



## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Title: Pioneering orientation and imitation in tourism clusters: the role of knowledge strategy**

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**Subject area: S5 Glocal clústeres: aspectos críticos y nuevas trayectorias**

**Abstract:** (minimum 1500 words)

*The globalization of tourism competition, attention to the environmental impact of tourism and concern for the sustainability of regional tourism development generate new challenges for firms located in tourist clusters (Martínez-Pérez, Elche & García-Villaverde, 2019). The literature on pioneering orientation (PO) highlights the benefits for firms being the first mover and how they lead to increase of competitiveness and sustainability (Stevens & Dykes, 2013). PO is a strategic position based on being the first in an industry developing new products and services, in this sense, a pioneer firm is able to identify new market opportunities before competition. These studies have focused on advantages of entry timing in diverse industries and contexts. However, there are few studies analyzing the tourism industry and even less focused on territorial agglomeration of firms like a cluster; thus, this paper analyses PO of firms located in tourism clusters. On the other hand, the literature points out a variety of drivers of PO, therefore, further research is needed to better understand the internal and external determinants of PO (Zachary, Gianiodis, Payne & Markman, 2015). Despite the interest in these topics, there is scant literature connecting tourism clusters and PO so this gap in the literature has motivated the approach of this study.*

*The ecology of populations approach states that firms that possess some key resources are more resilient to changes in the environment. It is known that environmental contingencies jointly with consumers' behavior and preferences, which change constantly, entailing a high level of market uncertainty (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). Currently, clustered firms undergo the impact of numerous and rapid changes and influence their strategic decisions so a highly dynamic environment is a determinant factor of the development of PO. From diverse types of environmental dynamic, imitation by competitors has a clear effect on industry dynamics, and this study focuses on threat of imitation perceived by CEOs of firms located in tourism clusters. The trend of copying strategic behaviours from the most successful firms in an industry influences quite significantly on decisions about OP. In this sense, firms adopt a more or less risky*



*OP according to their expectations about the likely of achieving net first-mover advantages, which, in turn, depend on perceived threat of imitation.*

*There is an open debate about the choice of an appropriate strategy of knowledge that determine the best development of current organizational capabilities and also their adjustment for the future, ensuring the success of a firms for long term. There are numerous studies focused on different types of knowledge and, hence, rather diverse strategies of knowledge; however, there are few studies analyzing how different knowledge strategies of clustered tourism firms are related to imitation environment, in turn, how they may influence PO of these firms. March (1991) distinguish between exploration and exploitation of knowledge; both strategies of knowledge are critical to adapt and survive firms in a dynamic environment, considering that a firm have a wide range of chances, this firm can implement a strategy individually or different combinations of them (Gupta, Smith & Shalley, 2006).*

*From these arguments, a question arises about the most appropriate knowledge strategy and its moderating role between threat of imitation and PO. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to analyze the moderating effect of knowledge strategy in the relationship between threat of imitation and PO. On the one hand, the contingent approach to analyze the moderating role of exploitation knowledge strategy and exploration knowledge strategy individually. On the other hand, the configurational approach to study the moderating role of combined knowledge strategy.*

*We propose next hypotheses:*

*H1: Imitation threat has a positive effect on pioneering orientation of tourism clustered firms.*

*H2: Exploitation knowledge strategy has a positive effect on pioneering orientation of tourism clustered firms*

*H3: Exploration knowledge strategy has a positive effect on pioneering orientation of tourism clustered firms*

*H4: Exploitation knowledge strategy positively moderates the relationship between imitation threat and PO of tourism clustered firms.*

*H5: Exploration knowledge strategy negatively moderate the relationship between imitation threat and pioneering orientation of tourism clustered firms*

*H6: The interaction of exploration and exploitation knowledge strategy moderates the relationship between imitation threat and pioneering orientation of tourism clustered firms*

*To carry out the empirical study, we have chosen to focus on the cultural tourism clusters in Spain, specifically in World Heritage Cities in Spain (Martínez-Pérez et al., 2019). Finally, we obtained a total of 215 valid questionnaires constituting a rate of response of 10.55% -the sampling error was 6.32% for a confidence level of 95% and the least favorable situation for  $p=q=0.5$ -, which is deemed acceptable in view of the low response rate in mail surveys.*









*these firms should develop ambidextrous strategies to face low imitation environments. However, managers should develop a combined strategy based on high exploitation and low exploration to develop greater PO in the face of a high imitation. Furthermore, firms located in a tourism cluster should contribute to develop a competitive and sustainable tourism cluster and to reinforce its innovative and environmental image.*

*Several limitations of this study might influence the generalization of the results obtained. First, the empirical study is cross-sectional. Therefore, the results and conclusions of this study are hard to extend to other industries, other types of tourism and also other kinds of firm agglomerations. From findings we propose as future work to study different antecedents of PO, such as market dynamism or technological dynamism, considering the interaction of combined strategy.*

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**Keywords:** *Pioneering orientation; imitation; knowledge strategy; tourism clusters*

**JEL codes:** **D21; D83; O31; L83; R11**