pace varies from one incident to the next, but there has been enough data recorded to prove that the world should always be preparing for the next potential pandemic. (P. Sandman, 2007). Although researchers had warned that a pandemic was to break out sooner than later (Webby & Webster, 2003, p. 1522; Osterholm, 2005, p. 1839), it seemed to come as a sudden surprise worldwide, often causing chaos as some leaders ignored the severity of the situation and failed taking the necessary measures to appease the pandemic before it started spreading uncontrollably (Ward A., 2020).

Covid-19 as widely known, or SARS-CoV-2, is the virus that forced extreme measures to be taken worldwide the past two years as world leaders strive collectively to stop this pandemic that has led to thousands of deaths and severe economic problems through ought the globe. The virus was first reported in the area of Wuhan, China, in front of the closed "Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market" in the centre of the city, where the first cases were reported in January 2020. However, in December 2019, there had already been warnings by health professionals about severe pneumonia in the area until the novel virus was identified a month later. It is worth mentioning that there is a lab that is classified level 4, which means that it meets the criteria to handle the world's most dangerous pathogens, in Wuhan specializing in coronaviruses. (Rettner R., 2021)

The pandemic outbreak has forced companies to find alternative ways of working which focus on the worker's health wellbeing and in the limitation of spreading the virus. Hybrid working models have been introduced, and the need for new workforce skillsets rose, creating new positions and making companies reconsider their ways of working in order to adapt to the new situation. Along with physical health worries, mental health has been one of the main topics that businesses' HR offices prioritize as working from home or being forced to let people go due to the economic crisis that emerged to companies, affects greatly people's mental

wellbeing. More specifically, in the beginning people were not used to working from home, so the idea of it created anxiety to many employees and employers that had to be dealt with – thankfully, they realized rather soon that not many things changed in the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities despite their absence from the office. (Craven, Liu, Wilson & Mysore, 2021)

The situation has affected every professional domain differently; however, the marketing industry, and more specifically, the digital marketing agencies are the topic of interest in this thesis. Companies were forced to adapt rapidly to survive as revenues were dropping in a rapid pace, leading many of them to bankruptcy. 68% of digital agencies globally reported to have a decrease in their revenue from the start of the pandemic, while there was an outstanding 66% drop-off in leads. While the business strove to find new ways of working to adapt to the situation, the great challenge was to convince their clients to change their marketing messages and methods rapidly in order to evolve according to the new requirements of the situation. To survive and even standout, 58% marketing agencies offered economical packages to their clients instead of keeping their prices up, which worked in their favour eventually as the client portfolios of most of the latter increased, keeping them functional until new solutions were introduced. (Gupta A., 2020)

A big fear in the marketing world was originally about in-house agencies – how to keep up if they cannot go to their working environment and interact directly with their clients? Surprisingly, the new model of working from home (WFH) worked pretty well for these agencies as they managed to keep the quality of work and client communication to the highest levels despite the complicated situation that occurred, and even went against their business model. In fact, more marketing agencies invested to becoming dedicated in-house agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, planning to keep this model in a post-pandemic world. The reasons behind that is that in-house agencies proved their efficacy by being dedicated to brands, knowing how to take drastic decisions during pressuring times like the past two years in order to make the brand thrive. (Adams P., 2020).

Emily Foster, director of the In-House Agency Forum (IHAF), a trade group representing internal agencies, said in comments to Marketing Dive: "The longer-term impact could, however, mirror what was seen with the economic downturn of 2008. That is, work that would

otherwise have been outsourced being funnelled in house." Marketers now need to find the most effective way to turn to in-house and combine at the same time remote working, keeping the dedication to the brands in order to bring the required results as some changes that were caused due to the pandemic are here to stay and re-strategizing is the correct way forward. The topic of the idea of this thesis was generated when Sydow (2020) asked how businesses can work actively to strengthen their firm instead of choosing to go into hibernation. In this thesis' case, it will be seen how marketing helped businesses integrate the WFH working model and persuade their or potential clients to give them their trust and support.

1.2   Purpose of the thesis

The present research describes a qualitative study of how in-house agencies use more the concept of WFH in order to cope with the current crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how is their present model is affected by the latter. The purpose is to help businesses understand that the pandemic helped discovering more efficient ways of working that include lower costs, high quality standards, and show them how to use marketing techniques to adapt their current business model to the post pandemic era successfully.

The model that the research is about is a hybrid one that includes the Work from Home (WFH) concept. In the end, the author offers recommendations on how enterprises can smoothly take advantage of the current situation in order for them to offer more solutions that fit their customers in a post-pandemic era, and finally, the author shows how teleworking can be beneficial for both employer and employee.

1.3   Data collection and sample

For this study, the data-collecting instruments were the following; documents and records that occurred from extensive research through the web including professional articles, books and e-books written by authors with an expertise relevant to the nature of the research; from observations of the author through their working experience and surroundings in integrated and non-integrated marketing agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic; and finally by analysing focus groups – the internal and external clients of a marketing agency. A SWOT analysis is also conducted to show the advantages and disadvantages of working from home.

The author's own experience will also provide useful examples that support the hybrid working model and show clearly why an integrated team has more brand-specific impact than an external marketing agency that works on a project-to-project basis. By using the research tools mentioned above, the author combined information on the current pandemic, on the ways of working of marketing agencies before and now, and the author now forms the potential way(s) of working in a post pandemic world.

Research question

How did work from home and the hybrid model gain the marketplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, and why in-house agencies are the solution for the future marketing services industry?

2 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 The Social Learning theory

The social learning theory (SLT) also known as observational learning happens when individuals learn and possibly adopt the behaviour of other people that surround them modelling is the process of learning how to produce some behaviour exhibited by a model. There is a tremendous impact in that way of learning as people tend to "imitate" certain behaviours that seem to work best on specific matters or they adapt certain behaviours of others to themselves when they fit them like clothing, hair products or styling etc. There are three main factors to consider when an individual wishes to imitate a model: a. the prestige of the model, b. the likeability, and c. the attractiveness. (Western, 1999).

In the same way, businesses imitate model of bigger organizations that seem to have been tested and proven to work better, therefore, when governments started to suggest that employees should commute to the office as little as possible to not at all, and supported that recommendation by doing this exact thing in the public sector to prove that it works, companies started to follow that example and adopt new ways of working. Similarly, when well-known companies like *Twitter* started adopting the hybrid working model for their business that would remain even after the pandemic is over, the trust for it from smaller

companies rose, having as an example that more and more businesses were affected by what others were doing, and eventually started following up their example.

2.1.2   The *marketing* definition

According to Dr. Philip Kotler a broad definition of marketing is "a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they want and need through creating, offering, and exchanging products of value with others" (p. 6, 1994), while a more complete definition is given by the American Marketing Association (AMA) and states that "marketing is 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." (2017).

While the former theory is partially correct, it misses a few important sides of marketing when it comes to a marketing agency; more specifically, it explains only the process of understanding the needs of individuals/organizations and then creating the right product or service to respond to these needs, ending up trading them for a monetary value, with sole goal the profit. This is only the one side of the coin, "marketing with external clients" as the author would call it, while a marketing agency needs to satisfy the needs of their "internal clients" as well. Using the latter marketing theory, the focus is on the partners' side which means that a marketing agency would need to offer competitive packages in terms of pricing, quality and speed to their internal customers (brands) in order to be chosen from the vast variety that exists in the market.

To summarize, the challenge for the agencies of question is not to only identify the needs of their potential customers and create a "tailored" product or service for them, but also to manage to sell their services better than the others to their internal clients. It could be seen as the connection between the brand and the consumer, having to keep the relationship with both balanced. These relationships were at risk now with the new conditions of working imposed by the pandemic, therefore, marketers had to swiftly find ways to keep the balance in an unbalanced system never before seen, and this is why integrated agencies had more success as the relationship with their brands was tighter, and they used this in order to both

keep the trust of their clients, and promote the products better in a world that did not even know their needs at the moment of the chaos caused by the pandemic.

Now that the term marketing is defined and the one that suits the research is chosen, it is now understandable how this crisis helped the world advance and become more innovative. Often, crisis offer the chance to businesses to identify gaps that were not clear before, therefore, it can be the milestone of a change. Marketing agencies, for instance, were initially focusing on the product, and the marketing revolution urged them to start focusing on the consumer – the customer now is the centre of attention (Keith, p. 35, 1960). According to Stafford "a crisis often leads to innovation and it is a good opportunity to reinvent aspects of your business" (2020).

Taking the above into consideration, today, companies realize that employees are the main pillar of the business, and keeping them satisfied leads to handling a crisis like the covid-19 pandemic the world experiences currently more easily, and makes firms understand that it is time now to evolve their ways of working and be more flexible – to achieve staying competitive during a crisis, the packages offered to clients must be both well marketed and competitive, and to achieve that, a company needs to broaden its horizons in terms of its business model, and in our case, create a hybrid model, integrating the "forced" by the pandemic concept, work from home. The reasons behind that are both social and economic, as the company's fees reduce substantially, and the company people are happier choosing where to work from.

2.1.3   The *marketing* definition

2.2   WFH before the pandemic

There have been numerous reports on companies that were initially reluctant to have people working from home due to worries in terms of quality, quantity of work and dedication, that have now started reconsidering their stance after discovering the solutions that this working model offers during the covid-19 pandemic (Ryder, 2020). It is a fact that people were used to working in the office, especially in Europe, and teleworking was only seen as an occasional work pattern to satisfy very explicit needs (Ahrendt, 2020). It is worth mentioning

that there was a rise from 5.4 % of employees that used to work from home in Europe in 2009 to a 9% in 2019 – it is highlighted that only a slow rise occurred in a period of ten years (Ahrendt, 2020).
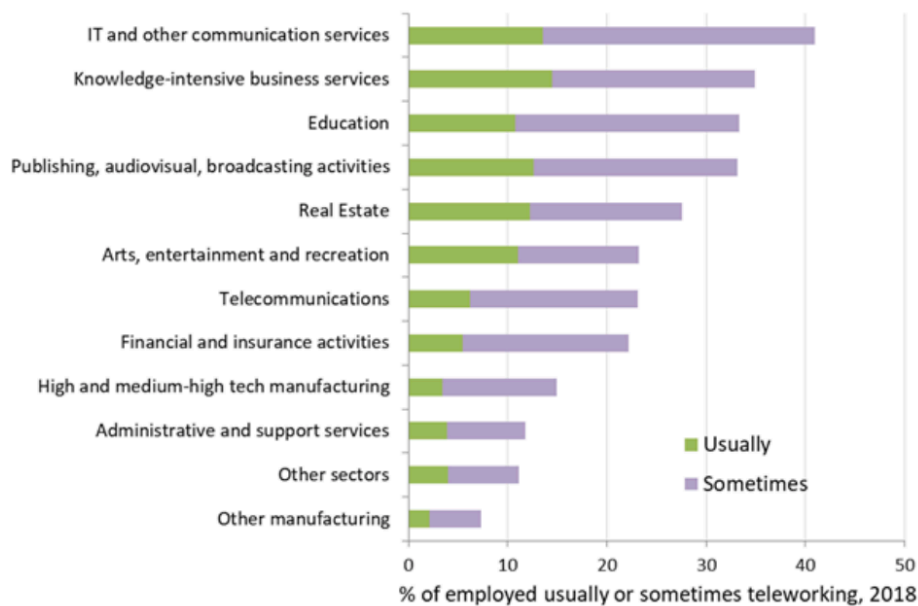

Figure 1: *Prevalence of telework by sector, EU-27*

Note: The group "Knowledge-intensive business services" includes the following sectors: Legal and Accounting Activities – Activities of Head Offices; Management Consultancy Activities – Architectural and Engineering Activities; Technical Testing and Analysis – Scientific Research and Development – Advertising and Market Research – Other Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities. The group IC and other communication services include: Computer Programming, Consultancy and Related Activities – Information Service Activities.

Source: JRC calculations from ad-hoc extractions of EU-LFS data provided by Eurostat

Teleworking frequency varied depending on the business industry, and as we see in figure 1 above, IT and knowledge were the domains that WFH had gained the biggest place, keeping however the figures still in low levels – seeing that around 40% of employees in IT and other communication services had already been working in distance, and knowledge-intensive business services would follow with a 30%. It is noted in the data above that most of the employees who practiced the WFH concept were occasionally doing it, and not in a permanent basis. However, what is worth mentioning is that high-skilled professionals or individuals with a managerial position were much more likely to have the chance to WFH while regular employees would not have the same possibility, even though the nature of their working routine would match the requirements of WFH (Ahrendt, 2020).

Taking the above into consideration, it is understood as a result that there was a lack of trust from the company's side towards the employees, and high worry in terms of keeping the already established quality standards – it could fairly be stated that the strict 9-5 working model has deeply stuck in employers' minds, and until the pandemic happened, they could not consider it as a vital option to run their business. There are various factors that used to determine the frequency of WFO such as; country – some countries were using more this model than others, industry – in some industries WFH offered solutions especially when

people with a special skillset were needed by a firm, but did not have the ability to change their location (mostly in IT services), work position – higher managers were more flexible in choosing their working pace when it came to working in distance (Ahrendt, 2020).

When teleworking was happening before the pandemic, it used to be a well-planned choice that needed a period of preparation, design, and organization to allow firms to successfully support and even monitor employees' productivity and provide better work-life balance (Gajendran, 2007); this shows that there was a wide and organized procedure before an employer would consider allowing their employees to perform their tasks from a location of their choice, and it is commonly understood in this way that employers were quite reluctant using this model of work. However, this cannot be the case when a situation like a global pandemic requires governments and companies to take action instantly; this is where crisis management comes in to help maintain the balance and prevent chaotic behaviours.

2.3   WFH and its challenges during the COVID-19 crisis

Early estimates of Eurofound showed that due to the pandemic, around 50% of Europeans worked in distance compared to 9% in 2019 (2020). Now, these numbers remain high as supported by Ceurstemont that teleworking is here to stay (2020). However, in contrary to the cases that WFH was implemented before the pandemic, now, the companies were initially forced to adopt this way of working without having the necessary organization for it, nor the time to prepare their employees and clients for such a sudden and substantial change (Wang et al., 2021).

Seeing this working model advancing, there were issues appearing that needed to be tackled swiftly by organizations in order not to have their system "crash" – the biggest challenge would be the well-being of the employees. More specifically, introducing this new concept that individuals were not used to caused confusion and employees had a hard time balancing their personal and professional life since both were happening at the same space, at home. Fatigue was caused by multiple online meetings that were happening the one after the other, unscheduled calls and meetings that occurred during the day disrupting the workflow and forcing employees to stay longer on their screen in order to tackle the daily workload. (Tsipursky, 2021)

Arguably, stress caused from the personal life combined with the stress caused by the professional life, and the situation with local or national lockdowns caused extreme fatigue to people, and there were not few the cases of depressive behaviour that appeared after a period of working from home combined with the strict measures to limit the covid-19 cases from spreading. There cases where a worker would show their concern about a co-worker's mental health rose significantly forcing companies to take actions and provide tools to confront the high levels of stress that their employees faced. Some of the tools used to go against that phenomena were; providing consultation to any employee that felt the need of it, organizing online sports/cooking/etc. classes that employees might be interested in, avoiding in this way having their mind focused on work problems all the time, reducing the meetings' duration, and establishing specific hours for the meetings to take place, so that employees could better plan their working day and allocate time for their daily tasks. (Shepell, 2021).

2.4 The Hybrid working model

2.4.1 Definition

A hybrid workforce consists of employees who work remotely and those who work in the office or a central location. Workers are able to decide where they are most productive or choose to combine both depending on their preferences and needs in a period of time. In other words, some employees will work in the office, some at remotely, and some will choose to have a combination of both. Human beings crave human interaction, so the hybrid model is just what they need; for example, most people would choose to have 3 days at home and 2 days in the office, considering a working week Monday-Friday. (ApolloTechnical, 2021)

2.4.2 Who uses the hybrid model?

High-revenue growth companies tend to choose the hybrid working model for their workforce, while 69% of companies with negative or no growth do not choose that concept and prefer to have employees working on-site in order to "control" more the hours that an employee is actually "working". 83% of workers prefer the hybrid model the report shows; there are several reasons why workers would prefer teleworking, but the most important one

is the flexibility they have to organize better their personal and professional life. (Apollotechnical, 2021)

Working from home might not be preferred from everyone, and there are advantages and disadvantages on both models, of which' the analysis is below. According to Hailley Griffis, an expert columnist, the hybrid model definition is: "A hybrid work model is a plan that incorporates a mixture of in-office and remote work in an employee's schedule. Employees occasionally have the ability to pick and choose when they work from home and when they come into the office. There is no one-size-fits-all hybrid model. Each company develops a hybrid model based on the needs of the company and the needs of the individual employee." (2021). The flexibility that the hybrid model offers is that each company can decide if their employees will have the option to combine WFH and WFO or choose only WFH/WFO. The main benefit with the hybrid model is that it offers so many options that it can be suitable for both employers and employees at the same time without having to compromise in terms of quality or quantity of work, nor pressure the employees to manage to adapt at a 100% rate their personal life according to their working life.

	WFH	WFO
Strengths	Flexible schedules, autonomy and freedom, familiar environment, time saving – no commuting, money saving (e.g. less office spaces), reduce absenteeism, equality	Networking, face-to-face interactions, prevent of miscommunication, separation of work and personal life, greater sense of belonging, greater access to technology, less risk of information leaks
Weaknesses	Uncomfortable environment, missing social interactions, Difficulties to distinguish personal and professional life, Not preferred by all employees	No flexibility, Sedentary lifestyle, workplace conflicts, noisy workplace, wasted time in unnecessary meetings, commuting expenses, Non-relevant side conversations, High operating costs, Not preferred by all employees

Opportunities	Hybrid models, New talents and skillsets from around the globe	Maintain a professional appearance (e.g. build lasting interpersonal relationships with clients)
Threats	Cybersecurity (e.g. data theft), Privacy (e.g. privacy bridges), High competition (e.g. sourcing labour in countries with cheaper salaries)	Traffic-related air pollution Less workforce diversity (elderly, mothers)

It is evident from the SWOT analysis above that there are both good and not so good sides on the two existing working models, therefore, the hybrid model (a combination of WFH and WFO) is proposed as the best future solution in organizations. In this way, there will be an equilibrium in order to have solutions and face any difficulty that might come when hiring someone, and also offer various solutions to employees already working in a company. More specifically, we notice that the more options and/or freedom employees can have in an organization, the more likely it is for them to stay and not change workplace, especially now, that due to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, companies and governments were forced to offer this freedom and flexibility, and it proved that the new conditions of work are preferred even in a post-pandemic society.

Being able to choose where and how they work will allow people to focus more on other issues to tackle in their life rather than consuming energy and money to relocate for work for example, or reduce the stress when it comes to searching a job and combining their personal life (e.g. spouse might be located in another place so relocating would be complicated for both individuals).

2.4.3   Figures on WFH – why is it effective?

There have been several studies that were realized in order to prove that WFH has been more effective than office work, and there are numerous businesses that are based on these or their own studies' results to keep the WFH/hybrid working model even after the pandemic. A study by Stanford that included 16.000 workers and lasted 9 months showed that WFH increased productivity by an outstanding 13%. It is worth mentioning that this increase in performance was caused by having more calls per minute attributed to a calmer and more convenient

working environment as well as working more minutes per daily shift due to the fewer breaks and sick leaves taken. (Bloom, Liang, Roberts and Ying, 2015)

More specifically, workers in a home environment reported that they are less distracted by co-workers and movement in the office, resulting to spending 30 less minutes talking about non-work topics and spending 7% less time speaking to management. (Bloom, Liang, Roberts and Ying, 2015)

Productivity was a concern when it came to first allow people to WFH as the companies did not have a way to track working hours – with working from home the work done is no more measured in hours, but whether the work is completed or not. This means that it is a common phenomenon that workers will stay on their screen for a longer time at home to finalize a project, while this would not be the case previously; at least not that often. A survey conducted by ConnectSolution showed that 77% of those who work remotely at least a few times per month increased productivity with 30% realizing more work in a shorter period of time and 24% doing more work in the same period of time (Wright, 2015). It is clear that individuals use their time more productively and there are various factors that were mentioned earlier that contribute to this such as the comfortable working environment with usually less noise, and the ability to manage their time better, allowing them to be more flexible during their day. It seems that this feeling of freedom during working hours makes people more willing to do more at the same or less amount of time.

To specify, during the pandemic, Prodoscore reports showed an increase in productivity of 47% since March of 2020, compared to March/April of 2019 (Calif, 2020). The research also showed which days and hours are the most productive for a teleworker; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday seem to be the most productive days, especially from 10.30 a.m. to 03.00 p.m., even though the working days are usually from 09.00 a.m. to 05.30 p.m. The least productive day is Friday, followed right after by Monday as they are the days before and after the weekend, where people are eager to finish their working week on the former case, and they are just starting a "long" week on the latter one (Calif, 2020).

It is commonly known that the cases that workers tend to avoid work are new few – taking coffee/smoking breaks, hanging out and discussing with co-workers, or taking more time to

lunch are common facts for some workers in order to gain some more "free" time. A survey that was conducted in March 2020 by Airtasker proves that WFH employees spent less time avoiding work (a significant 15% less), meaning that they spent 1,4 more days actually working, even though they took more breaks (Airtasker, 2020).

It is a fact that WFH offers options that lead to a win-win situation for both employer and employee. Employees tend to now take more breaks and work more effectively, taking productivity to the highest levels that have been seen so far. It is important to highlight that in the same report, it is shown that teleworkers had a healthier lifestyle as they clocked 2 hours and 44 minutes more of exercise per week compared to office workers. This is due to less wasted time in commuting to work, and less stress to go and get back home, while they also have the chance to cook at home easier and prepare healthier meals (Airtasker, 2020).

However, the WFH model is less effective than the hybrid work model that also includes working in the office. Nathan Schultz, a senior executive at Chegg was interviewed by the *New York Times* in 2021 about productivity in an organization now that the work was mostly conducted from home. The conclusion of the interview was that during the first few months working remotely, the productivity rose significantly; however, as time passed, employees started feeling lonely and missed social interaction causing productivity to see a decrease, and the mental health of employees to worsen. Companies then realized that in order to succeed they needed to include work from home and work it the office, so they choose now to go for the hybrid working model that includes both.

To close, the most important things the companies need to make sure are that employees are comfortable, organized, and healthy, keeping this way the productivity to the highest levels and the employees happy – in order to achieve such an "ideal" situation in the work environment, employers must hear out what people want now, after seeing what is possible due to the pandemic, and then find the best ways and practices to make it happen in a way that is efficient for both sides.

2.5   In-house agencies and WFH

2.5.1   Definition

An in-house agency is owned and operated by its one and only client: the advertiser. Instead of a company outsourcing its advertising and collateral to an agency, its marketing and communications requirements are mainly handled by its own in-house agency. Some material may still be directed to outside agencies, usually on a per-project basis. (Wloczewski, 2013)

Analysing the definition, the advertiser, the client, has an additional team that works exclusively for them, and offer new ideas and implement strategies that would be more effective depending on the brand and the market. In this way, the skillset of the company is more diverse, as it gives the capability to the marketing department to discover in depth what works in each local market and use this knowledge in their advantage to drive their campaigns to success.

2.5.2   Comparison of in-house and regular agencies

More and more firms turn to in-house solutions the past few years, and this is because there are several advantages that constitute the concept of a regular agency as outdated, since the market nowadays has evolved and requires more for a business to stay competitive. It is a matter of quality, efficiency and costing. First, the main points that differentiate the two concepts are mentioned above and it finalizes with the reasons why a firm chooses in-house agencies as their main marketers.

Accessing the market consists to be a slower process for an in-house team since fetching a team with people that have the right dynamics and connect perfectly is required for this concept to work, and the hiring process might require more time, research and expertise than having a ready agency who is established in the market already and have insights for consumer habits, local marketing tactics and allows the agency to access the market in a faster pace. However, the adaptability of an integrated agency gets to the highest levels as the team can adapt and re-adapt depending on each campaign's purpose in order to respond to the requirements of each project individually, implementing a quicker strategic adjustment and

even having more efficient marketing budget allocation, while agencies need to prioritize according to their workload for their various clients and projects, while the expenses tend to be higher, even though the delivery is slower. It is quite common that firms choose to continue a project with an agency after having it started internally, therefore, the agency does not have control on the campaign from the start to finish, allowing space for miscalculations or misunderstandings with their clients that could possibly cost additional money and most importantly more time to realize them. On the other hand, a reliable integrated team manages the projects from the beginning to the end, monitoring constantly the quality and being able to reorganize tasks' priority according to the needs of the business at a specific period of time – this is because they use the same resources for several projects of the brand they are working for. (Yasser, 2020)

The biggest benefit of an in-house agency is its connectivity with their clients as the team has direct contact with all the stake holders within the organization and access to data and previous campaigns, making the analysis faster and more informative to prepare for the next steps of marketing the brand; a benefit is inexistent when there are several communication barriers between the firm and the marketer. Flexibility is another crucial point as an in-house team can manage the workforce depending on their skills and expertise for each campaign, while an agency has people with more general skillsets, or people that might not be available at all times for when the brand requires; for example, only a team that knows a brand very well could successfully respond to the fast paced requirements of marketing while COVID-19 started, as it was a new situation for everyone. (Yasser, 2020)

An agency, though, would have a wider pool of talents as they work with many clients, and in multiple marketing channels, and even have external resources they could propose to their clients – however, the cost implication gets higher, and the flexibility of the workforce is limited. Last but not least, an integrated team is hired to "live and breathe" for your brand, product and industry, therefore, their knowledge and expertise cannot be compared with the one that an agency offers, as the latter has its own structure and profitability targets. Generally, an in-house team is a long-term investment that will eventually become one with the organization and the workers will be seen more as co-workers rather than external partners, which means that a strong relationship of trust is built over time. (Yasser, 2020)

It is noticeable that the advantages of an in-house function outweigh the drawbacks since the knowledge and expertise for a brand to the highest levels can only be achieved by having a more exclusive and dedicated team. During the pandemic, brands that had marketers dedicated to them stayed competitive, and some of them even thrived despite the unusual conditions that workers had to cope with. It is worth mentioning that the direct relationship of internal teams did not get weaker due to work-from-home conditions, and the communication with co-workers and clients did not meet barriers as the teams already knew each other, and the only difference would be to initiate a meeting online instead of choosing a room for it.

On the contrary, agencies that have never interpersonally communicated with their clients and did not know the brand in depth, but only from some projects that were done previously, failed to keep the level of communication as high as before for one main reason: trust; the trust between these "far-away" considered people could not be established with the clients due to the fear and uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic caused, while clients could trust easier the people who have been working with in a regular basis, listen to their propositions, and eventually dedicate budget to them to initiate the campaigns proposed.

2.5.3   Oliver Agency – case study

Oliver has a working model like no other as they state in their official website – they provide hand-picked dedicated teams for your brand depending of the particular needs of your business in order to tackle day-to-day and long-term marketing campaigns. The process of making a team for a client is the following; the Oliver contact meets with the client(s) to understand in depth their needs, their future goals, and discuss their budget; in this way, Oliver can work on a pre-plan and propose a team composition that would manage to satisfy the client's requirements in the most efficient and economical way. The work is delivered faster and better by having a proactive team with the dynamics to meet tight deadlines by keeping the quality standards to the highest. (Oliver, 2020)

There are several challenges for Oliver - meet the budget the clients set, offer and propose solutions that would not require additional funds and many more, so Oliver has offshore teams which along with the on-site ones that they create for each brand, they collaborate

together to deliver fast and cheap. Finally, Oliver has invested a lot in software and having their own IT and technology teams, they offer technology solutions as well such as project management and delivery platforms, measuring outcomes and KPIs platforms as well as brand-specific technology solutions when necessary. (Oliver, 2020)

Having clients like Pepsi, Microsoft, Paypal, Reckitt, Adidas and others, shows that there is a variety of industries that the company specializes, and proves at the same time that they are actually capable of creating the "dream-team" for each client. It is worth discussing about the offshore team capabilities as it allows people to work for a brand 24/7 due to the different time zones, making even the tightest deadlines seem feasible and this is a competence that only a handful of agencies can offer. (Oliver, 2020)

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Oliver and its clients are happy to have their employees and partners working in distance as the companies prioritize the health and well-being of their employees – this proved that the agency-client relationship did not fade, but even got stronger when the clients started seeing the positive results on their campaigns even during the particular times people have been living in, not only strengthening the trust between the firm and its clients, but also driving businesses to consider hiring an in-house agency and even be more comfortable by the WFH and hybrid working model options. (Oliver, 2020)

The author had the chance to be working at Oliver France as a project manager of a small-medium team (10 people) and using his own experience, there are realizations made that help us understand the point of view of an in-house agency that implemented the hybrid model from the inside. Some background; the author joined Oliver after working at BETC advertising agency, having the chance to see from the inside how both an agency and an in-house agency work. After several months at Oliver, the flexible ways of working already make a difference in the life of the employees – more specifically, Oliver supports flexible working hours in order to match well with the personal program of each employee, meaning that as long as the daily tasks are done, the employees can work when they prefer throughout the day – of course, this is in accordance with each client locally, and then, working in distance is not a new concept for Oliver as the company was already using the hybrid working model in all its accounts, prioritizing office work with 1-3 days that WFH was taking place. (Oliver, 2020)

The reason why an in-house agency can be more flexible in these ways is because there is a higher level of trust built between the agency and the client, therefore, the client is more flexible to not only accept such arrangements but also promote such ways of working to their own employees, like it happened with Reckitt x Oliver. Oliver joined forces with Reckitt, an international health and wellness company, two years ago, and it is worth mentioning the example of a Reckitt brand that saw an explosion in sales during the pandemic, Dettol. Dettol is a hygiene brand that manufactures cleaning products and mostly hand sanitizers that were proven effective against COVID-19; however, the brand was not known in several big markets, like the French one – this was the challenge of Oliver France, make Dettol known now that it was needed the most and provide products that will help people face the notorious virus that froze economy and changed everyone's daily life globally. Through several urgent marketing campaigns including digital, print and social media, that were realized in the tightest deadlines, Dettol won a great place in the marketplace, increasing its sales by 66% in a period of three months.

The above example clearly shows the efficacity of an in-house marketing team that knows a brand so well that they managed to find the best way to advertise it and plan a strategy that would make the brand known at a market with harsh competition – it is quite unsure that an external agency would manage to have the same successful results in such a low price and short timing, even impossible. Using the example above, people understand that in times of uncertainty, clients need to have trusted teams around them in order to make moves towards realising budget for new campaigns despite the difficulties of the era – Oliver proved to have known the brand in such depth that they managed to take advantage of such a negative situation to make a brand known at a market that it would take years for a "newcomer" to get their place.

Oliver also reacted quite responsively at the outbreak by implementing teleworking to all its accounts globally following the recommendations or restrictions of the governments. It was a challenge for the company as well – how would they keep being unique as their "secret weapon" was to be working closely with their clients at their premises, something that would not be possible anymore. To answer that, the HR teams globally put several measures into place, they organized team meetings to keep the interactivity between co-workers and even employees and their clients, they put in place coaching on well-being and different type on

activities online to offer a chance to their employees to keep up doing what they used to before lockdowns and quarantines take place – maintaining a life as normal as possible. (Oliver, 2020)

Now, things are getting back to normal little by little, and after seeing the success Oliver had using the hybrid model even more, they have decided to put in place a 20% office presence, which means only one day of presence in the office permanently, something that could possibly be challenged and considered extreme by its clients previously; however now, having proven that it works, organizations are more open minded in trusting people, and promoting more and more the hybrid model of work, even in in-house agencies that they are supposed to be more effective and develop better client relationships due to the agency's presence in their client's premises. (Oliver, 2020)

2.5.4   In house agencies – findings

It seems to becoming a fact that the in-house concept becomes more and more popular, and now that it seems to be able to be combined with even more flexible ways of working, companies are turning more towards this as it allows to have the same, if not better, results in terms of quantity and quality in a competitive price that an external agency would not be able to propose.

A very important point is that by implementing integrated teams that have the possibility to telework, the team member selection will be more inclusive as it will allow people that were not in a situation to travel to work daily to join. Such examples would be elderly people, mothers, individuals that live outside the cities and travelling to their work would consume a total of a couple of hours or more per day, and more importantly, teams will be diverse as people with different background that are located in several places worldwide will be able to join forces and work together.

Women that have child-care needs are proved to be 32% less likely to leave their current workplace should they be given the opportunity to work remotely report published by *CNBCmake it* states. Oxfam International states that there is at least 800 billion in lost income during 2020 resulting by women leaving their workplace due to job loss or child-care demands, and the key to reducing dramatically this amount of lost income is for companies to put in

place long-term remote work options according to data gathered from *Catalyst*, a global non-profit which specializes on building workplaces suitable for women. It is a deal breaker for women with children if they are not able to combine work with childhood care, so an organization that can offer this combination and eventually the opportunity to find some balance between them has the advantage of being chosen by female talents with child-needs globally. (Connley, 2021)

If people want a world that looks forward, they have to take several steps, and flexibility at work is one of major ones to start with.

3   Practical research

3.1.1   How to WFH effectively?

Step by step, research proved that working from home could deliver the same high-quality results than working in the office, initializing a rather big change to the foundations of European, and not only, organizations. There are many examples of companies that managed to use WFH as a tool during the pandemic, and there is the current example of *Nortal,* a leading digital transformation company with over 20 years of experience, 100 experts across 18 offices spread in America, Europe and Asia. Analysing the interview of two developers of the company, the thesis writer obtains answers to many questions that both organizations and individuals make when it comes to doubts about WFH. Some common questions and the answers below:

1.   Aren't there distractions when working from home?

Actually, WFH has shown how many more distractions exist in the office, from having random discussions with co-workers, coffee breaks, and the time used to go to meeting rooms, put back the work equipment (laptop, notebook, etc.), and start working again there for some time, while from home, it is all done at the same place. There are also no distractions from people passing by your office asking for stuff, or just having the movement in the office that can automatically take your mind off of what you are doing.

At home, there is the option to send up boundaries and make agreements with the other people living at home in order to leave you your space while you work, and finally, feeling isolated also consists to be a myth – it is what you make out of it that matters and how you are dealing with the working environment and surroundings.

2. Are there habits to adopt in order to be in a productive state of mind at home?

There are three main habits to adopt in order from WFH to work effectively for you without having a negative effect in your daily routine, nor your personal life. First, as mentioned above, boundaries with people that live at home must be put, then, a daily plan to follow should be present, and finally act as if you are not going to the office. The secret is to have a dedicate space at your place that is for work; in this way, people get in a working mood, while other people who live at home respect this space and avoid going to it, and it finally helps distinguish the working and personal life as it feels like a different space. It is important to set alarms and take small breaks every now and then to avoid being on the screen for too long periods.

3. What do you wear when working from home?

There is no need to dress formally, or the way you dress at the office while you work at home. However, if donning a suit and shining a good pair of shoes makes the trip for some individuals, then they should totally go for it. There is a lot of power in wearing something that makes you feel energized and capable. A regular shower in the beginning of the day can make the difference, whether people need to go to the office, or if they stay at home and telework. Some people could even wear their gym kit, so that they can take short breaks and exercise should they prefer to – there is no rule, put on whatever makes you feel more comfortable and ready for success.

4. What applications or technologies help staying productive while WFH?

Communication channels such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, and other tools help to keep the contact with the team at work and follow up on projects, discussions and meetings. This is an effective way to feel included and keep the feeling of "we" when working with a group. Fun

fact, one phrase that was often present in the beginning of every online meeting is "You are on mute".

Additionally, online classes like gymnastics, cooking, well-being etc., help employees commit even more to the company as they are offered several services that they can be using for their own self development or find some new hobbies that are guided by a professional; in this way, employees get to do group activities even though they are teleworking, and also have the chance to take a break from work and do something productive that eventually urges them to be more motivated to get back to work.

5. How to maintain productivity while there are distractions at home?

Taking breaks is fundamental to manage staying focused on the work responsibilities throughout the day as it allows to deal with household tasks or loved ones during the day without mixing this time with work. Then, after such short breaks, focusing at work feels more natural without having any sense of pressure. Also, it is important in order to understand and separate work and family time during the same period of the day. Finally, headphones during meetings help you concentrate from possible surroundings that would be a source of distraction in other cases.

6. How to stay organized when at home and be on top of projects and responsibilities?

The truth is that no matter whether you work remotely or not, documentation and archiving are critical tasks for the success of your work. The former allows you to share important information with the rest of the team and keeping everyone updated, while you stay on track on your own for changes other group members make. Without documentation and archiving, it is difficult to stay organized in the long-term, and thankfully, there are multiple technological tools that can support you and the business such as *OneNote*, *Google Docs,* and *Trello*.

7. How to maintain clear communication with colleagues and clients while WFH?

Although it is easier to be misunderstood when communicating without using body language and tone of voice, it is critical that the people consider the messages to be good intended. In this way, conflicts and misunderstandings will be avoided, but also, it will be easier to fix any issue that come your way. Additionally, using technology once more, calls and video calls reduce significantly such cases, without meaning that they should always be present, but only when one feels like they would be necessary in order to give a clear image of a request.

8. In terms of quality, how do you ensure the delivery is consistent with client expectations while WFH?

Simply by staying organized and focused you can meet the milestones without putting more effort that you would if you were working on place. WFH does not make you less responsible, nor makes the requests more complicated to understand – all is about communication, communication with your team and your client.

9. What is the secret to succeed WFH?

It is essential to stay positive and open to suggestions and discussions while working from home; in this way negative feelings and thoughts are avoided, and everyone can just support each other doing their part in the team. Last but not least, it is necessary reach out and ask questions when something is not clear instead of trying to read minds as this can actually end up creating misunderstandings. Treat the day like you would go to the office. Communication is the key.
(Hitchcock, Baggett, 2020)

After having explained some of the most common misconceptions about working from home, it is fairly easy to understand that the advantages of that method outweigh the drawbacks, and also add up advantages to the company like lower costs like smaller offices not centrally located and less transportation costs for employees, while allowing more flexible working hours that the company can agree with the employee(s) to suit better the needs. Hiring managers now can also offer attractive advantages when it comes to WFH and manage to get a better "deal" with their employees, where everyone has something to gain, the company can save some money, and eventually the employees can have more flexibility on where to

live their life without having to be massively centralized to big cities, or relocate to faraway places in order to work.

3.1.2   What do employees think about teleworking?

According to a study conducted recently by social media scheduling platform *Buffer,* some surprising data gathered lead to fascinating results about whether employees prefer to keep their remote work going instead of going back to the office. There were 2500 remote workers and business owners from the US, Canada and other countries that provided constructive feedback for the purpose of the research. The results showed that an outstanding 99% of respondents said that they were happy with their current remote work schedule and that they would prefer to continue this way, or at least, partially this way. Not only that, a 95% of the same respondents stated that they would recommend teleworking to their circle. Then, despite the flexibility given to work from anywhere with a stable internet connection, 84% of the respondents stated that they still prefer to work from their home – this is something that is positive for employers and make them feel safer by having their employees in a stable environment they feel productive and happier. Last but not least, remote work is not all or nothing, employees state. In other words, people are happy to make arrangements to be partially on-site, but making sure that they will keep their flexibility and ability to choose when they prefer to be at the office, so that they can better schedule and combine work and personal life. (Remote Leadership Institute, 2021)

3.1.3   Towards the end of the pandemic – are the *new* working conditions still valid?

The answer to that would be yes, but let's take a deeper look to it. Before the pandemic, the biggest disruptions to work included new technologies along with growing trade links, and COVID-19 has for the first time decreased the importance of the physical dimension at work. Jobs in work arenas where physical proximity is more necessary are more likely to see more important transformation after the pandemic is over, triggering at the same time knock-on effects in different work arenas while business models change in response. The latter jobs were more impacted by the pandemic as workers used to necessarily be in their working place physically, although proximity is not the only explanation. (Lund, 2021)
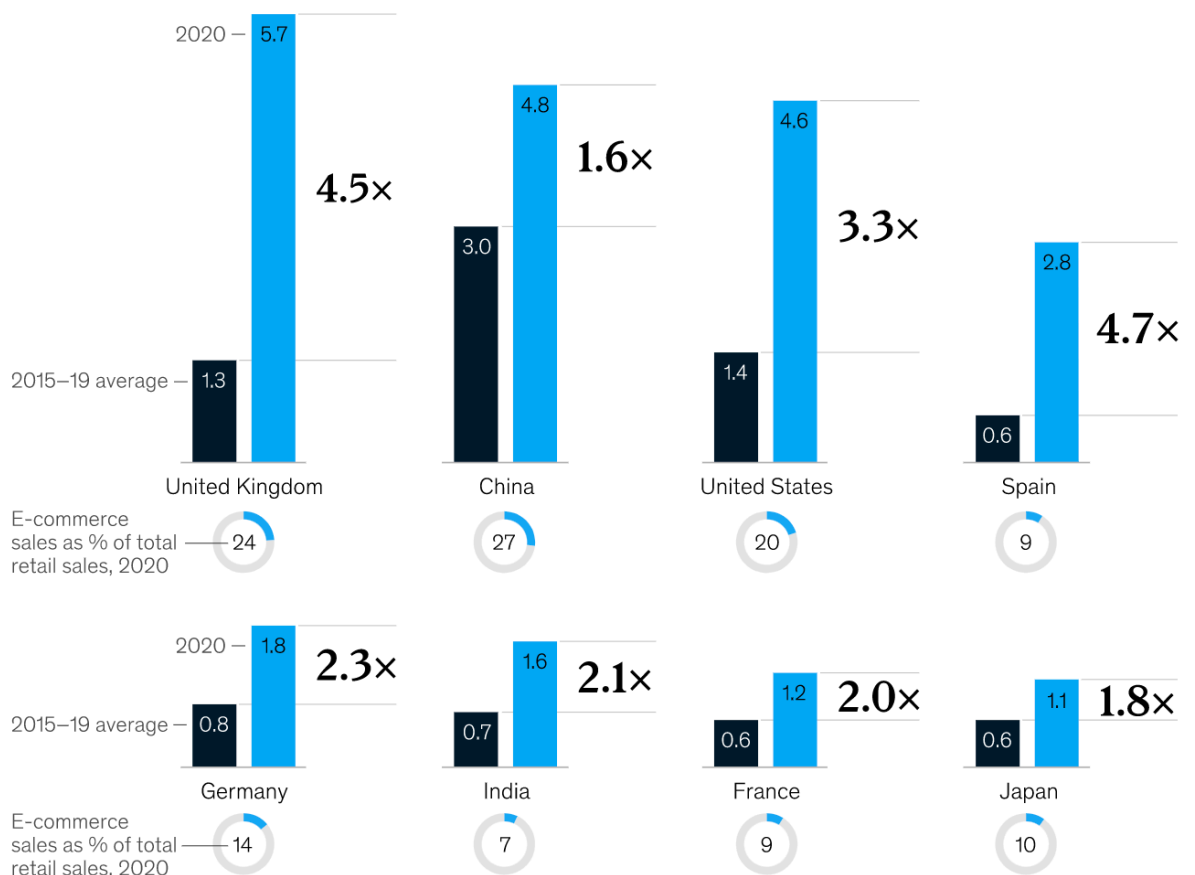
An analysis on the different working sections and how they will probably be affected in a post pandemic era. The on-site customer relations arena is consisted of employees who interact with clients in post offices, retail stores, and banks, among other places. Although work in this arena requires on-site presence, some of the work in this arena migrated to various digital transactions and e-commerce, a situation that is most likely to stick. Then, the travel and leisure arena include customer-facing employees in restaurants, hotels, entertainment venues and airport who interact with crowds of people in a daily basis. Due to the covid-19, most venues remained closed for a certain period of time during 2020, while airports and airlines operated on a severely limited basis, and the shift to remote work and reduction in business travel along with the automation of some occupations like food servicing roles are likely to curtail labour demand in this domain. An arena that was impacted positively in terms of opportunities by the hybrid/WFH model was the computer-based office work that includes administrative workplaces in hospitals, courts and factories, and offices of all sizes. This arena does not require employees to be physically on-site much, while the physical interaction with others is also limited. This seems to be the biggest arena in advanced economies, accounting for approximately the one-third of employment. Almost all potential remote work is within this domain. Finally, there is the maintenance and outdoor production arena that is consisted of farms, residential and commercial grounds, construction sites, and other outdoor spaces, where COVID-19 did not have such major impact as on other arenas as the work here requires little proximity and limited interactions with others, while it takes place fully outdoors. It seems that the pandemic pushed organizations and consumers to quickly adopt new behaviours which will possibly stick around, changing the trajectory of three groups of trends. However, we see rapid discontinuity between their impact on labour markets towards the end of the pandemic and after it. (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, Smit, Ellingrud, Meaney, Robinson, 2021)

According to the McKinsey report conducted in February 2021, some companies are planning to shift to more flexible workspaces after having evaluated the positive experiences of remote work during the past two years; something that will reduce the overall space they need and bring fewer workers into the offices. Overall, most companies consider reducing going to the office by at least 30%. Although this will cause a reduction to pollution due to people transmitting to the office, less expenses yearly for cheaper work spaces as they will no longer require that the offices are in big city centres and in the big sizes they used to be, demand for

retail and restaurants in downtown areas and for   public transportation will possibly see a decline as a result. Additionally, despite the estimation that leisure and tourism services are going to see a rise again, business travel will reduce importantly as video conferences, virtual meetings, and e-commerce are now preferred by both employees and companies; a move that will have knock-on effects on employment in commercial aerospace, hospitality, airports, and food service. (Lund et al, 2021)

It is important to highlight that the share of e-ecommerce grew at two to five times as it shows in the graph below compared to the rate before COVID-19; roughly ¾ of people that use digital channels for the first time during the pandemic state that they will continue using them even after the pandemic is over. E-commerce was already evolving rapidly before the pandemic, but the necessity of using all the digital tools available in order to face the issues that the pandemic and the restrictions imposed caused (Lund et al, 2021)

Year-over-year growth of e-commerce as share of total retail sales, percentage points

	United Kingdom	China	United States	Spain
2020	5.7	4.8	4.6	2.8
2015–19 average	1.3	3.0	1.4	0.6
	4.5×	1.6×	3.3×	4.7×
E-commerce sales as % of total retail sales, 2020	24	27	20	9

	Germany	India	France	Japan
2020	1.8	1.6	1.2	1.1
2015–19 average	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6
	2.3×	2.1×	2.0×	1.8×
E-commerce sales as % of total retail sales, 2020	14	7	9	10

Source: Retailing by Euromonitor International, 2021; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

McKinsey & Company

Overall, there is a shift towards digital solutions and practices that are going to keep being implemented in all arenas of work, highlighting more the ones that the work can be done by using digital tools. It is noted in the report that COVID-19 may propel faster adoption of AI and automation, especially in domains with high physical proximity. For example, automation and AI will make physical work done faster in specific cases like grocery stores, warehouses, manufacturing plants, and call centres in order to reduce workplace density and cope with surges in demand. People now are going to be more flexible even when they work in places that require them to be physically there, and this happens thanks to the technological advances. Consequently, it is expected that the largest negative impact of the pandemic to fall on employees in customer sales and food service along with the jobs that include less-skilled office support roles that will be able to be conducted with the help of AI. Job positions in transportation and warehouses are likely to increase; however, this is not going to outweigh the disruption of many low-wage jobs.   (Lund et al, 2021)

4   Outcomes

The main aim of this research thesis is to examine the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the ways of working in businesses as well as the sustainability of in-house agencies despite the fact that the direct client communication was not there due to the teleworking. Through academic research, data analysis, interviews, and own experience showed how ways of working evolved due to the pandemic and they are here to stay, while businesses turn towards partners that they can invest in long-term for a relationship based on trust and expertise – additionally, employers and employees can take advice on how to implement more successfully work from home policies and practices by analysing what is most wanted by employees, such as flexibility and freedom, and what can be offered more easily by employers. The study is important for both academic reasons and practice since it analyses a concept that is fairly new to many businesses as well as it provides newer topics for academic research and analysis. More specifically, concepts that were considered as taboo for many enterprises are now in the highlight and being adopted by more and more organizations; such concepts are WFO, the hybrid working model and in-house teams dedicated to brands.

WFH is here to stay

Employers and employees now know what is possible, they know they can get the work done in distance without compromising the quality or the rhythm of the job, and at the same time keep interacting with co-workers and collaborators as well as with clients and consumers. Now, for a number of employees, it is a deal breaker to have to go to the office daily, therefore, companies need to adjust to the situation and requirements of their employees. In order to have both employers and employees happy, the hybrid working model is used and provides solutions for just about anyone – it offers the flexibility that WFH provides along with the minimum "necessary" appearance in the office to keep the human connection that people need and keep having the feeling of a group, the feeling of "we" that isn't replaced by a screen. In her Harvard Business Review article, "*How to do Hybrid Right,*" Lynda Gratton highlights that "Moving to an anywhere, anytime hybrid model will succeed only if it is designed with human concerns in mind, not just institutional ones." Most people now seek for autonomy and choice about their lives, and therefore, teleworking offers just that. (Henley, 2020)

The reason why people seek more freedom and control in their lives now is because they saw that it is possible and that there is a way to make it work, therefore, organizations now start offering options of flexible working to lure talent and also lower their costs as there is no more need for huge offices centred in big cities, nor the need to offer extremely high salaries and compensation packages to find employees. Once agencies realized that by allowing their employees to telework can gain them higher productivity at work, lower annual costs and happier employees, they started searching for practices that would allow a smooth transition to the new era.

In-house and remote working

Taking all the above into consideration, there comes the conclusion that it is indeed possible to combine an in-house agency with an out of office way working, employers and employees proved that it actually works. Previously, there were concerns whether it would be possible to maintain the interpersonal relationship of trust between agency and clients, but after seeing the positive results during the pandemic, and even the growth of in-house agencies, it

is now clear that businesses are not be afraid of hiring integrated teams even if they are working full-time or partially in distance.

Clearly, there is still a lot of work to be done to find the best way to make it work, but the pandemic created a situation that required governments and companies to take extreme measures, which eventually accelerated the spreading of new modules of working that were not considered as options for the majority of employers previously. There are companies that have already started and even advanced working on their new policies and ways of working, making modules for all level employees and guides in order to reassure that a smooth transition to making permanent the situation of WFH is going to be established.

5   Conclusions

Taking all the above into consideration, a response is given to the research question of the thesis that is "How did work from home and the hybrid model gain the marketplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, and why in-house agencies are the solution for the future marketing services industry?". As during the pandemic it was not safe to commute to work, organizations put in place teleworking solutions, either fully or partially, therefore, new working models were established globally at the same time, making WFH the main solution when it came to the safety of employees and getting the work done – soon, it started being established everywhere that was possible, especially after showing the successful results of it. In-house agencies can offer solutions like depth of knowledge regarding a brand and fast reaction when it comes to advertise better a product or service when the deadlines are tight, therefore, companies now prefer to invest more on such solutions rather than trusting only the traditional agencies model, and this is due to the efficacity, quality of deliverables, and, of course, the lower prices.

6   Recommendations

The world evolves, and the pandemic took us one step further when it comes to understanding our possibilities in terms of different working ways, trusting employees that work remotely, and this situation proved that marketing agencies can have everything done without having a full time presence in the office, but most importantly clients also saw this.

Creative agencies could become more flexible and open towards offering solution packages that are "tailored" for each and every one of their customers, and taking into consideration their needs and budget, they can prepare a strategy plan for them, either by offering their services as usual, or by offering them solutions that include integrated teams that will be dedicated to them and their brands. In this way, external marketing agencies will be having the capacity to offer multiple options to potential clients and update their strategy and planning according to the needs of their clients yearly. Why should they do this? Because clients will be more open to trusting them seeing that they can choose a plan that would fit specifically their business and needs, and also know that this plan can be revised and ameliorated each year according to new needs, or different budget allocation, having the possibility to increase/decrease the number of members of the integrated teams for example.

Agencies could not only adopt the hybrid working model in terms of their employees' flexibility, but they can also make a hybrid model when offering their services, offering options that include both external and in-house work. This is a procedure that will still take some time to be adopted as there are several points to be taken into consideration and clauses to be respected, but people are on the right path for a more free and inclusive perspective that will allow talents from all over the world to work together and share experiences and new ideas, broadening the horizons of both the agencies' and clients' organizations. Finally, it is important that organizations schedule trainings with professionals that aim to educate their employees of all levels and not only raise awareness of the matters mentioned above, but also show the ways to action.

There is another important point to highlight; working from home opportunities could be possibly save even more money to companies. Apart from the fact that there is not going to be a need for big centrally placed offices that cost a significant amount of money annually, nor transport compensations or other benefits that are related to commuting to work, the salary will possibly be decided on where the employee lives. This is not something that has started happening yet as WFH is in an early stage, but companies will possibly discuss salary depending on the place their employees live; more specifically, if an employee lives in France, and taking into consideration if they live in a big city where expenses are higher, or in the countryside, the company will be able to propose a fair salary according to the standards of

the area. Of course, this will not always be the case, but it can facilitate the situation when an employee needs or wants to telework exclusively as the company will have another benefit from it.

To sum up, the pandemic showed to many countries the way forward and more and more businesses adopt such innovative and flexible ways of working, working hard on finding the best to put it in place – and employees seem to prefer keeping this way of working instead of getting back on-site at full capacity. Then, agencies evolve continuously, and have now realized that in-house combined with flexible ways of working is the way forward as we see from many examples of companies globally. There are still a lot of theories to be tried out until people figure out what are the most suitable practices and policies that work the best way for both employees, employers and clients, and once this is done, HR officers and potential or existent employees will know what situation satisfies their needs and manage to negotiate it in fair terms for both parties.

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