

INNOVATIVENESS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ANTECEDENTS, DIMENSIONS, & OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from work found in the organisational, tourism services, and consumer innovation literatures over the past 40 years, this paper develops a conceptual framework of innovativeness. It delineates innovativeness as a multidimensional construct; exploring its key antecedents, dimensions, and outcomes. To date, little significant international research activity on innovativeness within the SME, and in particular within the small tourism firm, has emerged from the extant literature. Moreover, the current literature appears to lack clarity in meaning, often confusing ‘innovativeness’ with ‘innovation’. Thus, this paper offers a new conceptualisation of firm-level innovativeness, distinguishing it from actual innovations themselves. In this paper, innovativeness is conceptualised as a particular form of organisational mindset and a specific set of capabilities that drive innovation activity.

Key Words: innovativeness; antecedents; dimensions; outcomes; tourism innovation; conceptualisation

INTRODUCTION

One dominant theme that continuously appears to emerge from national and supranational reports is that in order for the tourism industry to surmount the detrimental effects of lost competitiveness, emphasis must be directed at enhancing the innovativeness of the tourism firm (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; The National Development Plan, 2007-2013: Tourism Policy Review, 2003). Although innovation has been acknowledged in academia and government circles as a key success driver for the tourism industry, and despite numerous calls to explore tourism innovativeness, few research agendas have addressed this issue, resulting in extensive knowledge gaps. Theory suggests that if small tourism firms can strategically practice innovation, their limited resources will be utilised to maximum capacity and profitability, and that competitiveness should increase (Sundbo et al. 2006). However, research to date tends to focus on micro or product-level innovation, ignoring the reality that small firms need to continually innovate as a firm-level strategic objective, especially considering that “*innovations in and of themselves are not necessarily the key to long-term business success*” (Siguaw et al. 2006: 556). Simply stated, a tourism firm’s long-term survival may rely more on overall strategic-level innovativeness that produces dynamic capabilities, which in turn enhances the development of innovations, and less on the actual innovations themselves (Abernathy and Utterback, 1978; Trott, 1998). Hence, the defining factor of long-term survival through innovation appears based not on specific, discrete innovations but rather on an overarching, organisation-wide innovation capability structure, termed ‘innovativeness’. Other researchers have called for this broad firm-level perspective of innovativeness (Siguaw et al. 2006; Avlonitis et al. 1994). However, it has to be stressed that innovativeness within the tourism literature has received very scant attention and even within the broader innovation literature, the focus has been on the

large organisation. Little significant international research activity on innovativeness within the SME, and in particular within the small tourism firm, has emerged from the extant literature. Moreover, there has been relatively little empirical research reported that details how firms can achieve firm-level innovativeness (Markides, 1998). Indeed, innovativeness is difficult to achieve and remains a central dilemma for most small firms.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of research attention, the term 'innovativeness' has been frequently used in the tourism and innovation literature, but with a mix of conceptualisations and interpretations, often being used interchangeably with the term 'innovation' (Wang and Ahmed, 2004; Salavou, 2004; Hurley and Hult, 1998; Subramanian and Nilakanta, 1996). This is despite a general consensus in the literature that innovativeness is the precursor to innovation and represents a firm's ability to innovate (e.g., Wang and Ahmed, 2004; Hult et al. 2004; Hurley and Hult, 1998; Avlonitis et al. 1994). This suggests that innovativeness should be viewed as the strategic and competitive orientation of an organisation, and innovation as the vehicle which it uses to achieve its competitive advantage, providing a vivid mental vision of an input (innovativeness) and output (innovation) situation (Manu, 1992). Unlike innovation, innovativeness is not an end but rather a means to an end and it is this "idiosyncratic aspect that captures the significant difference between innovativeness and innovation" (Menguc and Auch, 2006: 65). Consequently, Siguaw (2006) proclaims that current innovation literature has not focused on innovativeness but on its output - innovation. For Avlonitis et al. (1994) the confusion surrounding the construct of innovativeness is further compounded by numerous authors amalgamating the antecedents that help shape innovativeness with the concept of firm level innovativeness. However, as Rogers (1998) points out, antecedents cannot be utilised in defining the innovativeness construct because they do not reflect innovativeness. For Midgley and Dowling (1978) the majority of researchers have failed to recognise that innovativeness is in fact a standalone construct, and should not be used synonymously with 'innovation' or the antecedent-related ingredients needed for firm-level innovativeness. Summing up the current state of the extant literature, Wolfe (1994) states that "*no set of characteristics which differentiates more from less innovative organisations has emerged*", primarily due to the narrow research focus on '*determinants of organisational innovation*' or on '*innovation output*' rather than understanding the dimensions of '*organisational innovativeness*' (1994: 409). According to Ellonen et al. (2008), the dimensions of the innovativeness concept still lack clarity and this needs to be underpinned by further research

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to disentangle the innovativeness construct, conceptually exploring its meaning. Drawing from work found in the innovation, organisational, consumer, and tourism services literatures over the past 40 years, the researchers define what is meant by the term 'innovativeness'. The paper develops a conceptual framework which delineates innovativeness as a multidimensional construct, shaped by a number of antecedents. In addition, the conceptual framework considers the outcomes of firm-level innovativeness in the SME tourism firm. Due to the scarcity of research and interest in this area, it is perceived that this ongoing study will contribute substantially to academic knowledge and practice, highlighting key areas warranting future investigation. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, the researchers provide an overview of the reviewed literature in this paper. Next, a synthesized discussion on the most salient aspects of the innovativeness construct that have led to this discussion are presented. Based on the foregoing, an integrated model for conceptualising innovativeness is presented. In the concluding section, observations are drawn for future theoretical and empirical development in the field of tourism innovation.

The Reviewed Literature

The review focuses on empirical research and conceptualisations reported by researchers published in a wide range of journals, books and working papers. Although this may have led to some variation in quality, the key consideration was whether the study contributed to the stock of knowledge on understanding the innovativeness concept and the factors that shape it. It is also important to note that on occasion, findings from research in other areas are also included in this review, because in their course of discussion on topics, such as, organisation, consumer, innovation, and tourism, they may have identified or addressed issues that impact on the innovativeness concept, or, provided context or corroboration for work in the area, and so warrant inclusion.

In addition, it is also important for the reader to be aware that when conducting a literature review some degree of arbitrariness in the selection of articles, books and working papers is inevitable. Indeed, with

any synthesis, decisions have to be made about what is central to a topic and so not all reviewed articles are referred to in the text. Nevertheless, these problems with synthesizing literature can be diminished through a thorough and meticulous review process. It is not the intention to claim that the selection of material examined here on firm-level innovativeness is all-inclusive. Indeed, there will be both academic and practitioner publications missed (for example, studies not written in English). Yet, the material retrieved and examined is extensive. Furthermore, at all times and to the best of the author's knowledge, concepts, quotes, hypothesis extracted from articles and books were used in their proper context. In addition, support material was referenced in order to ensure that the researchers' interpretation of other researchers work is appropriate and accurate.

The review encompassed empirical research and conceptualisations reported by researchers published in over 30 journal titles from a wide variety of specialisations (e.g., marketing, economics, strategy, organisational behaviour, consumer, tourism, innovation), covering the period from 1961 to 2008. Indeed, the studies eventually presented for review were selected after conducting an exhaustive search of business, management, marketing, innovation, and tourism-related databases (for example ABI/Inform, Business Source Premier, Emerald Full text, and Science Direct) using key-related words and consulting the referenced literature of each piece of work in order to move through the relevant pieces of literature. For example, Hult et al. (2004) article on the antecedents of innovativeness lead to Hurley and Hult's (1998) article on the relationship between innovation, market orientation and learning orientation which in turn led the authors to a number of subsequent articles dealing with the antecedents of innovativeness, including Damanpour's (1991) meta-analysis of the effects of determinants and moderators of organisational innovation. The entire journal catalogue where the articles appeared were systematically reviewed and studied by an established qualitative research method known as Content Analysis. In essence, each piece of literature was used as a platform for a more thorough literature search. In total, 65 conference papers and books were reviewed for this literature.

Building upon Prior Conceptualisations of the Innovativeness Construct

In terms of conceptualising the concept of innovativeness, one of the earliest studies comes from the communication literature where Hurt et al. (1977) define innovativeness as a 'willingness to change'. For Midgley and Dowling (1978), innovativeness is a form of innate personality trait. Rogers (1983) refers to innovativeness as the 'elapsed time of adoption of an idea or behaviour'. According to Homburg et al. (2002: 96), 'innovativeness' is a function of "the number of innovations a company offers, how many customers these innovations are offered to, and how strongly these innovations are emphasized". Kundu and Katz (2003) relate innovativeness to the organisation's intention to be innovative. Subramanian and Nilakanta (1996) and Subramanian (1996) define innovativeness in terms of the display of innovative behaviour consistently over time by an organisation. While for Stamboulis and Skyannis (2003) and Hjalager (1997), innovativeness conveys some behavioural change in response to a stimulus. For Hult et al. (2004) innovativeness means a firm's capacity to introduce new processes, products, or ideas in the organisation. Similarly, both Zaltman et al. (1973) and Hurley and Hult (1998) define innovativeness as 'the openness to new ideas'. Leavitt and Walton (1975, 1988) conceptualise innovativeness in terms of the 'openness to information processing'. Berthon et al. (1999) describe innovativeness as open-mindedness, enterprising, willingness to change, ability to innovate or to be creative. Avlonitis et al. (1994) treated innovativeness as being composed of a technological and behavioural dimension denoting both a technological capacity and a willingness and commitment of the firm to innovate. Some researchers have subscribed to the term 'organisation innovation orientation' (e.g., Amabile, 1997, 1996; Hurley and Hult, 1998), whereby innovativeness is expressed as the organisation's overall approach (e.g., attitude and mindset) towards innovation. For Avlonitis et al. (2001) innovativeness conveys 'newness', defining innovativeness as 'various dimensions of newness both to the company and the market'. In addition, the notion of novelty and the desire for novelty is adhered to (e.g., Hirschman, 1980; Midgley and Dowling, 1978; cited in Hirunyawipada and Paswan, 2006; Roehrich, 2004). Wang and Ahmed (2004: 304) characterise "organisational innovativeness as a firm's overall innovative capability of introducing new products to the market, or opening up new markets, through combining strategic orientation with innovative behaviour and process". Slater and Narver (1994) view innovativeness as one of the core value-creating capabilities that drives performance. Similarly, both Markides (1998) and Besanko et al. (1996) consider innovativeness as the development of new competitive strategies that create value for the firm. Amabile (1997) aligns innovativeness with the concept of organisational creativity. Menguc and Auch, (2006: 66) relates innovativeness as a "firm's proclivity, receptivity and inclination to adopt ideas that depart from the usual way of approaching business". Similarly, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) conceptualise innovativeness as a firm's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, to experiment, and be creative. In addition to creativity and resource-based view, the concept of risk

is incorporated into some definitions (e.g., Cowart et al. 2007; Midgley and Dowling, 1978; Gounaris et al. 2003), as well as the idea of uncertainty, ambiguity, and difficult (e.g., Gounaris et al. 2003). Siguaw et al. (2006) discuss 'organisational innovation orientation', which they understand as being an overarching, organisation-wide knowledge structure that facilitates innovativeness. Adhering to the idea of 'common mission' and 'innovation climate of new ideas'; Worren et al. (2002) aligns innovativeness to 'entrepreneurial intent' in which innovativeness can be fostered. Similarly, Hurley and Hult (1998) consider the nature of the organisational climate in which innovativeness can be nurtured. Atuahene-Gima and Ko (2001), and Amabile (1997) view management procedures and resources as important foundations of organisational innovativeness. Amabile (1997) and Burns and Stalker (1961) consider the importance of a management and leadership style that places value on creativity and innovation in general. For Souitaris (2002) firm-specific competencies are a key innovativeness-determining factor, while for Damanpour (1991) there is a specific set of organisational characteristics that can be attributed to the innovativeness of firms. Nystrom et al. (2002) believe that the organisational context (e.g., size, age, and resource slack) determines innovativeness. Both Subramanian (1996) and Calantone et al. (2003) believe that the nature of the firm's external environment has an effect on innovativeness. For Souitaris (2002) a firm's innovativeness can be attributed to the socio-economic and country-specific factors. Similarly, Hall and Williams (2008) and Shaw and Williams (1998) have studied the effect of embeddedness on firm-level innovativeness. Dyer and Singh (1998), Fischer (1999), and Holmen et al. (2004) link tourism innovation networks to innovativeness.

While at first glance, there appears to be no consensus in the literature, there are nevertheless underlying commonalities in these varying conceptualisations of the dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes.

Dimensions

First, most definitions conceive *creativity* as a key component of innovativeness (Amabile, 1997; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). For example, both Salavou (2004) and Sundbo (1997) discuss a firm's thinking capability to produce ideas that are new and distinctive, which for Markides (1998) can lead to new and applicable insights. Wang and Ahmed's (2004) definition implies an ability to exceed routine thinking processes, which involves going beyond the obvious to discover newness (Avlonitis et al. 2001). The various definitions imply a creative mindset to produce "some new process, product, or idea in the organization" (Hult et al. 2004: 430) thus leading to innovation. Second, an underlying assumption of most definitions is *newness and novelty*. Avlonitis et al. (2001) define innovativeness as 'various dimensions of newness both to the company and the market' which essentially answers Johannessen's et al. (2001) question: new to whom? Avlonitis et al. (2001) refer to 'degrees of newness' from really new innovations to incrementally new innovations, representing a continuum of newness. This conceptualisation echoes the notion of novelty and the desire to possess and seek out novel products and brands (e.g., Hirschman, 1980; Midgley and Dowling, 1978; Roehrich, 2004). Roehrich (2004) phrase 'attraction towards newness' offers a compact insight of the tendency to innovate in terms of newness and novelty seeking. Third, most definitions view what Hurley and Hult (1998: 44) call '*the notion of openness to new ideas*' as an aspects of a firm's innovativeness. This conceptualisation underscores the present researchers' emphasis on what Menguc and Auh refer to as a firm's receptivity and "willingness to forgo old habits and try untested ideas (2006: 66). This thinking strongly implies that innovativeness requires a company mindset or propensity to listen to "all voices", either internally or externally (Ahmed, 1998), and to explore and experiment with ideas (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Fourth, inherent in prior definitions is the firm's commitment or devotion to the innovation process (Berthon et al. 1999) and its *intention to be innovative* (Kundu and Katz, 2003). Indeed, firm-level innovativeness demands proactiveness in exploring new methods of doing business (Menguc and Auh, 2006; Mang, 2000). In the consumer literature, Marcati et al. (2008) refer to what is known as Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, whereby the consumer's intention to adopt an innovation is influenced by a conscious decision shaped by their attitude towards innovative behaviour and their perceptions of the factors surrounding such an intention (e.g., perceived advantages and disadvantages derived from adopting the innovation, social pressure towards the adoption, ease or difficulty of engaging in that behaviour). Fifth, most definitions relate innovativeness to Cowart et al (2007) notion of *risk and risk taking*. Midgley and Dowling (1978) align the notion of 'innate innovativeness' with perceived risk and the tendency to make risky decisions. Other researchers including Hirunyawipada and Paswan (2006) subscribe to the same school of thought. A sixth and extremely widespread component emerging from the various definitions relates to a firm's *capacity to innovate*. Avlonitis et al. (1994) argue that it is not sufficient that a firm has the behavioural will to innovate, but it must also possess the necessary technological capacity to realise this willingness. In this regard, Wang and Ahmed (2004: 304) characterise "organisational innovativeness as a firm's overall innovative capability of introducing new products to the market, or opening up new markets,

through combining strategic orientation with innovative behaviour and process". Slater and Narver (1994) view innovativeness as one of the core value-creating capabilities that drives performance. Similarly, both Markides (1998) and Besanko et al. (1996) consider innovativeness as the development of new competitive strategies that create value for the firm. Remaining with the idea of capacity to innovate, Hult et al. (2004) rationalise innovativeness as a firm's capacity to introduce new processes, products, or ideas in the organisation. Burns and Stalker (1977) conceptualise innovativeness as the capacity to innovate. In the tourism services innovativeness literature, Sundbo et al. (2007) refer to this technological aspect and the 'innovation capacity' of tourism destinations (e.g., Sundbo et al. 2007). The seventh dimension evident within most definitions centres on the *process of innovation adoption*. The actual adoption of an innovation by a firm would be considered an outcome of innovativeness. Nonetheless, the manner or the underlying conditions that drive the adoption should be considered a dimension of innovativeness. For instance, Rogers (1983) refer to innovativeness as the 'elapsed time of adoption of an idea or behaviour'. Similarly, Subramanian and Nilakanta (1996) argue that innovativeness is composed of three dimensions, namely, the mean time of innovation adoption, the mean number of innovations adopted, and the consistency of the pattern of innovation adoption in a given period of time. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971:27) define [consumer] innovativeness as 'the degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than the average member of his social system'. Moreover, the level of innovativeness possessed by the adopting unit (e.g., consumer, firm) acts as a precursor to the overall innovation adoption. Midgley and Dowling (1978), Foxall (1988), and Hirschman (1980) argue that the level of innovativeness influences whether a consumer will adopt a new product or not, as well as influencing the speed of innovation after the product or service is introduced to the market (Goldsmith and Flynn, 1992). Based on the foregoing, the level of innovativeness (i.e., high, moderate, or low) acts as a precursor for the time of adoption of innovations (i.e., early, late, or not at all), creating the necessary preconditions for innovative behaviour in a specific domain (i.e., domain-specific innovativeness).

Antecedents

First most definitions refer to *organisational innovation orientation*, which appears to act as an umbrella term in the innovation literature for several variables. For instance, Siguaw et al. (2006) discuss a firm's overarching knowledge structure that produces a specific set of innovation-producing capabilities. Atuahene-Gima and Ko (2001: 6) consider innovation orientation to be "*human resource practices that foster support for innovative and risky behaviour that enable employees to keep up with changing technologies*". For Amabile (1997, 1996), an innovation orientation includes the idea of motivation, resources, and management practices. Amabile (1997) explains that resources include everything that the firm has available to facilitate innovativeness including sufficient time for producing novel work in the domain, suitable skilled and experienced people, sufficient allocation of funds, material resources, systems and processes for work in the domain, relevant information, and the availability of training. Hurley and Hult (1998) discuss organisational culture in terms of market orientation, learning orientation, and entrepreneurship. Worren et al. (2002) acknowledge the underlying importance of organisational climate in terms of emphasising learning, development, and participative decision making in which innovativeness can be fostered. Based on the foregoing 'innovation orientation' is perceived as being the organisational climate, structure, procedures, and characteristics that enable 'innovativeness'. Second, an underlying assumption of many definitions is the antecedental nature of *firm-specific competencies* to innovativeness. For instance, Souitaris (2002) found four main firm-specific competences including technical, market, human resource, and organisational in determining innovativeness. Third, numerous conceptualisations of innovativeness rationalise *organisational characteristics* as an antecedent to the construct (see Avlonitis et al. 1994; Damanpour, 1991). Fourth, an underlying assumption of prior definitions is the effect the firm's *external environment* has on the level of organisational innovativeness. For instance, Subramanian (1996) argues that firms operating in less stable environments are typically more innovative than their counterparts who operate in more stable environments. This is similar to Siguaw et al. (2006) who forward the notion that firms in less stable environments have a greater incentive to innovate due to more environmental change and turbulence. Fifth, some definitions view what Souitaris (2002) consider the impact of *socio-economic and country-specific factors* on innovativeness. Indeed, firms which are classified as being 'highly innovative' are the ones who effectively manage to surmount the country-specific innovation barriers traditionally embedded in their cultural context that would typically inhibit innovativeness. This antecedent has close connotations with the notion of the embeddedness of firms in place. This thinking strongly implies that flexible and uncommon attitudes, beliefs, and practices which are embedded within the cultural context can impact on firm-level innovativeness (Souitaris, 2002). Sixth, various definitions conceive *organisational context* as having a direct impact on innovativeness. For example, Nystrom et al. (2002) discusses organisational size, slack resources, and organisational age in terms of their impact on innovativeness.

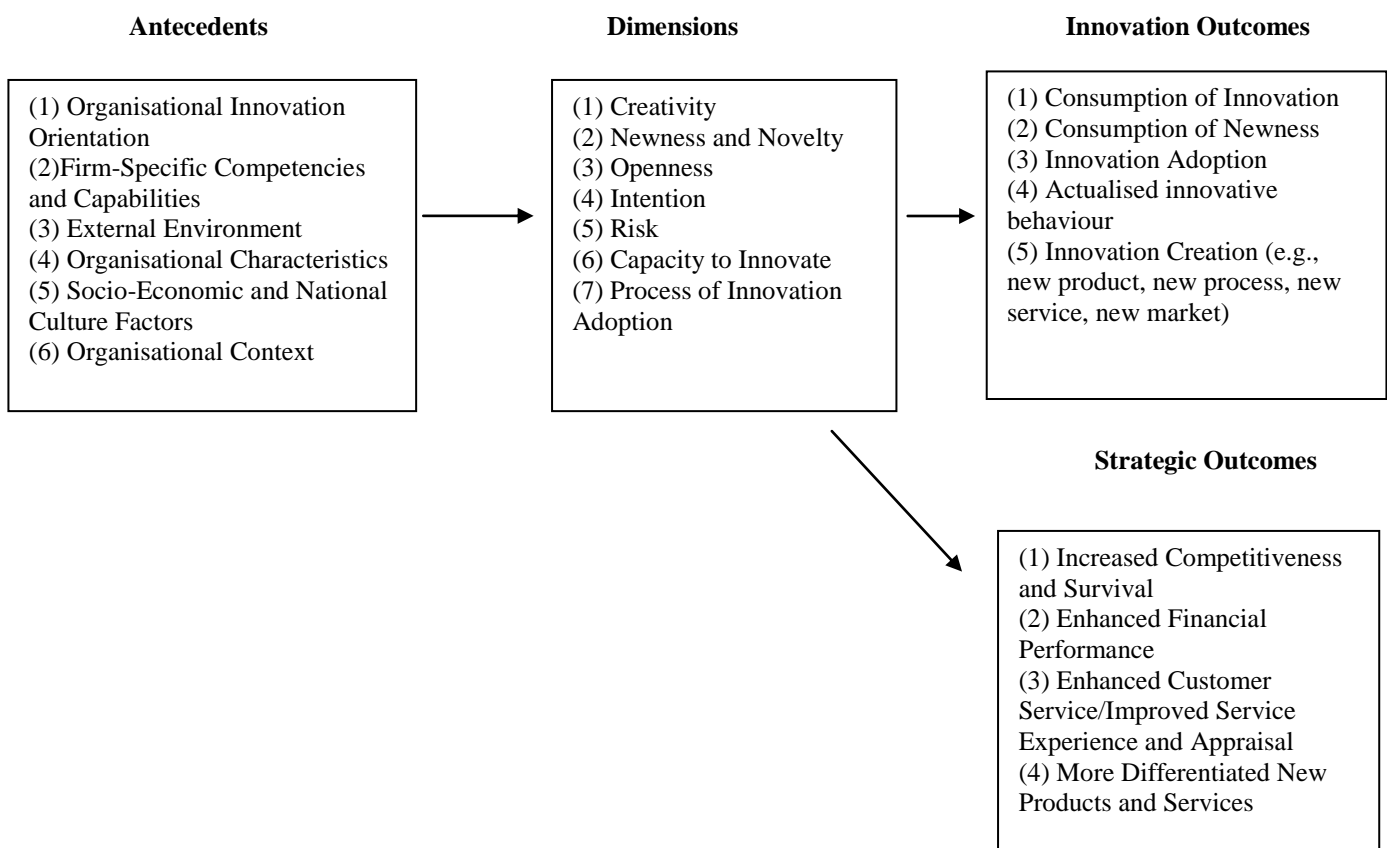
Finally, inherent within prior definitions is the view that interaction in *tourism innovation networks* provides firms with some of the necessary conditions required for innovativeness, namely, information transfer (Dyer and Singh, 1998: 665), learning (Fischer, 1999: 14) and the coordination of production and product development activities (Holmen et al. 2004; Håkansson and Snehota, 2000).

Outcomes

First emanating from most definitions is the view that the ultimate outcome of innovativeness is *innovation* in the form of a new product, new service, new process, new behaviour, new market, and so forth. Definitions from the consumer innovativeness literature discuss the notion of the ‘*consumption of innovation*’ (Midgley and Dowling, 1978), and the ‘*consumption of newness*’ (Roehrich, 2004). Definitions from the organisational literature discuss the notion of ‘*innovation adoption*’ (e.g., Daft, 1978) versus ‘*innovation creation*’ (Ravichandran, 1999; Becker & Whisler, 1967). Definitions also cite *strategic outcomes* of innovativeness including its effect on the consumer’s overall appraisals of new products (Coward et al. 2007), and its effect on consumers’ perceptions of perceived risk (Coward et al. (2007) and directly affects behavioural intentions (Midgley and Dowling, 1978; Park et al. (2005). In addition, innovativeness facilitates the transformation of intention to be innovative into actualised innovative behaviour (Vandecasteele and Geuens (2008). Moreover, organisational innovativeness consistently leads to more differentiated new products across developed and emerging European countries (Theoharakis and Hooley, 2008), with a higher and more statistically significant effect in the more developed economies such as the UK. According to Theoharakis and Hooley (2008), innovativeness enhances customer service and financial performance. Ellonen et al. (2008) subscribe to the viewpoint that innovativeness contributes to increased competitiveness and hence strengthens chances of survival in an ever increasingly competitive global marketplace. The importance of innovativeness to sustaining competitiveness is cited by many in the various conceptualisations (e.g., Ruppel and Harrington, 2000; Wang and Ahmed, 2004).

Based on the foregoing review of the literature, Figure 1 presents an integrated model for conceptualising innovativeness, the primary factors that shape it, and its outcomes.

Figure 1
Innovativeness: A Conceptual Framework - Antecedents, Dimensions, and Outcomes



Conclusion

Consistent with the call for a broader perspective on this topic, the researchers have suggested that innovativeness should be distinguished from the concrete outcome or tangible activity of innovation, and its dimensions should be labelled accordingly. In line with prior researchers (e.g., Wilson et al. 1999; Subramanian and Nilakanta, 1996; Subramanian, 1996) this paper demonstrated a need to reconceptualise the innovativeness construct. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 aims to overcome the current confusion which prevails in the innovativeness literature where previous researchers have conceptualised innovativeness as being a mixture of three distinct components: antecedents, dimensions, and outcomes. By separating these three components of innovativeness in the framework, the paper helps to clarify the notion that innovativeness is in fact a multidimensional construct which is composed of certain dimensions; shaped by several key antecedents. In addition, the conceptual framework helps to distinguish between innovation and innovativeness, whereby innovation is depicted as being the tangible or physical outcome (e.g., new product, new service, new method of production) of a particular organisational mindset and set of capabilities (i.e., innovativeness), shaped by antecedents (e.g. innovation orientation).

However, because the developed framework is a first attempt, and is only a starting point on the path to understanding the complexity of firm level innovativeness, it has its shortcomings and raises perhaps more questions than it answers. For instance, the framework does not take in to account the influence of potential moderating factors (e.g., type of organisation, type of innovation, scope of innovation, and stage of innovation adoption) on the relationship between antecedents and firm-level innovativeness. Nor does it address the issue of operationalisation. Indeed, valid measurement scales currently do not exist for measuring innovativeness. Although calling for future research has become somewhat of a cliché in academia, nevertheless, giving the general small size of tourism firms and the EU and government imperative to improve firm innovativeness, such a call seems appropriate. Indeed, building upon the model presented here is a key part of the researchers' future research agenda.

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