



Agglomeration, social capital and interorganizational ambidexterity in tourist districts

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge is a basic factor of competitiveness with a firm's exploration and exploitation capabilities acting as the main antecedents of innovation. However, a firm has two main options to obtain new knowledge: internal generation and external acquisition. This paper analyzes how tourism firms located in tourist districts develop ambidexterity through the combination of co-exploration and co-exploitation. Specifically, we study how the features that characterize a tourist district, such as the level of firm and institutional agglomeration, affect the development of co-exploration and co-exploitation capabilities, taking into account the mediation effect of social capital.

The population under study includes all the Spanish hotels located in Spanish coastal towns, making a total sample of 210 establishments. The results confirm that agglomeration has a positive impact on the ambidexterity of Spanish hotels. Moreover, the results show that agglomeration causes an increase of social capital in hotels, and that social capital has a positive impact on ambidexterity. We find that social capital partially mediates the effect of agglomeration on ambidexterity. Some implications for managers and policymakers are presented.

1. Introduction

The generation and use of new knowledge to feed innovation and product development is critical for the competitiveness of tourism firms (Cooper, 2006; Hjalager, 2002), with organizational ambidexterity (i.e., a firm's ability to simultaneously pursue exploitation and exploration of knowledge) acting as the main antecedent of innovation. According to several authors (King, Breen, & Whitelaw, 2014; Williams & Shaw, 2011), tourism firms are often dependent on externally generated knowledge. Tourism firms are usually located in tourist districts (Marco-Lajara, Claver-Cortés, Úbeda-García, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2016), which can facilitate acquisition of specialized knowledge from local universities, vocational training centers and technological organizations (Knudsen, 2007; Sanna-Randaccio & Veugelers, 2007; Tödtling, Lehner, & Kaufmann, 2009). The literature has adopted several terms to refer to shared district knowledge, such as 'shared knowledge', 'cluster knowledge', 'collective learning' and 'regional knowledge'. In reality it is interorganizational ambidexterity (Kaupila, 2010; 2015), which combines co-exploration and co-exploitation and is supported on interorganizational

relationships among the actors of a cluster or tourist district.

The ambidexterity literature has grown over the last decade but interorganizational ambidexterity through the development of strong ties with external actors has been less studied. On this specific issue, more research is needed to better understand interorganizational ambidexterity because the current literature suffers from limitations (Lo & Theodoraki, 2021), such as the quasi-exclusive dyadic perspective, which does not consider ambidexterity based on multipolar relationships typical of clusters, industrial and tourist districts, and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze how tourism firms develop ambidexterity through the combination of co-exploration and co-exploitation in tourist districts. This issue has been analyzed by other researchers (Camisón, Boronat-Navarro, & Forés, 2018; Lavie, Kang, & Rosenkopf, 2011; Wassmer, Li, & Madhok, 2017), but in our paper we go further by studying how the features that characterize a tourist district, such as its level of firm and institutional agglomeration, affect the development of co-exploration and co-exploitation.

However, physical or geographical distance is not the only nor even

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the main factor explaining the spatial diffusion of knowledge (Boschma, 2005; Knobens & Oerlemans, 2006; Staber, 2001). Different studies have demonstrated that knowledge diffusion is influenced by other dimensions of proximity, such as institutional, social, or cognitive distances (Breschi & Lissoni, 2009; Nooteboom, 1999; Rallet & Torre, 2005). In other words, knowledge is unevenly distributed among members of an industrial cluster depending on the development of social capital (Giuliani & Bell, 2005; Lissoni & Pagani, 2003). Consequently, our analysis includes the mediation effect of social capital. Thus, our specific aim is to analyze how agglomeration (of firms and institutions) affects the development of ambidexterity (co-exploration and co-exploitation) in tourism firms through the mediating effect of social capital.

To perform our analysis, we study Spanish tourist districts and the hotels located in them. Spain was chosen because its tourism industry is highly developed, with most hotels being located in holiday tourist destinations, usually in coastal municipalities where tourism is the main economic activity. The study is made more relevant if we consider that Spain is one of the leading countries in the world according to the number of tourists received every year, with tourism generating about 11% of its GDP. To achieve our aims, an online questionnaire was devised to obtain data related to the social capital and ambidexterity of Spanish hotels—firm and institutional agglomeration were calculated with information from several databases.

A structural equation model is used to test our model, the data analysis method used is partial least squares (PLS)—specifically Smart PLS 3.2. The use of PLS is appropriate when the research features circumstances such as categorical observable variables, observable variables with some degree of non-reliability, formative indicators, data coming from unknown or not normal distributions, secondary data... (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009; John, Sosik, Kahai, & Piovoso, 2009; Leyva-Cordero & Olague, 2014).

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, we present a review of the literature and propose empirical hypotheses. This is followed by an explanation of the methodology and variables, and a description and discussion of the findings. The paper finishes with the main conclusions and implications.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

2.1. Agglomeration in tourist districts

Tourism firms tend to concentrate in specific geographical areas, with a network of organizations interacting to produce a service, usually within destinations. Although traditionally it has been said that tourism businesses, including hotels, are concentrated geographically around the resources demanded by tourists (demand-side perspective), more recent studies show that tourism firms also take advantage of positive externalities generated by the concentration of businesses, thus improving their profitability (supply-side perspective). This has led several authors to apply the industrial district theory to the tourism sector, giving rise to the theory of tourist districts. A destination can only be considered a tourist district if tourist companies constitute the main economic activity and the resident population is an integral part of this activity (Marco-Lajara et al., 2016; Sainaghi, 2006).

The main idea underlying this approach is that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in a tourist district obtain better results than those outside the district due to certain externalities linked to geographical concentration, such as the exploitation of common resources and infrastructures, including higher accessibility to suppliers and distributors, the creation of a large labor market with a specialized and efficient workforce, and knowledge transfer between agents based in the territory. Several studies show that externalities generated in a tourist district positively affect the profitability and competitiveness of firms (Camisón & Forés, 2015; Lazzeretti, Boix, & Sánchez, 2018), some of them relating externalities with the degree of agglomeration (Canina,

Enz, & Harrison, 2005; Chung & Kalnins, 2001; Enz, Canina, & Liu, 2008; Marco-Lajara, Claver-Cortés, & Úbeda-García, 2014; Peiró-Signes, Segarra-Oña, Miret-Pastor, & Verma, 2015). Looking deeper into the impact of externalities generated by agglomeration on hotel profitability, Marco-Lajara et al. (2016) reveal that they can both increase revenues and reduce costs.

The assessment of agglomeration has mostly been carried out by economists using localization and/or specialization indicators, among them the Gini index, the Maurel–Sedillot index or the Herfindahl index. Nevertheless, considering that economic behavior is embedded in a network context consisting of relationships (Bengtsson, Kock, Lundgren-Henriksson, & Näsholm, 2016) and that specifically, tourism involves a network of organizations interacting to produce a service, usually within a destination (Baggio, 2011; Casanueva, Gallego, & García-Sánchez, 2016), in reality agglomeration is a construct shaped by three dimensions which are related to the agents of a tourist district (Marco-Lajara, Claver-Cortés, Úbeda-García, García-Lillo, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2019): agglomeration of tourism firms in the main industry, agglomeration of related and complementary industry firms, and institutional agglomeration.

2.2. Tourist districts and interorganizational ambidexterity

As we have pointed out earlier, externalities generated by agglomeration in a tourist district positively affect profitability and competitiveness, with part of this positive effect coming from externalities created by specialized knowledge in the district. For Brusco (1990), knowledge flows with a certain degree of freedom in tourist districts. In this vein, some scholars have argued that accessing knowledge is one of the main externalities firms derive from belonging to a territorial agglomeration. Additionally, this knowledge is rarely available to firms outside the district (Krugman, 1991; Storper, 1992).

The literature establishes that it is far easier for firms to create and accumulate knowledge in tourist districts due to the constant interactions with other agents such as similar companies, training and research centers and destination management organizations (Audretsch & Feldman, 1996; Jaffe & Trajtenberg, 2002; Malmberg & Maskell, 2002; Maskell, 2001; Rosell, Lakemond, & Melander, 2017; Tho, 2017). And it is not just geographical proximity, cultural proximity also facilitates interactive learning and a propensity to share knowledge and establish collaboration relationships because common rules and shared values prevent opportunistic behaviors (Boschma & Ter Wal, 2007). This ease in the creation and accumulation of knowledge implies that hotels often rely more on external sources of knowledge (King et al., 2014; Marco-Lajara et al., 2019; Williams & Shaw, 2011) than on the internal generation of knowledge; an effect that primarily takes place when internal R&D efforts are scarce (Hagedoorn & Wang, 2012).

The literature has adopted several terms to refer to shared district knowledge, such as ‘shared knowledge’ (Lawson & Lorenz, 1999), ‘cluster knowledge’ (Pinch, Henry, Jenkins, & Tallman, 2003) and ‘collective learning’ (Capello & Faggian, 2005; Capello, 1999; Chuang, Chen, & Lin, 2016; Cotic-Svetina & Jaklic, 2008; Cotic-Svetina, Jaklic, & Prodan, 2008; Lawson & Lorenz, 1999; Lawson, 2000). For their part, Asheim and Coenen (2005) introduce the distinction between regional knowledge exploitation and regional knowledge generation. In reality this is a case of alliance ambidexterity (Sun & Lo, 2014) or interorganizational ambidexterity (Kauppila, 2010; 2015), which implies a simultaneous development of exploration and exploitation supported on interorganizational relationships among the different actors located in the cluster or tourist district, i.e., co-exploration and co-exploitation.

At least two features of interorganizational ambidexterity can be highlighted. The first is that it is obviously supported on interorganizational relationships. As Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos (2011) point out, co-exploration and co-exploitation are two constituent elements of an interorganizational relationship. Co-exploitation can be described as a voluntary cooperative agreement to execute knowledge, tasks,

functions, or activities where the emphasis is placed on using and expanding the already existing knowledge. On the other hand, co-exploration represents a voluntary cooperative agreement to create new knowledge, tasks, functions, or activities. The second feature is that firm-level characteristics may not fully explain organizational ambidexterity. As Kang, Morris, and Snell (2007) suggested, organizations have few mechanisms available to avoid harmful conflicts between exploration and exploitation, so ambidexterity might be more effective and it can be created through the use of networks within and across firm boundaries (Ossenbrink, Hoppmann, & Hoffmann, 2019). Similarly, alliance researchers have argued that interorganizational partners play a key role in strengthening and complementing firms' exploration and exploitation agendas (Baum, Li, & Usher, 2000; Heimeriks, Duysters, & Vanhaverbeke, 2007; Kauppila, 2010, 2015; Lavie & Rosenkopf, 2006; Lavie et al., 2011; Úbeda-García, Claver-Cortés, Marco-Lajara, & Zaragoza-Sáez, 2020). Researchers have even analyzed whether explorative or exploitative alliances are better, depending on the firm's internal weighting of exploration or exploitation (Bresciani, Ferraris, & Del Giudice, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2019).

In conclusion, the creation and sharing of knowledge – that is, the development of interorganizational ambidexterity – is far easier in tourist districts, due to geographical and cultural proximity, which facilitate the establishment of collaboration relationships. Obviously, the possibility to establish relationships with other agents depends on the number of existing firms and institutions in the tourist district, that is, its level of agglomeration (Marco-Lajara et al., 2016). Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. *Agglomeration in a tourist district has a positive impact on the development of interorganizational ambidexterity (co-exploration and co-exploitation) by hotels located there.*

2.3. Tourist districts and social capital

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 243), define social capital as the sum of current and potential resources in, available through and derived from the network of relationships in a social unit. These authors propose three strongly interrelated dimensions to analyze the characteristics of social capital—structural, relational, and cognitive— (Lee & Sukoco, 2007; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Wu, Chang, & Chen, 2008; Yli-Renko, Autio, & Sapienza, 2001). The cognitive dimension refers to shared codes, narratives and languages that may increase members' mutual understanding. The structural dimension encompasses the connections between actors that shape their interpersonal links. The relational dimension refers to the trust or sense of proximity among actors created by the depth and closeness of a relationship.

By helping firms to build a relational stock through interactions and exchanges, initiating a cluster contributes to the formation of social capital (Cappiello, Giordani, & Visentin, 2020). Various authors have described specific mechanisms in tourist districts that drive the creation of social capital (Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004; DeCarolis & Deeds, 1999; Gulati, 1995; Trigilia, 2001). Specific features of tourist districts, such as proximity and interaction intensity, play a key role in sharing goals and building common values between network members. In this way, actors adopt common codes, values, and practices through social interactions (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, tourist districts can be described as groups of firms embedded in a strong local network and sharing a relatively homogenous system of values and ideas (Barabel, Huault, & Meier, 2007; Becattini, 1990), some studies observing greater shared culture and values in firms belonging to tourist districts as compared with external firms. Nevertheless, initiatives are needed to provide services and infrastructure that can facilitate the establishment of formal and informal ties between firms, local institutions or research centers (Cappiello et al., 2020).

Obviously, the higher the number of firms and institutions located in a tourist district, the higher the possibilities of mutual interaction and

the development of social capital, shared goals and values. This leads us to propose a positive association between agglomeration in tourist districts and social capital.

Hypothesis 2. *Agglomeration in tourist districts has a positive impact on the development of social capital by hotels located there.*

2.4. Social capital and ambidexterity

Research on the relationship between social capital and innovation is extensive (Gerke, Luzzini, & Mena, 2021), a lot of it focusing on the positive effects of social capital in the relationships among actors from the same region (Huggins & Johnston, 2010), many papers emphasizing that social capital facilitates the exchange of valuable information and tacit knowledge due to the interactions among firms and institutions located in a tourist district, the trust implied by these relationships, and the similar goals and culture they share (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Simonin, 1999; Storper, 1997). As Seo (2020) points out, relational traits – such as mutual trust among partners, network ties/configuration/stability and shared goals/value – featuring the contexts where interorganizational learning occurs are crucial for learning effectiveness. Shaw and Williams (2009) view tourism clusters as vehicles for tacit knowledge transfer, where proximity facilitates trust and common values for effective knowledge sharing through inter-firm links and informal individual relationships. Sørensen (2007) argues that strong individual relationships with employees at other institutions within a tourism destination are more important to knowledge transfer than proximity itself. Lefebvre, Sorenson, Henschion, and Gellynck (2016) reveal that structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital all positively affect knowledge sharing among network members. Kim and Shim (2018) also find that the three dimensions of social capital positively influence knowledge sharing among SMEs in a tourism cluster. However, the effects of the different dimensions of social capital on knowledge sharing are not always the same. For instance, Cappiello et al. (2020) find that the cognitive and structural dimensions of social capital exert positive effects on innovative and competitive performance, while the relational dimension displays more varied effects. Different effects are also found by Ortiz, Donate, and Guadamillas (2018).

Thus, social capital in general, which includes ingredients of the three dimensions of social capital, can be an essential element to explain firm heterogeneity in the development of ambidexterity and knowledge acquisition. That is, geographical proximity is not a sufficient condition to enable firms to access district knowledge. Firms vary in terms of their number of contacts, trust in other members, and sharing of goals and cultural values with them (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Storper, 1997). In consequence, firms vary in their capacity to acquire and learn from the valuable knowledge in their district, that is, in their capacity to develop ambidexterity through interorganizational relationships (interorganizational ambidexterity). So, a third hypothesis can be formulated.

Hypothesis 3. *Social capital development is positively associated with ambidexterity development (interorganizational ambidexterity).*

2.5. Tourist districts, social capital, and interorganizational ambidexterity

Our last hypothesis is a consequence of the previous ones. In other words, if agglomeration has a direct impact on social capital, as predicted by H2, and social capital has a direct impact on interorganizational ambidexterity, as proposed by H3, then we consider that social capital is a basic explanatory factor that links agglomeration in a tourist district and ambidexterity. In this way, firms that have a higher number of contacts, maintain trust relationships with them and share goals and values, are in the best position to take advantage of their membership of a tourist district.

Summarizing, we understand that agglomeration in a tourist district will have an indirect effect through social capital on the firm's

knowledge acquisition through the development of co-exploration and co-exploitation capabilities. In line with the above arguments, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: *The development of social capital mediates in the association between agglomeration in tourist districts and the development of ambidexterity (interorganizational ambidexterity).*

Fig. 1 shows the theoretical model and proposed hypotheses representing the relationships between the analyzed variables. As we can see, in addition to the hypothesized effects, we have introduced size and chain membership as control variables (Yli-Renko et al., 2001).

3. Methodology

To test the proposed hypotheses in our model, we study the Spanish tourist districts and the hotels located there. Spain was chosen because its holiday tourism is highly developed, with most hotels being located in holiday tourist destinations, usually in coastal municipalities where tourism is the main economic activity.

Our first task was to identify tourist districts, following the methodology developed in Italy by the Instituto Nazionale di Statistica. According to this methodology, firstly local labor systems (LLSs) in the Spanish coastal area were identified, and secondly, tourist districts were categorized as LSSs with above average employment concentrations in small and medium sized tourist enterprises, that is, when the result of the following equation is >1:

$$Z = \frac{\frac{\text{Tourism employment in destination } i}{\text{Total employment in destination } i}}{\frac{\text{Tourism employment in Spain}}{\text{Total employment in Spain}}} > 1$$

Spanish LLSs were already identified by Boix and Galletto (2005), whose work serves as a basis for our study. Our task was limited to finding which LLSs corresponded to each of the tourist municipalities (as identified by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment) on Spain’s coastline. This led us to identify 440 towns pertaining to 178 LLSs (Marco-Lajara, Zaragoza-Sáez, Claver-Cortés, Úbeda-García, & García-Lillo, 2017).

Later, an online questionnaire was launched to obtain data related to social capital and ambidexterity in Spanish hotels. The following

sections show the features of the sample and explain the statistical procedure followed as well as the measurement of the different constructs and variables.

3.1. Population and sample

The population under study includes all the Spanish hotels located in the Spanish coastal towns—both in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Balearic and Canary Islands. We worked with a sample of 210 establishments, for which we obtained data related to their social capital and ambidexterity. These data were collected through an online questionnaire launched in 2019.

40% of our sample hotels, that is 84, are located on the Mediterranean coastline of the Iberian Peninsula, specifically 32 in Catalonia, 20 in the Valencian Region, 5 in Murcia and 27 in Andalusia. The most represented regions in the sample are the Balearic Islands, with 54 hotels (25.7%) and the Canary Islands, with 43 (20.5%). Finally, the Atlantic coastline in the north of Spain is represented by 29 hotels (13.8%), that is, 5 in Galicia, 8 in Asturias, 5 in Cantabria and 11 in the Basque Country. 70.9% of the hotels in the sample have more than 50 rooms. More specifically, 17.7% have between 50 and 99 rooms, 27.8% between 100 and 199, 13.9% between 200 and 299, and 11.4% more than 300.

3.2. Statistical procedure

A structural equation model is used to test the proposed hypotheses (Fig. 2). The data analysis method used is partial least squares (PLS)—specifically Smart PLS 3.2. The use of PLS is appropriate when the research features one or more of the following circumstances (Henseler et al., 2009; John et al., 2009; Leyva-Cordero & Olague, 2014): some observable variables are categorical, the observable variables have some degree of non-reliability, there are formative indicators, the data come from unknown or not normal distributions, secondary data are used, the sample is very long.

Prior to estimating the models, we examined common method variance. According to Harman’s single factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), if common method variance exists, a factor would emerge from a factor analysis with all research indicators. This test must be preceded by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) estimate

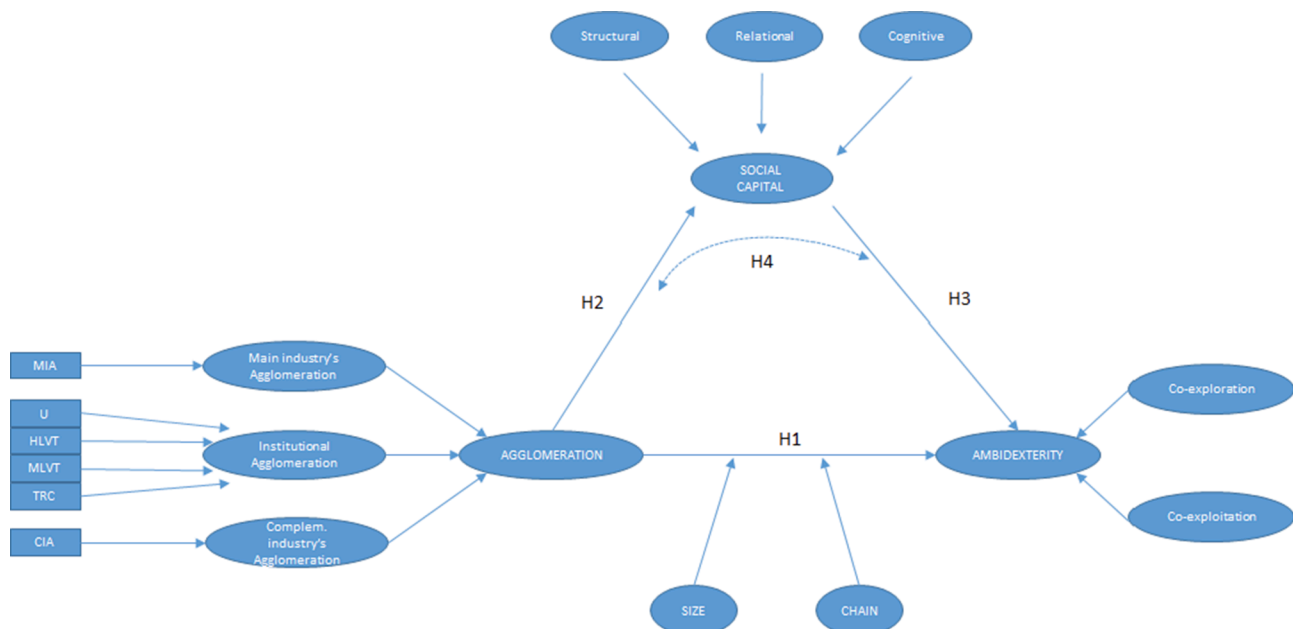
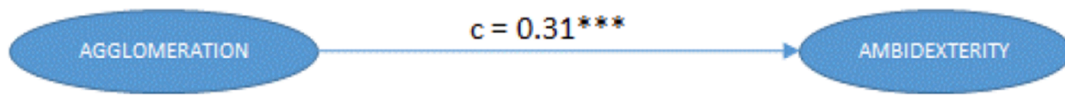
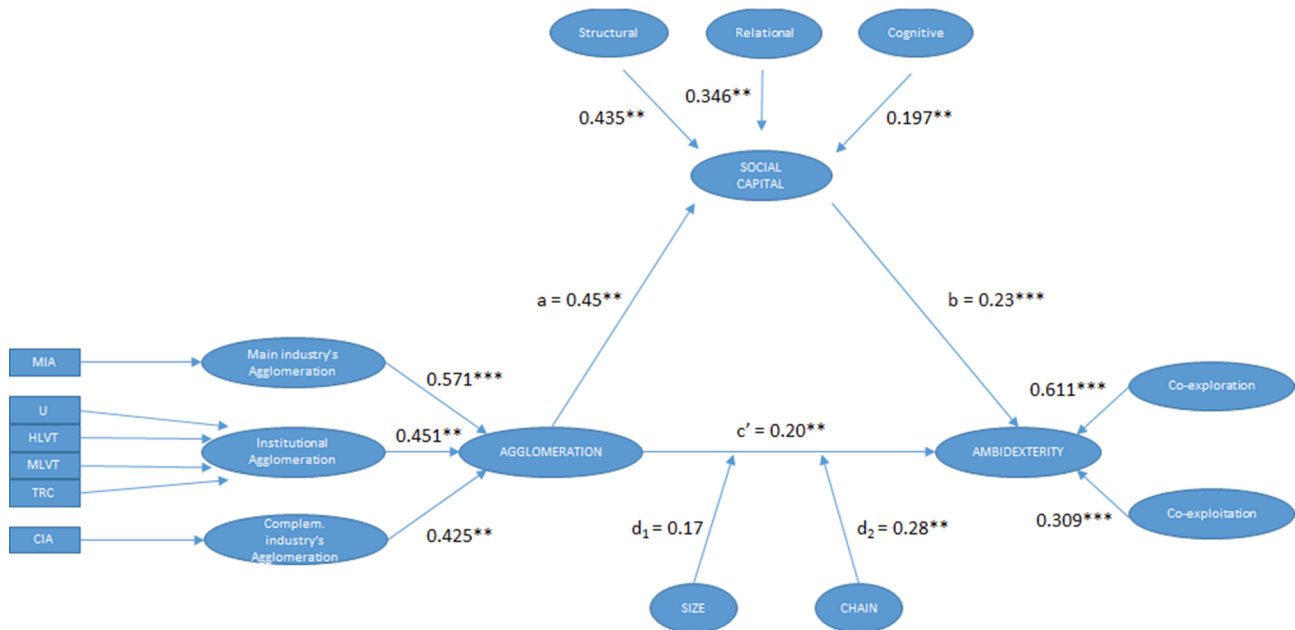


Fig. 1. Model with hypotheses.

a. Model with total effect



b. Model with the mediated effect



- H1 = Agglomeration → Ambidexterity = c'
- H2 = Agglomeration → Social capital = a
- H3 = Social capital → Ambidexterity = b
- H4 = Agglomeration → Social capital → Ambidexterity = a x b

Fig. 2. (a) Model with total effect. (b) Model with the mediated effect.

that includes all the indicators from every scale, with a view to determining the extent to which most of the variance in this model is explained by a general factor (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Twelve factors were identified, with the main factor accounting for 19.8% of variance. None of the factors explain >50% of variance, which suggests no common method variance.

3.3. Measurement

3.3.1. Agglomeration

This is a second-order formative construct shaped by three first order formative constructs which are related to the agents of a tourist district (Marco-Lajara et al., 2016): agglomeration of tourism firms in the main industry, agglomeration of related and complementary industry firms, and institutional agglomeration.

3.3.1.1. Main industry firms' agglomeration (MIA).. Degree of agglomeration is found with the result obtained with the previous eq. Z, which determines if an LLS constitutes a tourist district. The data used to estimate the equation corresponding to each LLS were obtained from the firm database of the Spanish Chambers of Commerce (Camerdata), updated to January 2020. Our search focused on tourism firms with fewer than 250 employees belonging to codes 5510, 5610 and 5630 of

the Clasificación Nacional de Actividades Económicas (National Classification of Economic Activities-CNAE), CNAE2009—corresponding to hotels, restaurants, and cafés.

3.3.1.2. Number of firms belonging to related and complementary industries (RCIA).. This was estimated with the number of firms obtained from sections 47.6 and 47.7 (retail trade of cultural, recreational, and other items), as well as 90, 91, 92, and 93 (artistic activities, shows, libraries, museums, games of chance, sports activities, recreational activities, entertainment) of CNAE2009. The data stemmed from the firm database of the Spanish Chambers of Commerce (Camerdata), updated to January 2020.

3.3.1.3. Institutional agglomeration.. Based on previous works (Audretsch & Feldman, 1996; Feldman & Audretsch, 1999; Jaffe & Trajtenberg, 2002; Knudsen, 2007; Sanna-Randaccio & Veugelers, 2007; Tödtling et al., 2009), institutional agglomeration is a formative first order construct made up of local universities and vocational training centers that offer tourism studies, as well as local tourism research centers. This information came directly from the Internet and the resources were measured as follows:

Universities (U): number of universities which offer tourism degrees at the provincial level relativized by the number of inhabitants in the province.

Higher-Level VT (HLVT): number of higher-level vocational training centers with tourism programs at the tourist district level, relativized by the number of inhabitants in the area.

Medium-Level VT (MLVT): number of medium-level vocational training centers with tourism programs at the tourist district level, relativized by the number of inhabitants in the area.

Technological Research Centers (TRC): number of public and/or private technological institutes, including university institutes focused on tourism research as well as tourist observatories at the autonomous region level.

3.3.2. Social capital

To measure social capital (Appendix A), we used a seven-point Likert-type scale with different items in order to evaluate the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions established by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). All the items correspond to scales previously validated by other works such as Tsai and Ghoshal (1998), Kale, Singh, and Perlmutter (2000), Yli-Renko et al. (2001), Maula, Autio, and Murray (2003) or Ruiz-Ortega, Parra-Requena, and García-Villaverde (2016).

Specifically, to measure ‘structural social capital’ we used a total of six items ($\alpha = 0.871$): three to assess ‘network links’ obtained from the scale of Maula et al. (2003); and the other three to evaluate ‘network configuration’ with a scale adapted by Ruiz-Ortega et al. (2016) from the works of Molina-Morales (2005) and Expósito-Langa and Molina-Morales (2010).

In the case of the ‘relational social capital’ dimension, we used the five-item scale of Kale et al. (2000) because it is considered the most comprehensive for its application to the external networks of firms ($\alpha = 0.853$).

Finally, for ‘cognitive social capital’, we used eight items ($\alpha = 0.891$). The first six items – obtained by adapting items used in previous studies by Tsai and Ghoshal (1998), Young-Ybarra and Wiersema (1999), and Yli-Renko et al. (2001) – allow us to measure ‘shared goals’; the other two items were adapted from Simonin (1999), allowing us to evaluate ‘shared culture’.

3.3.3. Interorganizational ambidexterity

Our model considered this variable as a second-order construct shaped by two first-order reflective constructs—co-exploration and co-exploitation— which we measured using scales previously validated by other authors (Appendix A). Specifically, we combined four items developed by Kauppila (2015) and five items developed by Camisón (2004) in order to assess co-exploration; and another four and five items developed by the same authors, respectively, to measure co-exploitation (see Appendix A).

3.3.4. Hotel size

Size was determined by the number of employees, which was also easy for us to find from SABI.

3.3.5. Hotel chain affiliation

Chain affiliation was estimated as a dummy variable which takes a 0 value when the hotel does not belong to a chain and 1 otherwise. The qualification for a chain was 3 or more affiliated establishments with different addresses, whether on an ownership, management, rental, or franchise basis. The consideration was under no circumstances given to associations and/or federations of hotel firms.

4. Analysis and results

Because PLS does not allow us to represent second-order factors directly, we first calculated the factor scores of first-order constructs

(latent variable scores), which were considered as the indicators of second-order factors (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003). In the first stage, the first-order factors were separately included in the model with their respective indicators. In the second stage, a model was estimated that used the latent variable factor scores calculated in the first stage for each of the first-order components.

After building the second-order variables, the model was assessed on the basis of the stages proposed by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017): measurement model evaluation and structural model analysis. Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the main results, which are shown in Fig. 2 with the weights of formative indicators used to estimate the latent variables, and the path coefficients for each hypothesis. The figure is split into two parts, the first (Fig. 2a) with the total effect of agglomeration on ambidexterity, and the second (Fig. 2b) where the mediated effects of social capital are included.

4.1. Stage 1. Measurement model evaluation

Because the formative indicators do not need to be correlated and it is assumed that they are free from error, the traditional assessment of reliability and validity is not applicable (Bagozzi, 1994). Thus, the assessment of the measurement model for formative indicators in PLS can be based on an assessment at the construct level and at the indicator level (Chin, 2010). The first was discarded, since to perform it we need a previously validated reflective construct in order to compare it with the formative construct. Therefore, we rely exclusively on evaluation at the indicator level.

The variance inflation factor analysis (VIF) rules out high potential multicollinearity between indicators. The evaluation of the weights of the indicators shows that they are all statistically significant (see Fig. 2b). Even if an item contributes little to the explained variance in a formative construct, it should be included in the measurement model (Roberts & Thatcher, 2009, p. 30), because dropping a formative indicator implies dropping part of the composite latent construct.

4.2. Stage 2. Structural model analysis

The algebraic sign, magnitude, and significance of the structural path coefficients, the R² values and the Q² test for predictive relevance permit an evaluation of the structural model. Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was used to generate standard error and t-statistics. This makes it

Table 1
Effects on endogenous variables.

Effects on endogenous variables	Direct Effect	t-value (Bootstrap)	Percentil 95% confidence intervals	Explained Variance (%)
<i>Social capital</i>				
R ² = 0.1375/Q ² = 0.05				
Agglomeration	0.45**	1.343	[-0.156; -0.038] Sig.	13.75%
<i>Ambidexterity</i>				
R ² = 0.2735/Q ² = 0.175				
Social capital	0.23***	0.762	[-0.072; -0.036] Sig.	12.4%
Agglomeration	0.20**	1.677	[0.005; 0.111] Sig.	7.9%
Size	-0.15**	1.495	[-0.057; -0.005] Sig.	1.9%
Size moderation	0.14	1.221	[-0.029; 0.067] Ns.	1.7%
Chain	0.000	0.017	[-0.047; 0.056] Ns.	0.0%
Chain moderation	0.305**	1.881	[0.001; 0.068] Sig.	3.5%

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.005; *p < 0.01.

Table 2
Summary of mediating effect test.

Total effect of Agglomeration on A (c)		Direct effect of Agglomeration on A		Indirect effect of Agglomeration on A			
Coefficient	t value	Coefficient	t value		Point estimate	Percentile bootstrap 95% confidence interval	
						Lower Upper	
0.31***	1.509	H1 = c'	0.20**	1.677	Total	0.20**	0.005 0.111
					H4 = a × b (via social capital)	0.11**	-0.022 -0.003

A, ambidexterity.
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.005.

possible to assess the significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2017). The confidence intervals of standardized regression coefficients were also calculated. According to Henseler et al. (2009), if a confidence interval for an estimated path coefficient *w* does not include zero, the hypothesis that *w* equals zero is rejected. More specifically, it was decided to use a percentile approach—which has the advantage of completely free distribution (Chin, 2010).

The three direct effects described in Fig. 2b are significant because they exceed the minimum level in a Student's t-distribution with one tail and n-1 (n = number of resamples) degrees of freedom (Table 1). The same result is also obtained with a 95% percentile bootstrap confidence interval. Accordingly, H1, H2 and H3 are supported. In other words, the creation and sharing of knowledge, and more specifically, the development of interorganizational ambidexterity is far easier in tourist districts, due to geographical and cultural proximity, which facilitate the establishment of collaboration relationships, with the results indicating that it depends on the level of agglomeration. These findings related to H1 are consistent with previous works finding that clusters and tourist districts, where a lot of firms are agglomerated, have a positive impact on the interorganizational ambidexterity and innovation of hotels (Camisón et al., 2018; Camisón, Forés, & Boronat-Navarro, 2017; Lavie et al., 2011; Wassmer et al., 2017). The importance of these results resides not just in the possibility to access the resources and knowledge of other organizations, but also because it helps ambidextrous organizations to solve internal tensions between exploitation and exploration (Kang et al., 2007; Ossenbrink et al., 2019). Whatever the case, the relevance is higher for the competitiveness of tourism firms which are often characterized by dependence on externally generated knowledge (King et al., 2014; Williams & Shaw, 2011). Related to H2, our results confirm that helping firms to build a relational stock through interactions and exchanges, clusters and tourist districts contributes to the formation of social capital (Cappiello et al., 2020). Finally, for H3, empirical evidence is obtained that geographical proximity is not a sufficient condition to enable firms to access district knowledge, with social capital facilitating the exchange of valuable information and tacit knowledge among firms and institutions located in a tourist district (Cappiello et al., 2000; Chuang et al., 2016; Kim & Shim, 2018; Sørensen, 2007).

The research model proposed has a predictive value for the two dependent variables (Table 1). Ambidexterity presents the highest explained variance (R² = 0.2735). The structural model was also evaluated using the cross-validated redundancy index (Q²) for endogenous reflective constructs (Chin, 2010). This measure examines the predictive relevance of the theoretical/structural model. A Q² greater than zero implies that the model has predictive relevance. The findings shown in Table 1 confirm that the model suggested has a satisfactory predictive relevance for the two dependent variables—social capital and ambidexterity.

In terms of the moderation effect of control variables, only the chain moderation effect is supported. The moderation effect of size is rejected, although size has a significant impact on ambidexterity (see Table 1).

Testing the mediation hypothesis (H4) was possible thanks to the analytical approach of Hayes and Scharkow (2013). The indirect effect is specified and tested with the mediator (social capital) (Table 2).

We also studied the total effect (c) and the direct effect (H1: c') of the independent variable (agglomeration) on the dependent variable (interorganizational ambidexterity). Chin (2010) suggests a two-stage process to test mediation in PLS: 1) using the specific model—including both direct and indirect effects—and performing N bootstrap resampling and explicitly calculating the product of the direct paths that form the indirect path under assessment; and 2) estimating significance by means of percentile bootstrap (Williams & MacKinnon, 2008). This generates a 95% confidence interval (CI) for the mediator: social capital (H4). If the interval for a mediation hypothesis does not contain the zero value, it means that the indirect effect significantly differs from zero at a 95% confidence level.

Taking into account Fig. 2a, Table 2 reveals that agglomeration has a significant total effect on ambidexterity (c). When the mediating variable is introduced (Fig. 2b), both the direct impact of agglomeration (c') and the indirect impact of social capital (a × b) on ambidexterity are also significant. This means that social capital partially mediates the influence of agglomeration on the ambidexterity of hotels, and that H4 is accepted.

5. Conclusions

This study analyzes interorganizational ambidexterity in Spanish tourist districts. The main contribution of our work is that it helps to reduce the gap in the academic literature on interorganizational ambidexterity, since it has mainly been studied in the context of dyadic relationships between firms, and not in the context of the multilateral relationships that are generated in the network of firms and institutions within a cluster or tourist district. Although there are some works based on the network approach, the novelty of our work is that it is not limited to finding out if the companies in a district are more or less ambidextrous but that it establishes a direct relationship between the degree of agglomeration of the district and interorganizational ambidexterity.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this study. The first is that tourist districts, due to the relationships that are established among local agents, help tourism firms to develop interorganizational ambidexterity, with a positive relationship between degree of agglomeration and ambidexterity. This results in greater competitiveness for local tourism firms, not only because through interorganizational ambidexterity they can access the resources and knowledge of other organizations, but also because this helps them to solve the internal tensions between exploitation and exploration normally faced by an ambidextrous organization.

The second is that the positive effect on interorganizational ambidexterity is partly determined by the social capital that is generated in a tourist district. That is, not only the physical presence or agglomeration of firms and institutions helps the development of interorganizational ambidexterity, but also the bonds and trust relationships that are established among the organizations located in the district. Furthermore, considering that the generation of social capital is motivated by the level of agglomeration of the district, it can be said that social capital partially mediates the positive relationship between business agglomeration and interorganizational ambidexterity in the context of a tourist district.

6. Implications

Theoretical and practical implications are also derived from the study. At a theoretical level, the main implication is that we must continue to investigate inter-organizational ambidexterity in the context of business networks that are generated, for example, in clusters, industrial and tourist districts, technological parks or entrepreneurial ecosystems. This is crucial as it will help to understand why some organizations are more ambidextrous and more competitive, especially in certain sectors, such as tourism, which is often shaped as a network of firms and institutions within a destination.

As for the practical implications for tourism firms, the first is that it is very important for hotels to choose a good location in tourist districts with a higher level of agglomeration, since it can be crucial for the development of their ambidexterity, performance and competitiveness. The second is that location in a tourist district is not the only requirement for firms to accumulate more knowledge and be more ambidextrous. It is very important to know how to relate to other firms and organizations, establishing relationships of trust that help share and create new knowledge. In other words, they must know how to develop their social capital. Thirdly, although it has not been specifically analyzed in this paper, we think that firms located in a tourist district must correctly manage their portfolio of alliances, properly combining the use of exploratory and exploitative alliances in order to improve their ambidexterity through interorganizational relationships.

Regarding practical implications for institutions and policymakers, as social capital is critical to enhancing the competitiveness of firms, tourism cluster policies should focus on how to create a friendly operational climate to build social capital and support innovation. Initiatives are needed to provide services and infrastructure that can facilitate the establishment of formal and informal ties between firms, local institutions, or research centers, as well as upgrade the stock of human and intellectual capital.

7. Limitations and future research

The most important limitations are related to those aspects that have not been considered in the study and that may be decisive in the development of firms' relationships, share capital and interorganizational ambidexterity. This is the case, for instance, of hotel ownership (family business, foreign capital, etc.).

Apart from these aspects, future research on inter-organizational ambidexterity in tourist districts should enquire into how the different dimensions of social capital (structural, relational and cognitive) mediate the relationship between agglomeration and ambidexterity, since there is limited empirical literature on the effects of the different dimensions of social capital on firms' ability to improve their competitiveness and innovativeness. Moreover, it could be interesting to analyze which kind or dimension of agglomeration (MIA, RCIA or institutional) is the most influential on the ambidexterity of hotels, and which dimension of ambidexterity (co-exploration or co-exploitation) is the most affected by them.

On the other hand, as cooperation is embedded in the relationships of a network on different levels, such as organizational, departmental and individual levels, there is an opportunity to adopt theoretical approaches that bridge both micro-levels and macro-levels of analysis to a greater extent (Bengtsson et al., 2016; Bouncken, Gast, Kraus, & Bogers, 2015).

From another point of view, future lines of research could be focused on analyzing the impact of interorganizational ambidexterity (co-exploration and co-exploitation) on firm performance (Chang, Hughes, & Hotho, 2011), studying the division of labor with regard to exploration and exploitation among the actors inside the cluster (Cantner, Graf, Rothgang, & Wolf, 2015) or identifying how a governance structure leads to ambidexterity at the cluster level (Bocquet & Mothe, 2015). Moreover, it could be interesting to analyze how firms in a tourist

district balance the use of explorative and exploitative alliances depending on the firms' internal weighting of exploration or exploitation.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Bartolomé Marco-Lajara: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing, Supervision. **Mercedes Úbeda-García:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Review. **Patrocinio del Carmen Zaragoza-Sáez:** Conceptualization, Review, Editing. **Francisco García-Lillo:** Conceptualization, Review, Editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

QUESTION 1

Please, show your level of agree with the next assertions about your contacts (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree):

Structural social capital (network ties)

- We interact frequently with our contacts.
- We know our contacts in a personal level.
- We maintain close social relationships with our contacts.

Structural social capital (network configuration)

- The exchanges of resources, information, and so on, among our contacts usually have a similar content.
- The contacts with which we maintain frequent relationships, in general, know each other.
- The contacts from which we receive advice, information, or whatever element for making important decisions know each other, that is, they maintain reciprocal relationships.

Relational social capital (trust)

- There are personal relationships with our contacts.
- The relationships are characterized by mutual respect between the parties.
- The relationships are characterized by mutual trust between the parties.
- The relationships are characterized by high reciprocity between the parties.
- The relationships are characterized by personal friendship between the parties.

Cognitive social capital (shared goals)

- We share the same ambition and vision as our contacts.
- My firm is enthusiastic about pursuing the collective goals and missions of our relationships.
- We share our goals and objectives with our contacts.
- We understand our contacts' strategy and needs.
- My firm's employees and my contacts' employees have positive attitudes toward a cooperative relationship.
- My firm and my contacts tend to agree on how to make the relationship work.

Cognitive social capital (shared culture)

- The business practices and operational mechanisms of your contacts are very similar to yours.
- The corporate culture and management style of your contacts is very similar to yours.

QUESTION 2

Evaluate, according to your perception and the available information, the situation in the tourist destination or tourist district in which your business is located for the areas identified below in relation to the average of the competitor destinations or districts, on a scale of 1–7 where 1 is “much worse than our competitors,” 4 is “on a par with our competitors” and 7 is “much better than our competitors”:

Co-exploration-1

- Support services are available to establish cooperation agreements with firms within the tourist destination/district that are difficult to reproduce outside it.
- Firms benefit from common learning processes (on products, processes, technologies, markets and customers) stimulated by leading R&D centers in the industry such as technological institutes or universities, suppliers or clients located in the tourist destination/district.
- Knowledge is created through cooperation with customers, suppliers, competitors and/or R&D organizations (frequency and importance of relationships and cooperation to create knowledge and innovations by developing joint projects, strategic alliances, business meetings, temporary exchanges of staff, etc.).
- There is a model or pattern of relationships for the informal transmission of innovations, technologies and knowledge within the tourist destination/district that cannot be reproduced outside the area.
- Availability of qualified specialized human capital.

Co-exploitation-1

- Firms benefit from the external communication activities carried out cooperatively by distributors, groups of competitors or business associations in the area.
- There is an overall strategic plan and policies that are important to improving the tourist destination/district as a whole.
- A comprehensive tourism product is offered through the cooperation of the destination agents.
- Establishments are sited in a privileged environment.
- Cost savings achieved by sharing resources, tasks or staff, among various activities.

QUESTION 3

Evaluate the following items on a scale of 1–7 (1 = never; 4 = usually; 7 = always):

Co-exploration-2

- In our innovation-related activities, we pursue collaboration with universities and research centers.
- The intent of our interorganizational collaboration is to create groundbreaking innovations.
- Our interorganizational collaboration enables creating innovations that our firm would not be able to create on its own.
- The search for new opportunities is a key motivation for our firm’s interorganizational collaboration.

Co-exploitation-2

- We use subcontracting to rationalize our business operations.
- Suppliers have an important role in the development of our new products/services.
- Our interorganizational collaboration enables increased efficiency.

- Complementary resources are an important driver of our interorganizational collaboration.

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