



Construct validity analysis of the strategic imitation practices scale

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Abstract

This study aims to develop and validate a comprehensive measurement scale for strategic imitation practices within organizational contexts. Strategic imitation refers to the deliberate adoption of successful strategies, business models, or practices from competitors or industry leaders to enhance organizational performance and adaptability. Despite its growing theoretical significance, there remains a lack of standardized and psychometrically sound instruments to assess this construct. The current research addresses this gap by introducing the Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS), which was developed through a rigorous process involving item generation, expert review, and empirical testing. Data were collected from 312 participants across multiple industries, including higher education, telecommunications, and hospitality. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed a six-dimensional structure of the scale, encompassing: imitation of successful strategic practices, imitation of knowledge, relational learning by imitation, innovation imitation, internal positive behavior imitation, and value imitation. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency and construct validity, as evidenced by acceptable factor loadings and inter-correlations between dimensions. The SIPS provide a reliable instrument for researchers and practitioners seeking to understand and measure how organizations strategically engage in imitation as part of their broader strategic repertoire. This study contributes to the literature on strategic management by offering a validated tool that enhances both theoretical and practical insights into the mechanisms and outcomes of strategic imitation.

Keywords: Strategic imitation practices, construct validity, scale development

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing business environment, firms increasingly rely on strategic imitation as a mechanism for learning, adaptation, and competitive advantage. Unlike social imitation, which is driven by conformity and social norms, strategic imitation practices involve deliberate decision-making aimed at gaining tangible benefits through the adoption of proven strategies (Vilone *et al.*, 2012; Peng *et al.*, 2021) ^[13, 18]. However, despite the theoretical and practical relevance of strategic imitation, there remains a lack of standardized instruments to measure this phenomenon with precision and reliability.

This study contributes to the literature by presenting a comprehensive construct validity analysis of a newly developed Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS). The scale builds upon prior conceptualizations and incorporates recent findings from studies analyzing imitation in complex environments (Posen *et al.*, 2019) ^[14].

The scale integrates behavioral indicators derived from a structured questionnaire distributed among employees and managers, enabling a more grounded and realistic understanding of how strategic imitation manifests within organizations.

Concept of Strategic Imitation Practices

Strategic imitation practices refer to a conscious and deliberate organizational process in which firms adopt strategies, practices, or business models from successful competitors with the aim of improving performance, accelerating learning, or adapting to dynamic environments (Sulistiyan *et al.*, 2012; Peng *et al.*, 2021) ^[13, 16]. It goes beyond blind copying and involves in-depth analysis, selection, and contextual adaptation of imitated practices to align them with the firm's internal capabilities and external conditions (Bourkha, 2023) ^[4].

The phenomenon of strategic imitation is deeply rooted in

the literature on organizational learning and knowledge diffusion (Zander & Kogut, 1995) ^[22]. Scholars have emphasized that imitation is not merely passive replication but rather an active learning mechanism through which organizations absorb external knowledge and integrate it into their existing capabilities. This is closely tied to the concept of absorptive capacity, which determines whether a firm can effectively utilize spillovers of knowledge from other firms (Valdani & Arbore, 2007) ^[17].

Strategic imitation should be distinguished from social imitation, which occurs due to peer pressure, conformity to industry norms, or cultural influences rather than strategic intent (Vilone *et al.*, 2012) ^[18]. The key difference lies in the motivation and awareness behind the act: while social imitation is often reactive and unconscious, strategic imitation is proactive and based on rational decision-making aimed at achieving competitive advantages.

Dimensions of Strategic Imitation Practices

Based on a comprehensive synthesis of the provided materials and relevant literature, this study identifies six core dimensions of strategic imitation practices. These dimensions capture distinct aspects of how organizations engage in strategic imitation, contributing to a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of the construct, which enhances both theoretical depth and measurement accuracy. The detailed descriptions of each dimension are presented in the Appendix for clarity and reference.

1. Imitation of Successful Strategic Practices

The imitation of successful strategic practices refers to the conscious and deliberate adoption of proven strategies, business models, or operational methods from high-performing firms. This form of imitation is not a blind copy-paste exercise but rather a strategic learning process that

involves analysis, adaptation, and integration into the imitator's own organizational context (Bourkha, 2023; Peng *et al.*, 2021)^[4, 13].

Imitation in this sense plays a critical role in organizational learning and knowledge diffusion, particularly in industries where trial-and-error learning is costly or time-consuming (Zander & Kogut, 1995)^[22]. According to Wanasika & Conner (2011)^[19], imitation can be classified into two main types:

- a. **Strategic Imitation:** Involves substantial resource commitment and long-term planning to match the strategic actions of innovators.
- b. **Tactical Imitation:** Refers to short-term copying of actions without significant investment.

This distinction highlights that not all forms of imitation are equal, and the value derived from them depends on the depth of analysis and contextual customization (Algarni *et al.*, 2023)^[2].

Moreover, from the perspective of relational learning, imitation is more than just copying — it is a process of understanding why certain practices succeed and how they can be adapted for internal use (Yang & Hyland, 2006; Posen *et al.*, 2013). As noted by Aarstad *et al.* (2016)^[11], organizations often learn from others' successes and failures to guide their own strategic decisions.

In addition, imitation supports firms in reducing risk, saving costs, and learning from pioneers' mistakes, which enhances the likelihood of market success. It also allows firms to leverage existing knowledge instead of reinventing the wheel, especially in low-tech industries or emerging markets where access to innovation resources may be limited (Xia & Liu, 2018).

2. Imitation of Knowledge

The imitation of knowledge refers to the process through which organizations acquire, assimilate, and apply external knowledge by observing and learning from successful competitors or partners. It goes beyond simple copying; rather, it represents an active organizational learning strategy that involves analysis, adaptation, and integration of external insights into internal capabilities in order to align with strategic goals (Zander & Kogut, 1995; Li Pira *et al.*, 2017)^[9, 22].

This dimension is closely linked to the concept of absorptive capacity, defined as a firm's ability to recognize the value of new external knowledge, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends (Burkert & Hermida, 2023)^[5]. Chaniago (2021)^[6] further elaborates on ACAP as encompassing four interrelated processes: acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation of knowledge — all of which are essential for turning imitated practices into innovation and competitive advantage.

Organizations with higher absorptive capacity are more capable of extracting meaningful insights from imitated practices, especially in dynamic environments where knowledge evolves rapidly (Algarni *et al.*, 2023)^[2]. In such contexts, imitation becomes a vehicle for knowledge mobilization, allowing firms to build upon existing ideas and develop new combinations that support innovation (Davis & Aggarwal, 2019)^[8].

Studies also suggest that there is a dynamic relationship between imitation and innovation, mediated by absorptive capacity. While some scholars argue that ACAP complements imitation by enhancing the firm's ability to

interpret and use external knowledge (Chen & Zhang, 2021)^[7], others propose that high levels of ACAP may even substitute for imitation when firms possess sufficient internal knowledge to innovate independently (Aarstad *et al.*, 2016; Sulistiyani *et al.*, 2012)^[1, 16].

3. Relational Learning by Imitation

Relational learning by imitation refers to a deliberate and strategic process through which organizations learn from and adopt relationships and interactions between entities — whether individuals, teams, or firms — to enhance knowledge and develop organizational capabilities. It goes beyond the mere copying of practices and includes understanding the patterns and dynamics of how parties interact, and how these relationships can be adapted within a different context (Bombini *et al.*, 2009; Peng *et al.*, 2021)^[3, 13].

This form of imitation is particularly relevant in interactive and dynamic environments such as multi-agent systems or organizational networks, where learning occurs not only from observing outcomes but also from analyzing how others interact with their environment (Over & Carpenter, 2021). Research shows that relational imitation enhances the organization's ability to adapt quickly to dynamic conditions, and serves as an effective mechanism for transferring complex knowledge when the relationship between entities is clear and based on repeated interaction (Bombini *et al.*, 2009)^[3].

The spread of this type of learning is closely tied to the presence of strong organizational networks and similarities between leaders or institutional cultures, which facilitate the integration of new practices into internal operations.

4. Imitation of Innovation

Imitation of innovation refers to the process through which organizations adopt and implement products, services, or technologies that were originally developed by pioneering firms. It is not simply a passive replication but often involves analysis, adaptation, and sometimes improvement of the original idea to suit the imitator's internal capabilities and market conditions (Min & Kim, 2021; Algarni *et al.*, 2023)^[2, 10].

This form of imitation plays a central role in strategic management and organizational learning, particularly for firms that lack the resources or risk tolerance to be first movers. Unlike radical innovation — which introduces entirely new concepts — innovative imitation focuses on leveraging existing ideas and enhancing them to create competitive value (Sulistiyani *et al.*, 2012)^[16].

5. Imitation of Internal Positive Behavior

Imitation of internal positive behavior refers to the process through which employees or teams within an organization observe, learn from, and adopt successful behavioral patterns demonstrated by other units, departments, or individuals inside the same organization. It is a form of organizational learning that promotes consistency, collaboration, and performance improvement by leveraging positive role models within the firm. This type of imitation is not limited to copying actions but involves understanding why certain behaviors lead to better outcomes and how they can be adapted to different contexts within the same organization (Özsungur, 2021)^[12].

6. Imitation of Value

Imitation of value refers to the strategic process through

which organizations adopt and implement value propositions that were originally developed and offered by leading firms in the market. This type of imitation is not limited to simply copying a product or service; rather, it may also include imitating how this value is created, such as the internal processes, resources, and technologies used to deliver it (Bourkha & Demil, 2016).

The concept highlights that value creation involves both what is offered to customers and how it is delivered. Therefore, successful imitation of value requires more than just replicating the end offering — it often demands an understanding of the underlying business model and operational structure that support its delivery.

Methodology

1. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 312 observations across various industries, including higher education telecommunications hospitality sectors. Participants included middle and senior-level managers familiar with their firm's strategic orientation toward imitation.

2. Instrument Development

The initial item pool was developed based on qualitative synthesis of prior studies and expert review. A total of 30 items (see Appendix) were generated and distributed across the six proposed dimensions.

3. Analytical Techniques

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of strategic imitation practices. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then performed to validate the measurement model and confirm the dimensionality of the strategic imitation construct.

Construct Validity Analysis

1. Factor Structure and Reliability

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), presented in Table 1, confirmed a clear six-factor structure, aligning with the proposed dimensions. All dimensions showed acceptable factor loading values above 0.50, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of the Dimensions of Strategic Imitation Practices

Dimension	Factor Analysis
Imitation of Successful Strategic Practices	0.92
Imitation of Knowledge	0.88
Relational Learning Imitation	0.85
Innovation Imitation	0.86
Internal Positive Behavior Imitation	0.83
Value Imitation	0.89

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the dimensions of strategic imitation practices were statistically validated. EFA identified the underlying structure, confirmed the measurement model's fit, and supported the construct's validity.

2. Assessment of Discriminant and Convergent Validity

The following Table 2 presents the correlation matrix between the six dimensions of the Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS). These correlations provide insight into the interrelationships among the dimensions and support the assessment of discriminant and convergent validity.

Table 2: Correlations Between Dimensions of the Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS)

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6
Imitation of Successful Strategic Practices	—	0.88	0.89	0.85	0.87	0.81
Imitation of Knowledge	0.88	—	0.87	0.88	0.86	0.88
Relational Learning Imitation	0.89	0.87	—	0.87	0.80	0.79
Innovation Imitation	0.85	0.88	0.87	—	0.81	0.87
Internal Positive Behavior Imitation	0.87	0.86	0.80	0.81	—	0.85
Value Imitation	0.81	0.88	0.79	0.87	0.85	—

Note: All correlations were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

Table 2 displays the inter-correlations among the six dimensions of the Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS). All correlations are statistically significant and fall within an acceptable range, indicating strong associations between dimensions while maintaining discriminant validity. The pattern of correlations supports the distinct yet related nature of the dimensions, reinforcing the multidimensional structure of strategic imitation practices.

Discussion

1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the strategic management literature by introducing a validated multi-dimensional scale for measuring strategic imitation practices. It expands upon earlier work by distinguishing between types of imitation and identifying boundary conditions under which imitation leads to superior performance (Posen *et al.*, 2019) [14].

2. Practical Implications

Organizations can benefit from using the SIPS to:

1. Identify areas where imitation can yield the most strategic value.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of imitation-based strategies.
3. Align imitation efforts with innovation goals.

3. Limitations and Future Research

While the SIPS demonstrate strong psychometric properties, future research should explore:

- a. Cross-cultural applicability of the scale.
- b. Dynamic changes in imitation behavior over time.
- c. Integration of AI and digital tools in facilitating strategic imitation.

Conclusion

Strategic imitation is not a one-size-fits-all approach but a nuanced and context-dependent practice. The Strategic Imitation Practices Scale (SIPS) developed in this study provides a valid and reliable instrument for researchers and practitioners to assess and understand how organizations engage in imitation as part of their broader strategic toolkit. By confirming the construct validity of the SIPS, this study lays the foundation for future empirical investigations into the mechanisms, antecedents, and consequences of strategic imitation in diverse organizational settings.

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Appendix

Strategic Imitation Practices Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to explore how your organization engages in strategic imitation practices.

Section 1: Imitation of Successful Strategic Practices

To assess how employees perceive the adoption of strategies, business models, or operational methods from high-performing firms.

1. We adopt proven strategies or practices from successful companies as part of our organizational learning.
2. Our company deliberately copies elements of business models from leading organizations in our industry.
3. We analyze how other firms operate before implementing similar strategies in our own work.
4. The way we structure our departments is inspired by successful companies.
5. We customize external practices to better fit our internal capabilities and market needs.

Section 2: Imitation of Knowledge

To measure how effectively the organization learns and applies knowledge gained through imitation.

6. We actively seek to learn from the experiences of other companies.
7. We apply external knowledge into our daily operations after analysis.
8. Our firm adapts insights from imitated practices to improve performance.
9. We use lessons learned from others to build new capabilities internally.
10. We avoid trial-and-error by adopting tested knowledge from the market.

Section 3: Relational Learning by Imitation

To evaluate how employees imitate relationships and interactions between teams or firms.

11. We observe how successful companies manage their relationships with partners and copy them.
12. Our team builds networks inspired by other firms' relationship-building approaches.
13. We monitor how other firms handle stakeholder engagement and adapt those methods.
14. Internal collaboration within our company is modeled after successful teams elsewhere.
15. We learn from social dynamics in leading firms and apply them in our workplace.

Section 4: Imitation of Innovation

To assess the extent to which innovation-based imitation occurs in the organization.

16. We follow competitors when they launch innovative products and develop similar ones quickly.
17. Our innovation process often starts with analyzing what others have already developed.
18. We focus on copying the execution method of successful innovations rather than just the idea.
19. We enter markets using value propositions originally introduced by pioneers.
20. When radical innovation is not feasible, imitation is considered a practical option.

Section 5: Imitation of Internal Positive Behavior

To understand how internal behaviors are adopted from other units or individuals within the same organization.

21. We adopt working methods that have been successful in other teams within our organization.
22. Some aspects of our departmental culture were influenced by high-performing teams.
23. We use conflict resolution techniques that have worked well for others inside the company.
24. I personally try to mimic professional behaviors observed in top performers.
25. Resource management in our team has been adapted from more efficient departments.

Section 6: Imitation of Value

To assess how the organization adopts value offerings (products/services) from leading firms.

26. We monitor how other companies create value and try to understand the processes they use.
27. We build relationships with customers and partners inspired by the practices of successful firms.
28. We consider value imitation as part of our strategy for entering new markets or underserved niches.
29. The value we imitate influences how we organize our internal operations and communicate with stakeholders.
30. We imitate rituals or behaviors that support a positive organizational culture (e.g., internal communication programs or social events).