



**ISCTBL 2022**  
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

**Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“ –  
Штип**

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Shtip**

**Факултет за туризам и бизнис  
логистика**

**Faculty of Tourism and  
Business Logistics**

**Петта Меѓународна Научна Конференција  
Fifth International Scientific Conference**

**ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ ВО ТУРИЗМОТ И БИЗНИС  
ЛОГИСТИКАТА ВО 21 ВЕК  
CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS  
LOGISTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**ЗБОРНИК НА ТРУДОВИ  
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**



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## PANEL SESSION

### **Challenges and implications of COVID-19: reducing disparities and addressing distributional impacts in different sectors**

Session chair: Tatjana Boshkov, Assoc.professor and Dean at Faculty of tourism and business logistics, „Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia

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13. Dr. Žarko Rađenović, Research Associate, University of NišInnovation Center, Serbia
14. Prof. Dr. Boban Melovic, Ph.D., Vice-Dean for international cooperation, Faculty of Economics Podgorica, University of Montenegro

#### **Moderators**

##### **First session: Business logistics and business administration**

Natasha Miteva, PhD, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia

##### **Second session: Tourism, hospitality and gastronomy**

Natasha Miteva, PhD, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia





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**ФАКУЛТЕТ ЗА ТУРИЗАМ И БИЗНИС ЛОГИСТИКА**  
**FACULTY OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS**

**ПЕТТА МЕЃУНАРОДНА**  
**НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА**

**FIFTH INTERNATIONAL**  
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30 април, 2022, Штип / Shtip, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## HOW BUSINESS IMITATION HELPS COMPANIES ESPECIALLY DURING PANDEMIC CRISES

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### Abstract

Business pioneering has always been perceived as a critical factor for success, or a competitive advantage that almost every entrepreneur strives for. By definition, business pioneering includes seeking for opportunities, changes, challenges, gaps to be filled, and not being afraid to lead on and take a stand when needed. Accordingly, business pioneers enjoy the greatest level of success, loyalty, and all the benefits brought by being an innovator and leader. However, business imitation strategies have proven to bring success too. The scope of this research paper is to outline the difference between pioneering and imitation and prove that business imitation strategies result with success. Furthermore, a literature review was carried out for this paper aim in order to show how business imitation can help companies from different industries during the most difficult times of the pandemic crises. At the same time, the importance of entrepreneurial and managerial skills is summarized too since they are a lead to successful strategy implementation and long-term incorporation.

**Keywords:** *marketing strategies, business imitation, business pioneering*

### Introduction

We live in a complex society surrounded by constant need for innovation. No matter the area of life considered, the surrounding simply worships innovation as the only solution for each problem or challenge. Furthermore, the business world sees innovation as the only key to success, growth, or even sustainability. The innovation and innovators are the so called "first movers", the ones that introduce new products and/or services, the gurus, and the titans everyone follows. At least, until recent, this was majorities' stance when looking at the literature, reading reviewed business research papers or articles, or even when looking at the world's successful businesses.

Business imitation is just a step behind as the term indicates, but the number of companies generating huge gains using it is enormous and still increasing. Imitation in the business world has been perceived as a safe path to follow, learning from the mistakes or failures of the innovator, less time spent, and less money invested. This doesn't mean that business imitation is a cheap process. Imitation, to be successful and sustainable on a long run, it has to include some innovation. At least organizations implementing business imitation strategies have to wisely chose what to imitate and be creative in the process of doing it so, in order to avoid legally charges and succeed on the market. They are the followers who swoop in at the market with the improved version.

Innovative companies have been seen through every industry, from technology, healthcare, transportation and energy to consumer goods and services, media and telecommunication. Some

recognizable innovative companies are Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Tesla, Mi, Facebook, Cisco, Pfizer, etc. All of them prioritize innovation, support it through funds and talent, and transform it into results. The same stands for the business imitation among organizations too, including Instagram, Alando, Xiaomi, Google Home, FedEx, McDonalds, Visa, Walmart, Coca Cola and many more. It is interesting to note that even innovative organizations have made some imitation in their existence too. They do not rely purely on innovation. Furthermore, the innovation and imitation strategies are seen among not so popular organizations as well, such as supermarkets, beauty salons, textile manufacturers, and retail companies too.

Imitation and innovation are processes that happen simultaneously and

### **Business innovation**

Innovation as a term comes from the Latin word “*innovatio*” meaning renewal, but its definition is in constant change and there isn’t one commonly accepted. The term itself in the business can be used either for the outcome or the process, and in order to avoid the confusion, one popular view outlines innovation as a term defining the business outcomes as “*a new or improved product or business process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the firms’ previous products or business processes that has been introduced on the market or brought into use by the firm*”. Correspondingly, innovation activities refer to the business processes which “*include all developmental, financial and commercial activities undertaken by a firm that are intended to result in an innovation for the firm*”. (OECD/Eurostat, 2018)

Fundamentally, innovation is a process of change, an introduction of something new, that can happen in any stage of the business, no matter if the business is in its introduction or maturity phase. Furthermore, the innovation process can happen in any organizational level in the business, and on any field, including products, services, and processes. (Nowodziński & Wierzbicki, 2019) More importantly, it is a big process which creates value and competitiveness, and shows a link with the growth, standard of living, jobs, and profits. As a result, entrepreneurs see it as a way to stay in the game, or link with growth, creativity, design, exploitation, change, failure, entrepreneurship, customers, knowledge, and society.

The list of innovators is big enough and the analysis of their growth shows the importance and advantage that business innovation offers. On Picture 1 is the list of 50 most innovative companies during the year of 2021. Their innovation readiness is evaluated on ten dimensions including innovation ambition, innovation domains, innovation governance, performance management, organization and ecosystems, talent and culture, idea to market fit, portfolio, funnel, and project. The score of these dimensions is total of 100, but 80 is considered to be threshold for readiness. (Torkington, 2021)

Picture 1: 50 most innovative companies

## And this year's readiest innovators? Meet 2021's 50 Most Innovative Companies.



Source: (Torkington, 2021)

It is important to point out that usually innovation is linked with invention, which comes naturally but should not be seen as one that cannot exist without the other. By definition, invention is “*creating something new that has never existed before*”. (Pearsall & Hanks, 1998) Meaning, invention is a process with which it is created something that has never been desired before, and the idea can be patented. Therefore, invention can become innovation if transformed into something that will fulfil customers’ need or add value to them. However, innovation don’t need the invention to be original. For the innovation to happen, it has to be driven by several driving factors, including emerging technologies, competitors’ actions, new ideas, and emerging changes in the external environment. Technologies of course are seen as a driving factor for innovation since they are the basis for every business product, service, and/or process. Business innovations arise from the competitors’ actions too, because in most cases they are the benchmark for any persuasion. Also, innovations happen from new ideas and differently from the past when there were few people or a company department, ex. R&D, working on new ideas, today companies include everyone in the process. Every idea is welcomed to be shared and analysed for further opportunity. Last but not least, the external environment is strong driving factor for business innovation too since every change in it affects the entire organization, including the political, technological, economic, cultural, and technological environment. Business organizations must analyse the pros and cons of undertaking any strategy, and the same stand with the innovation strategy too. The innovation process for sure comes with the advantage of being a first mover, profitability, possibility for exclusivity, and growth. However, it is important to note that the business innovation comes with high prize of trials and errors, failures, and it takes time to happen. As a result, the bigger the advance of the business innovation, the greater the possibility for business imitation.

### **Business imitation**

Looking for a definition of the term imitation is far more complex than looking at the definition of innovation. Not that there isn’t any general or widely used one, but there are numerous definitions for imitation from different approaches regarding the areas of concern, ranging from approved to legally abandoned. Cambridge Dictionary defines imitation as “something copied, or the act of copying”, or “an occasion when someone or something imitates another person or thing”, or “made to look like something else”. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) However, each research areas goes beyond the basic definition and looks for a definition in its field. For example, biologists see imitation as behavioural copying, psychologist see it as demonstrative behaviour

not seen by the imitator when it is performed. (Zentall, 2006) Economists see imitation as a generator of competitive movements, but also as a rational decision made regarding the available information. (Banerjee, 1992) (Tirole, 1990) For marketing researchers, imitation is forgery of the characteristics of a product. (Carpenter & Nakamoto, 1989)

Imitation as a strategy has been widely used in all areas of today's living as a way of safely approaching challenges. As such, business imitation is no different, and as many researchers state it has been used for making the right decision, ensuring success when entering a market or industry, and aiming for sustainability. (Levesque & Shepherd, 2004) Instead of looking at the imitation with negative connotation, marketers respect the innovation and see it as an alternative way of using the existing, making it better, fulfilling business goals less risky and less costly. The fact is that innovation stimulates imitation to follow, so marketers go beyond and even develop business imitation strategies for organizations to follow. The imitation strategies that organizations follow are not defined differently than the strategy itself. It is simply stated as imitation strategy because it imitates, or mimics, other organization in some of their processes or activities. Usually, organizations implement and follow imitation strategies when developing the marketing mix. It could be used when developing the product, its characteristics and the target market it is aimed at, when establishing the price range, choosing the type of promotion to pursue in order to gain more target audience, or choosing the different distribution channels in order to get the products closer to its audience or even with the establishment of the inter-organization distribution.

When looking at the imitation strategies' researchers analyse the organizations homogenization before looking at the type of the imitation. Imitation strategies have different approach and affect in organizations operating in public sector, private sector, pharmaceutical industry, service industry, etc. Further on, there is difference if the imitation is done intentionally and unintentionally. According to the Imitation matrix presented in Fig 1, business imitation strategies can be creative, partial, or total.

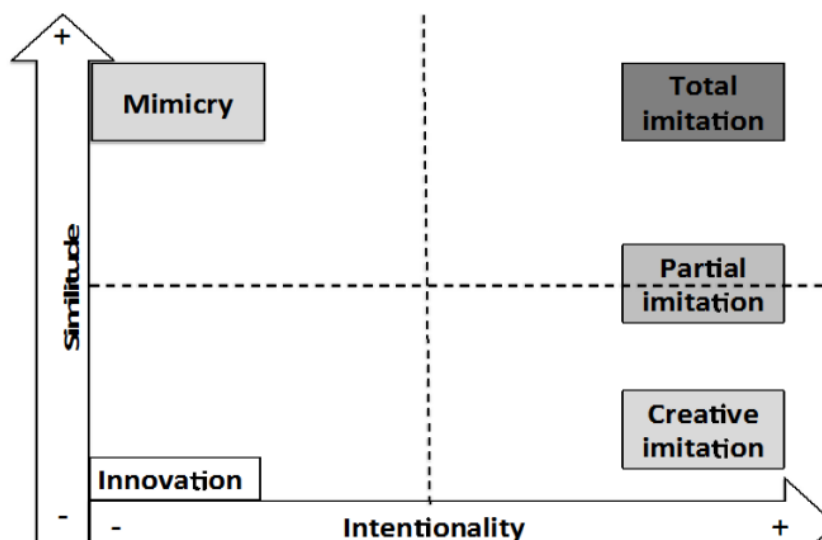


Figure 1. Imitation matrix (Bourkha & Belfellah, 2017)

As the matrix shows, organizations can develop *total imitation strategies* which focus on destruction of the innovator advantage and result with profit primarily from avoiding the R&D investments. Organizations that implement *partial imitation strategies* usually choose which characteristics from the innovator to adopt and include partial differentiation or homogenization in their processes. The *creative imitation strategies* are also considered as adoption strategies

where the imitators take only knowledge and information from the innovator, and use it to intelligently duplicate the product, service, process and/or idea.

All those types of imitations arousing in the competitive market just prove how the process of imitation itself can be innovative for any organization. Even if the first idea, product, or service is born with the process of innovation, the innovator itself can use the imitation strategies in order to improve it, place it on other market, offer it to other target group, adjust it based on new technology, and so on. This continuous process is better presented through the spectrum of innovation, invention, and imitation shown on Figure 2.

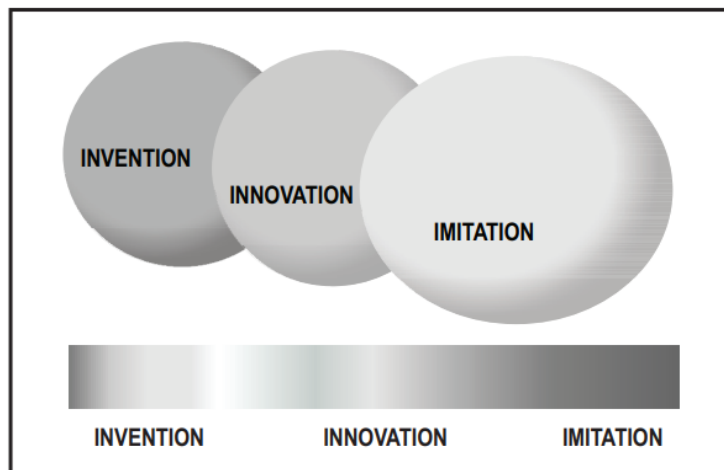


Figure 2, The Spectrum of Invention, Innovation, Imitation, (Sidik)

The spectrum shows that invention, innovation, and imitation are an ongoing process happening within and outside of organizations. It further shows that each process aims at higher added value either by imitation, which is making something (partially, totally, or creatively) that already exists, by invention which is discovering something completely new, or by innovation which is discovering something new in order to create something relatively new.

Another fact that gives positive connotation to the imitation strategy is the existence and effectiveness of the market entry strategies that organizations use in order to expand on global level. All market entry strategies are an example of imitation: franchise, joint ventures, managerial contracts, and mergers and acquisitions. Even though, they all have their differences in terms of organization establishment and operation, they all have strict rules to follow involving exactly the same products, services, or processes. For example, franchising which is still one of the most popular strategy used among global leaders, involves agreement between two entities, binding the franchisee to use same logo, name, packaging, operational strategies, marketing strategies, etc. There are binding rules for the franchisor too, which include sharing know-hows for the organizational operations, knowledge, and technology. Managerial contracts are not so different either when it comes to imitation strategies in their operations. This strategy involves sharing management and marketing processes including planning, recruitment, training, public relations, and some financial processes too. Mergers and acquisitions are another strategy that involves imitation to some level since the involved entities combine and share their resources to establish new organization which will grow their new project. All those expansion strategies are implemented with some level of imitation, and they all aim at gaining market share, competitive advantage and growth. (Митева, 2018)

### **Success using business imitation**

Traditionally, there is no doubt that innovation and invention are the key to success and driving force in any industry on any organizational level, both for the organization itself and the economy as a whole. For that matter it is important to mention some world innovative leaders such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, Tesla, Lego, Amazon, Pfizer, Cisco, Ikea, Mi, etc., that enjoy competitive advantage, success, and profit.

It is important to note that organizations that use imitation doesn't mean that they use it exclusively in their entire existence. As mentioned in the previous section and in the Imitation matrix, there is difference in the use of imitation depending on the level and what part. Organizations that use imitation strategies at the beginning, or as a steppingstone, and shift to innovation on long run will sustain on the competitive market and are most likely to even surpass the innovator. A good example of organizations that literally cloned others and succeeded are today's popular Instagram stories and Snapchat, Sega and Nintendo, Alando and eBay, Xiaomi and Apple, Google Home and Amazon Echo, and FedEx and UPS, (Zaleski, 2017). There are organizations that successfully used imitation strategies for certain product, such as Coca Cola which copied diet cola from RC Cola, Visa, Master Card and American Express copied from Diners Club. McDonalds fast food chain is example of imitation strategy of a system, which copied it from White Castle that invented the fast-food chains in 1921. (Shenkar O. , 2010) Moreover, imitation strategies are widely used by the innovators too, with which they overcome challenges, modified their products or processes, or even differentiated its products and gained customers. Looking at the high-tech industry Apple is one of the innovators that used imitation when developing even three of the most dominative products: MP3 player, iPod, and iPhone. Both Facebook and Google also didn't come first on the market, but for sure they gained and sustain great competitive advantage.

The list of well-known brands and companies is huge since imitation doesn't only mean exact copy of product, service, or idea. It can be partial or creative imitation too, of a managerial process, marketing mix, operational performance, development process, etc. In fact, besides the list of biggest world leaders which prove that imitation can lead to success, there are numerous smaller, or not so known companies, that use imitation strategies for their operations and sustainability on the market. Most of them are part of the textile, food, tourism and hospitality, beauty, and even retail industry.

### **Business imitation during pandemic**

The pandemic with Covid 19 touched every aspect of organizational operations on every part of the world. Organizations, no matter the industry or size, were put to a corner and pushed to find new ways and opportunities in order to survive the new reality of uncertain, complex, and volatile environment. Organizations that have dealt with crises were put under pressure to adapt their business models and strategies so that they can remain present on the market. During the past two years, a lot has changed. Organizations were shut down, people were fired, others shifted and worked from home. Everyone was asked to reconfigure its assets and adapt.

Strong organizations with developed R&D sectors and available assets prioritized innovation in order to unlock the postcrisis growth. It is interesting to point out that although three quarters of the organizations state that innovation is their priority, during the pandemic only 20% of them were ready and equipped to innovate, and they recover even more quickly from the pandemic. Few of them are Apple, Pfizer, Tesla, Samsung, Sony, Huawei, etc. (Torkington, 2021)

Looking at the big picture, according to a research conducted by the McKinsey & Company, the focus of executives during the pandemic is mainly on maintaining the business continuity by cutting costs, and improving productivity. The research also included questions regarding their readiness to capture new growth opportunities, and the results show that only 21% of the



surveyed are focused on the new growth. The majority, or 47% are focused on the business core, 41% on the efficiency, 27% on the organizational health. Furthermore, the results of the research show that the executives believe that once the pandemic is stabilized, their organizations will return to innovation related strategies. The researchers point out that only the pharmaceuticals and medical products showed interest and focus in innovation. The responds are shown in Figure 3. (Am, Jorge, Furstenthal, & Roth, 2020)

Figure 3. Commitment to innovation has decreased as companies work through the COVID 19 crisis and focus on short-term issues

**Commitment to innovation has decreased as companies work through the COVID-19 crisis and focus on short-term issues.**

Share of executives who list each action as the No. 1 or No. 2 priority precrisis vs today, %

A Precrisis normal B Today C End of health crisis D Economic recovery



<sup>1</sup>Percentage points.  
 Source: McKinsey Innovation through Crisis Survey, April 2020

McKinsey  
& Company

Source: McKinsey Innovation through Crisis Survey (Am, Jorge, Furstenthal, & Roth, 2020)

The other organizations, followers, don't sleep and until the crisis pass, but shortly after the first movers they implement business imitation strategies of the already tested innovation and offer total, partial, or creative imitation in their field. During the pandemic mostly the business imitation took place in the e-commerce, technology management, strategy, and marketing field. There was a huge shift to online shopping by the people, so the organizations that weren't already online, reacted quickly and implemented the already present e-commerce strategy. Not only shopping, but education also was shifted online. The first movers were already present and offered online classes and activities, but followers had to act quickly and imitate their strategy. Mergers and acquisitions also took place among the organizations as a way to survive the pandemic, but as mentioned previously, they are a type of business imitation strategy since it involves two or more organizations sharing their knowledge and resources. There is a huge evidence of business imitation strategies used in the health industry during the pandemic, from organizations that developed the vaccines to hospitals, health systems, pharmacies.

Business imitation strategies during the pandemic are noticed and preferred among the small and medium enterprises, which are the backbone to every economy today. Besides going online with their activities, SME followed already tested strategies and entered other markets, used creative marketing activities to gain bigger target customers, used digital tools to analyse operations, etc. (Engidaw, 2022) The social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Google, were constantly implementing and offering new tools for SME to use in order to sustain on the market. Everyone in need could take advantage of the already available digital tools for marketing its products, processed, services or ideas, for entering a new market. All of this is a business imitation that happens on a daily basis on today's challenging and competitive market. Even the governments



imitate each other when implementing new strategies to deal with the pandemic and the challenges it imposes.

### **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

The relationship between imitation and innovation has been studied by numerous researchers. In the literature business innovation has been recognized and linked with sustainability and successful operations for decades. (Colombo, 2008; Mustar, Wright, & Clarysse, 2008; Colombelli, Krafft, & Vivarelli, 2016) Innovation as mentioned at the beginning of this paper means creating something new by recognizing a need, or even creating one, that hasn't been fulfilled yet. However, every first mover has its follower, so the negative connotation for business imitation has changed, it has been welcomed in this continuously emerging and challenging living. Organizations that use business imitation as strategy doesn't mean that they do an exact copy of everything the innovator does. The business imitation strategies organizations use can be either total, creative, or partial. Further more they can be implemented on products, services, processes, ideas, operations, marketing activities, management activities etc.

The author Sylvie Geisendorf even proposed a model in order to fill in the gap between imitation and innovation, which had undergone over 1000 runs of simulations. The results showed the economies thrive best when there are new ideas flowing in and the first movers are in a clear advantage. However, the followers are taking advantage of the innovation quickly, and even in a situation of a total imitation, profits are high. The results proved that imitation pays off, but the best performance is when there is a partial imitation, or creative, since it takes heterogeneity out of the competitive markets. Furthermore, the imitation still needs innovation for a prosperous success, and vice versa. (Geisendorf, 2009)

The literature review clearly points out the need for business innovation on today's complex markets, but also the importance of business imitation too. Kotler, the well-known father of marketing, states that the solution to competitiveness and market share retention can be solved with innovation, but the practise shows that even leaders cannot follow the same innovation strategy all the time at every level of their operations. Businesses recognize imitation as a winning strategy when markets are in a growth stage, technology is uncertain, entry barriers are low, products have a short lifecycle, imitation helps with the distribution of the product thereof ensuring a greater availability. (Krzakiewicz & Cyfert, 2018)

Given this a question can arise if the organization should wait and imitate? Yes and no. The successful imitators don't wait. The so-called followers continuously search for new ideas away from their industry, away from their home market, and usually come up with a creative imitation on the market. By doing so they even can beat the innovator who is still in investments phase with higher costs. (Shenkar O. , *Defend Your Research: Imitation is more valuable than innovation*, 2010)

Should an organization imitate or innovate? Are an organization imitator or innovator? There isn't one answer to any of these questions. One thing is clear for sure, imitation does pay off. An organization or any entity can an imitator and innovator at the same time, an innovator implementing business imitation strategy, an imitator undertaking innovation process, pure innovator, pure imitator, or creative imitator, and still gain competitive advantage and succeed on the market.

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