

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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

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**Abstract:** (minimum1500 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.

Table 1. Results of Regression Analysis for pioneering orientation

	Mod	elo 1	Modelo 2		Modelo 3		Modelo 4		Modelo 5	
	β	t- statistics								
Size	-0,026	-0,336	-0,036	-0,468	-0,055	-0,819	-0,064	-0,981	-0,072	-1,104
Type firm	-0,054	-0,705	-0,059	-0,782	-0,039	-0,589	-0,042	-0,651	-0,046	-0,708
Sense belong.	0,06	0,837	0,028	0,392	-0,057	-0,893	-0,054	-0,856	-0,048	-0,758
Fin. resour.	0,257***	3,34	0,26***	3,405	0,268***	4,016	0,27***	4,112	0,271***	4,166
Sources inf.	0,126†	1,702	0,119	1,618	-0,004	-0,056	0,011	0,162	0,002	0,031
Imitation			0,143*	1,979	0,031	0,47	0,072	1,076	0,144†	1,866
Exploitation					0,288***	3,348	0,294***	3,409	0,319***	3,685
Exploration					0,271**	3,192	0,266**	3,169	0,292***	3,466
Im.x explt.							0,243**	2,79	0,285***	3,227
Im. x explr.							-0,214*	-2,406	-0,209*	-2,337
Explt. x explr.									-0,127†	-1,664
Im. x explt. x explr.									-0,187*	-2,094
$\mathbb{R}^2$	0,108***		0,127***		0,343***		0,372***		0,389***	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,083		0,098		0,313		0,336		0,347	
Change adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0,083***		0,015*		0,215***		0,023*		0,011†	

† p 0.10; \* p 0 .05; \*\* p 0.01; \*\*\* p 0.001

Figure 1. Moderating effect of exploitation knowledge

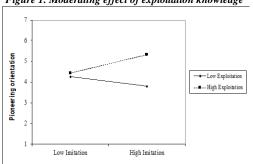
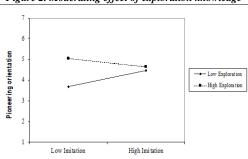
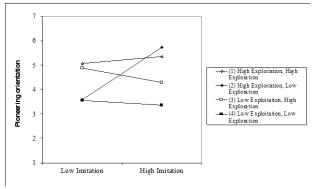


Figure 2. Moderating effect of exploration knowledge



 ${\it Figure 3. Moderating effect of exploitation and exploration knowledge}$ 





The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis, which we present in Table 1. We constructed two plots to provide a better interpretation of the effects, one for exploitation and another for exploration knowledge strategy, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. In Figure 4, we plot the triple interactive effect. The results for imitation threat as a linear predictor are positive and significant, so we can accept the Hypothesis 1. The findings confirm Hypothesis 2 and 3, supporting the positive role of both exploitation and exploration knowledge strategies. The results also confirm Hypothesis 4 and 5, supporting the moderating roles of knowledge strategies, specifically the positive moderating role of exploitation and the negative moderating role of exploration. Finally, the triple interaction effect is indeed present -exploitation and exploration knowledge strategy- jointly moderate the relationship between imitation threat and PO. The results for the triple interactive effects are as expected and confirm Hypothesis 6.

This study focuses on some determinants that influence PO. Specifically, this paper analyses the moderating role of knowledge strategy on the relationship between imitation threat and PO, by distinguishing exploitation and exploration of knowledge. In a contingent model, whereas the exploitation knowledge strategy moderates positively the relationship between threat of imitation and PO, the exploration knowledge strategy moderates negatively. This finding means that the exploitation strategy, which consists in use internal resources, builds barriers to imitation of competitors. However, the exploration strategy requires display more complex resource in order to scan the environment, which entails important investments and diversified resources. Tourism firms need to explore new markets segments and also develop new interface with consumers and these actions are much more easily understanding and copying by competition. Thus, knowledge exploration strategy could be not an appropriate decision when the level of threat of imitation is higher and may actually be harmful to pioneers tourism firms.

In the configurational model, this study adds to the debate about the convenience of ambidexterity or punctuated equilibrium strategy. The main contribution of this paper is finding out the moderating role of combined knowledge strategy on the relationship between threat of imitation by competition and PO. In a context of high threat of imitation, firms that combine exploitation and exploration knowledge develop less PO. Tourism firms that exploit and explore knowledge simultaneously, that is, ambidexterity knowledge strategy, have to display a great variety of resources and it requires more important investments. In this case, if firms perceive dynamism and high risk of imitation will adopt a follower orientation, which is a more conservative strategy because they have no expectations of take advantages of first-mover.

In addition, this study contributes to theoretical and empirical literature. On the one hand, we delve into the antecedents of PO in the context of clusters, connecting, from a theoretical focus, entry timing, cluster, organizational knowledge and ecology of populations. On the other hand, this paper fills an interesting gap in the empirical literature, since few papers have analyzed entry timing in clusters, more specifically in tourism clusters in the context of Spain.

Managers of the firms located in the tourist clusters should support their PO with different knowledge strategies depending on the threat of imitation they face. Thus,



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