STRATEGIC INNOVATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON HOTEL FIRMS OPERATING IN ANTALYA REGION

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ABSTRACT

Strategic innovation is an issue that is frequently debated by the recent studies. The contemporary organizations almost in all industries seek to increase their strategic innovation capabilities in order to possess a sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, in the hospitality industry strategic innovation is an essential instrument of gaining competitive advantage in the marketplaces. In modern days of hospitality and tourism, satisfying consurmers with providing only accommodation and catering services is not sustainable since demand is becoming diversified and rivals are offering new services. Thus, strategic innovation may assist hotel firms in meeting new demand and expanding the range of services they offer. Therefore, the purposes of this paper are to measure the level of strategic innovation of hotel firms, and to reveal the obstacles to strategic innovation activities. The paper will also examine the importance of strategic innovation for hotel firms. To this end, a questionnaire was developed and employed to middle and top level executives of hotel firms operating in Antalya province. Results show that hotel firms primarily innovate to improve service quality and to satisfy guests. It was also found that the most important obstacle to innovation is cost of innovation activities.

Keywords: Strategic innovation, Competitive advantage, Hotel firms, Antalya region

INTRODUCTION

Business environment is changing more rapidly than before because of the increasing velocity of new technologies. Moreover, industries are shaken by new entrants, mergers, and deregulations. In this environment, successful organizations have already recognized that they should gain a sustainable competitive advantage in order to outperform their rivals. Practically, organizations can obtain competitive advantages through several ways such as entering new markets, developing new business models (Markides, 1997), or making strategic innovations. Furthermore, technological advances, high accessibility to product information, and

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availability of similar services/products in the marketplaces make strategic innovation issues more important than ever before for almost all industries. Similarly, in the hospitality industry gaining competitive is a challenge. Hotel firms, therefore, need to strategically innovate to gain and sustain a competitive advantage against rivals.

There are various studies about organizational innovation, however most of them are related to the manufacturing industry (Drucker, 1998; Preissl, 2000; Eraslan, Bulu and Bakan, 2008; Johne, 1999; Hamel, 2006; Rademakers, 2005), health sector (Patti, Yanes and Suizdak, 2012) and even music industry (Tschmuck, 2012). Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes and Sorensen (2005) argued that innovation research has been employed in the hospitality and tourism industries to only a limited extend and empirical studies of the innovation have been modest. According to some researchers there is a relationship between level of innovation and development of tourism industry (Hjalager, 2002). Relying on this argument, Hjalager (2010: 1) posits that 'innovation research represents a meaningful and valuable way of understanding the economic dynamics of the tourism industry and deeper insights will be helpful for the industry and policy makers alike'. Similarly, innovation is a critical issue of contemporary hospitality industry. Thus, the primary aim of this research is to explore the level of strategic innovation of hotel firms operating in Antalya province. In this context, this research specifically aims to reveal the obstacles to and reasons for strategic innovation activities of hotel firms. Additionally, the paper investigates the relationship between level of strategic innovation and categorization (international or national) of hotel firms. To this end, first a review of literature was undertaken. Secondly, a survey was conducted with a sample of hotel firms operating in Antalya province. Finally, results were discussed in the results and conclusion parts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation and Strategy

Researhers (Drucker, 1993; Kamien and Schwartz, 1982; Porter, 1990; Hjalager, 2002; Becker and Whisler, 1967) define innovation in various ways. Schumpeter (1934) qualifies innovation as new products/services, new production techniques or new organizational structures. Alternatively, Becker and Whisler (1967) define innovation as the early use of a creative idea by one of the organizations that have similar goals. According to Kamien and Schwartz (1982) innovation occurs as a result of

organizations' activities for creating new products/services or production processes.

Although there are many categorizations of innovation offered by different researchers (Abernathy and Clark, 1985; Hjalager, 1997; Weiermar, 2006), in the innovation literature five types of innovation are commonly used by researchers. These are process innovation, service/product innovation, organizational innovation, marketing innovation and business model innovation. Service/product innovation comprises of significantly improved or completely new service or goods (OECD, 2005). The aim of process innovation is to increase the efficiency and productivity. In general, the basis of process innovation is technological advances and investments (Hjalager, 2002). Marketing innovation is related to issues such as development of marketing mix and improving service quality. Organizations attempt to make marketing innovation to find potential markets and to deliver quality service to target markets (Johne, 1999). Innovations in terms of organizational models, managerial techniques, strategies and organizational structures are forms of organizational innovation (Hamel, 2006). Organizational innovation also includes enhancing staff responsibilities and duties, and developing new methods to coordinate and control employees (Rademakers, 2005). Markides (2006) advocates that business model innovation should be seen as strategic innovation because organizations can change or improve their business model by this type of innovation. Indeed, new business model may increase marketshare of organizations by attracting new customers (Markides, 2006). Moreover, Davila et al. (2013) argue that it is possible to change the structure of an industry by using combinations of technology and business model innovations which requires a strong strategic orientation possessed by the innovative organizations. Thus, one aspect of understanding the management of innovation is its association with strategy.

According to Çelikçapa and Kaygusuz (2010) innovation management means supporting and encouraging innovation through technology, business processes (customers, suppliers, financial resources, etc.) and human relations (culture, communication, organization, etc). In fact, success of innovation depends on two factors: technical resources (human, equipment, information, money, etc.) and the organizational skills to manage technical resources. More specifically, organizations that are equipped with both strategic and organizational skills can effectively combine these two factors in order to manage the innovation processes. Additionally, Ecevit and Işık (2011) argue that in a competitive environment the most important success factors in innovation

management are strategy and leadership. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that organizations without an effective strategy may not be able to perform the necessary steps of innovation management (Cormican and O'sullgvan, 2004).

Strategic Innovation

Researchers (Krinsky and Jenkins, 1997; Martinsons, 1993; Markides, 1998; 1999) use strategic innovation concept as a combination of strategy and innovation. According to Markides (1997) strategic innovation requires thinking on new ways of competing in the marketplace. Alternatively, Hamel (1998) defines strategic innovation as an ability to understand the industry dynamics and to change them. Ultimately, this should produce wealth for stakeholders and create new value for customers by redesigning service, and redefining marketplace (Hamel, 1996). According to Govindarajan and Trimble (2004: 21) "a strategic innovation breaks with past practice in at least one of the three areas: value-chain design, conceptualization of customer value, and identification of the potential customers".

Considering definitions presented above, it is possible to say that strategic innovation has three outcomes. Accordingly, strategic innovation leads to (i) new marketplaces, (ii) improved value for customer and the organization, and (iii) developing new business models (Sniukas, 2010). In essence, strategic innovation requires strategic experiments. Govindarajan and Trimble (2005) assert that these strategic experiments have ten characteristics as follows:

- Strategic experiments require unlearning,
- Strategic experiments are not only technological improvements or geographic expansions,
- Strategic experiments target poorly defined sectors,
- Strategic experiments require borrowing,
- Strategic experiments are initiated before other rivals,
- Strategic experiments require new capabilities and knowledge,
- Strategic experiments have potential for increasing revenue,
- Strategic experiments are managed by managers,
- It may be difficult to get feedback about strategic experiments,
- Strategic experiments are expensive to repeat.

Recently Sniukas (2010) explains strategic innovation in a framework which consists of content, process, and context dimensions. Within the content dimension, Markides (1997) claims that first requirement for strategic innovation is to identify and target the gaps earlier than rivals. To

do that, an organization has to decide three issues; (i) who are our customers, (ii) what service/product should we offer to attract customers, and (iii) how we should offer this service/product cost efficiently at a strategic level. Similarly, Drucker (1994) advices organizations to seek the answers of following questions: what business are we in, what is the organization's future plan, who is our customer, how does the customer consider value, and what technology to use.

From the perspective of content of strategic innovation Schlegelmich, Diamantopoulos and Kreuz (2010) qualifies strategically innovative organizations as the ones that possess the characteristics such as using new sources, targeting non-customers, focusing less profitable customers beside the profitable ones, segmenting market according to similarities rather than differences, offering the services to mass customers, and implementing strategic price policy. Thus, strategic innovators do not focus on only retaining and satisfying existing customers, but also continuously searching for new markets potentially having new opportunities.

DeWit and Meyer (2004) describes the process of strategic innovation with three components: strategy formation, strategic change and strategic thinking. In this process, managers should be aware of threats and opportunities in the environment of business, and weaknesses and strengths of the organization and they should be able to frequently contrast their existing views against the changes occurring in the environment (Topsakal, 2013). They also should have the capacity to choose best innovative ideas (DeWit and Meyer, 2004). To do this, managers need to develop a pool of strategy alternatives from which they can choose the best one. Finally, the selected ideas and strategies should be performed (Markides, 2000).

The process dimension of strategic innovation also emphasizes the organizational culture that facilitates generation of new ideas, and developing new products or services which can not be easily copied by rivals (Hansen and Birkinshaw, 2007).Thus, such a supportive organizational culture is one important aspect of strategically innovative organizations.

An organizational system is one of the most effective determinants of the strategic innovation context. DeWit and Meyer (2004) uses organization's structure, culture (shared beliefs), processes (procedures), and members to define organizational systems. Likewise, Govindarajan and Trimble (2005) propose the concept of organizational DNA which is constituted by organization's structure (decision authority, process flows and information flows), systems (planning, control sytems and

budgeting), personnel (career paths and recruting policies,) and culture (core values). While Markides (2000) takes a similar approach and refers to the factors such as culture, incentives, structure and people; Schlegelmich et al. (2010) use four factors as culture, processes, people and resources. Thus, from context perspective tolerating mistakes, supporting teamwork, rewarding risk taking, possessing nonbureaucratic processes and a flat structure, and recruiting educated personnel are the major qualifications of strategically innovative organizations (Sniukas, 2010).

There are various objectives of strategic innovation. In addition, impact of the each strategic innovation on organizations is different (OECD, 2005). Therefore, different organizations may have different reasons to initiate strategic innovation activities. For example, according to OECD Oslo Manual (2005) organizations innovate for expanding the range of products and services offered, increasing existing market share, entering new markets, reducing labor costs, increasing velocity of product and service delivery time, improving working conditions, reducing impact of environmental conditions, reducing cost of energy, and so on. There are also various obstacles to the strategic innovation activities of organizations. For instance, the factors such as excessive risk perceptions, lack of funds, lack of knowledge, personnel attitude towards changes in organization, uncertain demand, lack of infrastructure and superstructure, legislation and taxation can impede strategic innovation of organizations (OECD, 2005). According to Radas and Bozic (2009) there are two generic obstacles to innovation: financing and expenses (too high cost, lack of source of finance, insufficient support from the state) and internal factors (lack of information about technology, qualified staff, and information about market).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This research explores the reasons of and obstacles to innovation, and the level of strategic innovation in hotel firms operating in Antalya region. Furthermore, the relationships between level of strategic innovation and categorization (international or national) of hotel firms are also investigated. For this aim a survey was employed. The questionnaire of survey was developed by using 'Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data' and paper of Ecevit and Işık (2011).

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part collects data about profiles of hotel firms. In this context, operating age, number of employees and categorization of firms (international or national) were investigated. The second part measures the perceptions of participants

about how important the outputs of and how effective the obstacles to strategic innovation are by using 5 point Likert scales. The questionnaire items describing the outputs (cost savings, achieving competitive advantage, entering into new markets, improving service quality, decreasing delivery time of service, following technologies, and increasing satisfaction of guests) and obstacles (cost, administrative barriers, bureaucracy, qualifications of staff, guest demand, organizational culture, organizational structure, and lack of infrastructure) were borrowed from 'Oslo Manual: Guidelines for Collecting and Interpreting Innovation Data'. The final part of the questionnaire consists of 13 statements about strategic innovation. This questionnaire was administered the middle and top level executives of hotel firms. As of the date 08.06.2012, totaly 251 5-star hotels were operating in Antalya (R.T. Culture and Tourism Ministry) and 119 of them participated into survey. Cronbach's alpha value was calculated to evaluate the reliability of the 13 item strategic innovation scale. The scale was found reliable since the Cronbach's alpha value (96 %) was higher than 70 % threshold which is offered by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2009).

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

First, frequency analysis was performed to reveal the selected characteristics of participating hotel firms including types of hotels (national or international) and possession of unit or working group for new ideas. Frequency analysis was also used to evaluate the importance of outputs and effectiveness of obstacles to strategic innovations. Second, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to assess the dimensionality of strategic innovation scale. Third, correlation analysis was conducted to ascertain the relationships between the strategic innovation and selected variables including number of employees and operating age of organizations. Before conducting correlation analysis, scatter diagram is used in order to test linearity among variables.

Table 1 summarizes the types of hotels and possession of unit or working group for new ideas. It's seen on table that while 53 % hotels are operated on an international scale, 47 % of them are national operations. Table 1 also shows that frequency of hotels (41 %) which possess a unit or working group for new ideas is lower than hotels (59 %) which do not have such a unit or group.

Table 1. *Frequency of types of hotel firm and possession of innovation unit or group*

Variables		n	%
	International	63	53
Type of Hotel Firms	National	56	47
	Total	119	100
	Yes	49	41
Unit or Working Group for New Ideas	No	70	59
	Total	119	100

Table 2 illustrates the desired outputs of innovation activities. As seen on Table 2, most of the participating hotel firms innovate in order to improve service quality. It's followed by increasing satisfaction of guests. Entering new market has received respectively a lower level rating of importance among the other outputs. We can conclude that the most important outputs expected from strategic innovation are to improve service quality, increase satisfaction of guests, achieve competitive advantage, and decrease delivery time of service.

Table 2. *Desired outputs from innovation activities*

	Very Important		Important		Neither Important Nor Unimportant		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cost Savings	63	52.9	42	35.3	14	11.8	119	100
Achieving Competitive Advantage	84	70.6	35	29.4			119	100
Entering into new markets	35	29.4	56	47.1	28	23.5	119	100
Improving Service Quality	105	88.2	14	11.8	-	-	119	100
Decreasing Delivery Time of Service	84	70.6	35	29.4	-	-	119	100
Following Technologies	77	64.7	28	23.5	14	11.8	119	100
Increasing Satisfaction of Guests	98	82.4	21	17.6	-	-	119	100

Table 3 summarizes the obstacles to innovation activities. As seen on Table 3, in most of the participating hotel firms, the cost of innovation and qualifications of staff are the major impediments for innovations. They are followed by organizational culture. Bureaucracy has a lower rating than the other obstacles. We can conclude that hotel firms need to improve

their staff's qualification to start innovation activities. Moreover, organizational culture is an important factor to support the innovation activities in hotel firms.

Table 3. *Obstacles to innovation activities*

	Very Effective		Effective		Neither Effective Nor Ineffective		Not Effective		Never Effective		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cost of innovation	70	58.8	42	35.3	-	-	7	5.9	-	-	119	100
Administrative Barriers	35	29.4	42	35.3	21	17.6	21	17.6	-	-	119	100
Bureaucracy	21	17.6	49	41.2	35	29.4	14	11.8	-	-	119	100
Qualifications of Staff	63	52.9	49	41.2	7	5.9	-	-	-	-	119	100
Guest Demand	42	32.5	49	41.2	14	11.8	14	11.8	-	-	119	100
Organizational Culture	49	41.2	35	29.4	21	17.6	7	5.9	7	5.9	119	100
Organizational Structure	42	35.3	56	47.1	14	11.8	7	5.9	-	-	119	100
Lack of Infrastructure	42	35.3	49	41.2	21	17.6	7	5.9	-	-	119	100

The items in the strategic innovation scale were subjected to factor analysis in order to explore the dimentionality of the scale. Results are shown on Table 4. As a result of the factor analysis all scale items are grouped in one dimension. The variance explained by one factor is 71,091 % which is an acceptable value.

Table 5 demonstrates the differences in participants' perceptions of strategic innovation between hotels that have innovation department and those do not. As seen on Table 5, there are significant differences for 8 scale items based on the t-test results. Perception of participants from hotels that have an innovation department is higher than hotels do not possess an innovation department. We can conclude that innovation department increases the level of innovation within organization.

Table 4. *Factor analysis results of strategic innovation scale*

Items	Factor Loadings
We are searching for new resources	.741
We are targeting guests who are not currently our guests	.876
Beside highly profitable guests, we are also focusing on less profitable guests	.900
We are implementing strategic price policy	.741
Our prices are also suitable for mass guests	.741
All employees of hotel are authorized to create new ideas	.900
We are using internal and external resources to create new ideas	.899
Our employees are aware of our hotel strategy	.751
Our new products/services cannot be copied easily by rivals	.803
Our new product/service projects are completed on time	.840
Our hotel firm shows tolerance to errors	.799
Our hotel firm encourages teamwork	.844
Our hotel firm has variety of task force teams	.893
Cronbach Alpha	.964
Total Explained Variance for Strategic Innovation 71.091 %	
KMO=.761 Barlett's test of sphericity Sig.=.000	

Table 5. *Differences in perceptions of participants according to innovation department*

Statements	Do you have innovation department?			
	Means/Yes	Means/No	p	t value
We are targeting guests who are not currently our guests	4.14	3.70	.008*	2.700
Beside highly profitable guests, we are also focusing on less profitable guests	4.14	3.70	.000*	4.613
Our prices are also suitable for mass guests	4.14	3.30	.000*	5.589
All employees of hotel are authorized to create new ideas	4.43	3.50	.000*	6.377
We are using internal and external resources to create new ideas	4.29	3.50	.000*	4.993
Our new products/services cannot be copied easily by rivals	3.86	3.30	.000*	3.397
Our new product/service projects are completed on time	4.14	2.90	.000*	6.474
Our hotel firm encourages teamwork	4.29	3.80	.000*	5.653

*p<0.01

A correlation analysis was performed between 'strategic innovation', and 'operating age of hotels' and 'number of employees'. Table 6 summarizes the results of correlation analyses. As seen on Table 6, there is a negative but significant relationship between strategic innovation and number of employees (-.211) while no significant relationship between strategic innovation and operating age of hotels is found. According to results it can be concluded that increases in number of employees in hotels negatively influence strategic innovation activities.

Table 6. *Relationship between strategic innovation, operating age and number of employees of hotel*

		Strategic Innovation	Operating Age of Hotel Firm	Number of Employees
Strategic Innovation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.091	-.211*
	Significance		.325	.022
Operating Age of Hotel Firm	Pearson Correlation	-.091	1	.110
	Significance	.325		.235
Number of Employees	Pearson Correlation	-.211*	.110	1
	Significance	.022	.235	

* $p<0.05$

A one-way anova analysis was performed to compare the differences between the strategic innovation perception of national and international hotel firms' executives. Results are showed on Table 7.

Table 7. *Differences between international and national hotel firms*

	Means			
Statement	International	National	p	F
We are using internal and external resources to create new ideas	3.66	4.00	.049*	3.933
Our hotel firm encourages the teamwork	4.13	3.44	.000*	17.523

*$p<0.01$

There are significant differences between national and international hotel firms with reference to two scale items. First, national hotels allocate more internal and external resources to creating new ideas than international hotels. Since international hotels are expected to have their own idea creation departments, they do not need to use additional external resources. However, national hotel firms need to use external resources to gain competitive advantage in the marketplaces. Second, the results on Table 7 reveal that international hotels encourage team work more than national hotels do.

CONCLUSION

Strategic innovation primarily leads to entering new markets and developing new business models besides its other positive outcomes. In recent years, hotel firms need to increase their market shares more than any earlier times because of the strong competitive environment. Thus, hotels should start strategic innovation activities which assist them in differientiating themselves from their rivals. However, there are some factors that hamper innovation activities. The cost of the innovation and qualifications of staff are two important impeding factors which reduce the innovation activities of hotels. Nevertheless, hotel firms still wish to engage in strategic innovation activities because they want to improve service quality and increase satisfaction of guests. To do so, hotel firms should start with improving their staff's qualifications. Establishing an innovation department is another significant attempt to activate the innovation capacity of hotel firms.

It is important to increase level of strategic innovation of hotel firms in Antalya province to increase market share and competitiveness in the field. Also, there should be a study about level of strategic innovation of Antalya province as a tourism destination because it is important for tourism destinations to have a sustainable competitive advantage over their rival destinations.

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