

An Introduction to a Model of Political Leadership in the Context of Tourism Advocates

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An Introduction to a Model of Political Leadership in the Context of Tourism Advocates

Tourism and politics are inextricably linked. The industry is often seen as a means of accomplishing political ends, such as increased economic development, and is shaped by political activity through funding allocation and legislation (Hall, 1994). While tourism is known to yield multiple economic, environmental, and social benefits, there are many examples of political actions that have hindered tourism development. The historic loss of the Colorado state tourism office (Siegel, 2009) and the more recent closure of the state of Washington’s tourism office (Yardley, 2011) both illustrate extreme outcomes of limited political support for the tourism industry. Political challenges also exist at the local level, such as the distribution and use of lodging tax revenues. However, there are examples of political success for the tourism industry, particularly at the federal level where actions such as the reauthorization of funding for BrandUSA have garnered bipartisan support (Alcantara, 2014). The tourism industry at all levels would stand to benefit from such increased political support, which is contingent upon many factors. Leadership from the tourism industry within the political arena is one such factor.

Leadership is a concept that has been the focus of explorations in a multitude of fields, including tourism (Beritelli, 2011; Pechalner, Kozak, and Volgger, 2014; Zach, 2013). These studies have yielded many definitions of leadership, with several authors emphasizing that it is “the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals” (Robbins, 2000, p. 347). In the context of tourism, leaders who work towards gaining political support for the industry must influence two groups, the members of the tourism industry and policymakers (Figure 1).

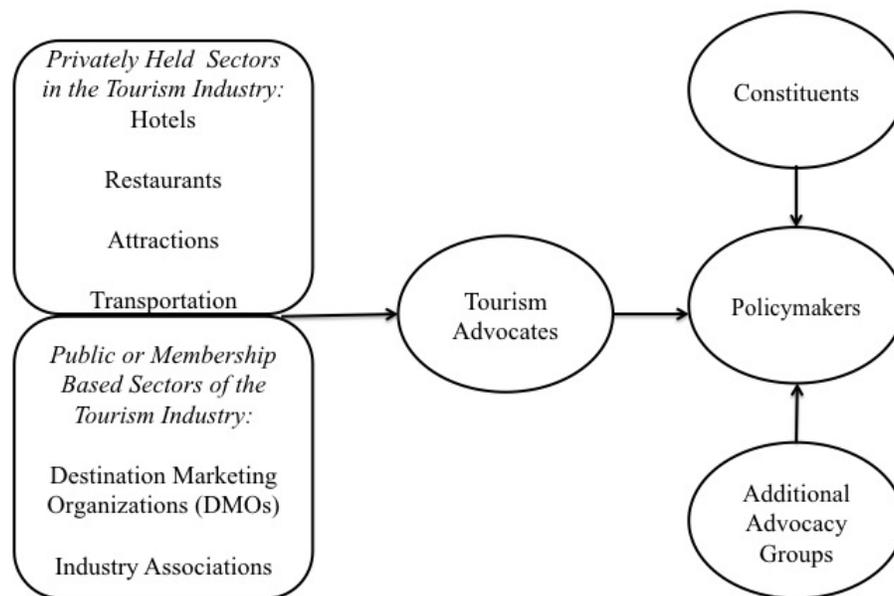


Figure 1. Interests within tourism’s political arena

Leaders influence tourism industry members to unite around common interests and agree upon a legislative agenda (McGehee and Meng, 2006). Tourism leaders then advocate for the industry based upon this legislative agenda as they attempt to influence policymakers. Thus, political

leaders in the tourism industry can be considered tourism advocates. Swanson and Brothers (2012) illustrate the complex roles tourism advocates play in voicing the industry's diverse interests in Federal-level policymaking and McGehee and Meng (2006) demonstrate their value in gaining influence at the State-level. Despite the vital role that they play in gaining political support for the tourism industry, there has been relatively limited exploration of tourism advocates and how they achieve influence among the industry and policymakers. Therefore, this presentation introduces a framework that may prove useful for research efforts related to political leadership in tourism, which in turn can yield valuable findings to support the development of future tourism advocates

Theoretical Contribution: An introduction to a model of political leadership

While research focusing on tourism advocates is limited, the broader understanding of leaders in tourism and other fields is well established and continues to expand. In addition to many definitions of the concept this work has generated a variety of means to classify leaders. These include a litany of leadership traits and styles that have proved successful for leaders across a plethora of contexts. While the traits and styles of tourism advocates are important components in understanding how they influence members of industry and policymakers, a more detailed profile of tourism advocates is needed if we are to fully explore their ability to gain political support for tourism. Therefore this presentation will focus on a modified version of a model of political leadership (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwater, and Ferris, 2002), a comprehensive framework illustrating the contextual elements and antecedents that influence leadership behaviors and their outcomes for both the leaders and their target audiences (e.g. tourism industry members or policymakers) (Figure 2). Guided by a thorough literature review this model was adapted for use in the context of tourism by exploring previous work which identified the role of leadership in gaining political influence for the tourism industry (e.g. Hall, 1994; McGehee and Meng, 2006; Stevenson, Airey, and Miller, 2008; Swanson and Brother, 2012). The existing literature revealed multiple similarities between Ammeter et al's (2002) model and the proposed role and value of tourism advocates. These similarities will be addressed in this presentation which aims to provide a discussion of each component of this framework that will help to illustrate the value of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the political leadership demonstrated by tourism advocates.

This introduction of a model of political leadership serves as the first application of such a framework in the context of tourism. It is proposed the implementation of this framework in the study of political leadership in tourism will help to reveal what contextual elements and antecedents are valuable in the development of tourism advocates. Such information may be used in the identification and cultivation of future tourism advocates. Additional explorations of the political leadership behaviors outlined in the model may be useful in identifying those actions that produce desirable outcomes, such as changes in target audience's attitude or behavior.

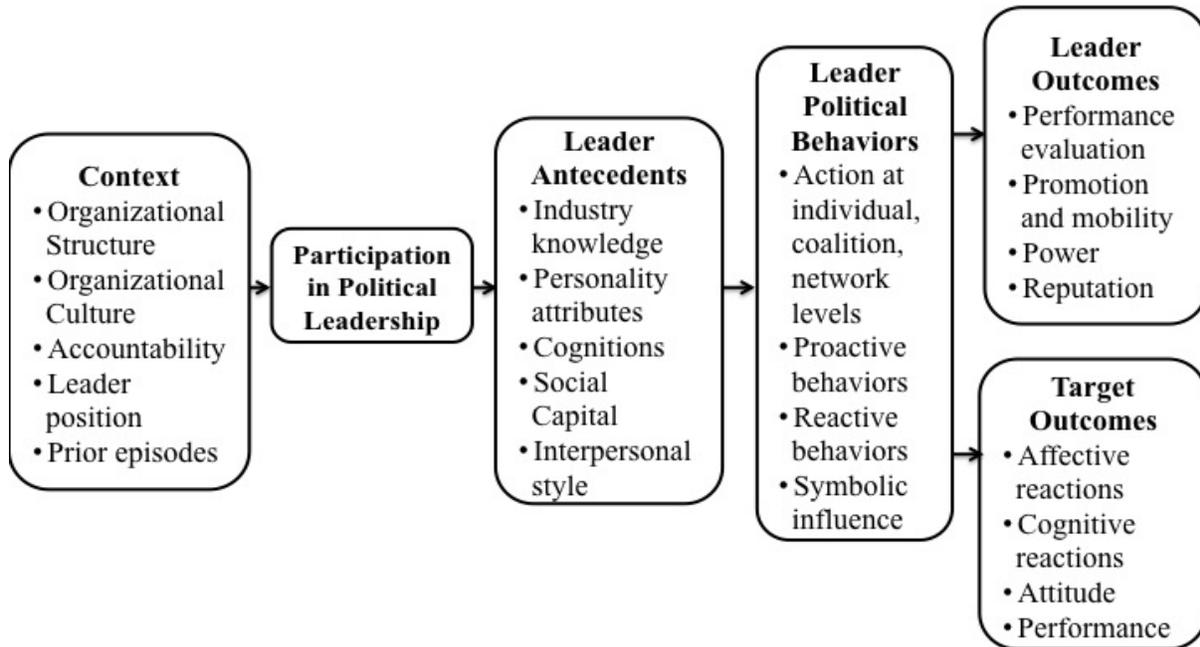


Figure 2. A tourism-specific model of political leadership, adapted from Ammeter et al. (2002)
Implications and Contribution to Applied Tourism

Ultimately an understanding of the contextual elements, antecedents, and political behaviors that result in desired leader and target outcomes may prove useful for ensuring that tourism advocates can consistently produce such outcomes. For example, previous explorations of political activity in tourism have revealed that it is vital that the industry speak with a unified voice on legislative issues (McGehee and Meng, 2006). Thus, a tourism advocate may seek the creation of a unified voice as an outcome of their political behaviors. This could require changing the attitudes of tourism industry members' to support the legislative agenda which the advocates will present to policymakers. The fragmented nature of the tourism industry makes such an outcome difficult to achieve, and thus an understanding of what leads to creating a unified voice would be valuable. The creation of a unified voice is just one example of an outcome that tourism advocates may attempt to achieve, others such as fostering methods of communication (Stevenson, Airey, and Miller, 2008) and cultivating collaboration and negotiation (Bramwell and Meyer, 2007) are also important but challenging to accomplish.

The exploration of tourism advocates using frameworks such as this model of political leadership will help to advance the broader study of political leadership and will add to the growing interest of general leadership in tourism. This presentation of the political model of leadership in the context of tourism offers a theoretical foundation which may inform future research focused on tourism advocates. These investigations may yield knowledge which will help the industry as a whole continue to gain the political support that it requires.

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