

Lesson Learned in the Use of Mixed Methods to Gain Multiple Perspective in Tourism Leadership Research

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Introduction

The study of political leadership in tourism is an area which requires greater attention and research. Little is known about the individuals who serve as political leaders for the tourism industry, tourism advocates. Even less is known about how they develop relationships with members of the tourism industry. This mixed method study was designed to utilize existing theories developed to explore political leadership from the perspective of both the leader and their followers, or tourism advocates and tourism industry members, respectively. Utilizing an adaptation of Ammeter et al.'s (2002) Political Model of Leadership (Figure 1) this study employed a mixed-methods approach which combined in-depth interviews with tourism advocates and an online survey with tourism industry members to gain multiple perspectives on the relationships tourism advocates built with tourism industry members.

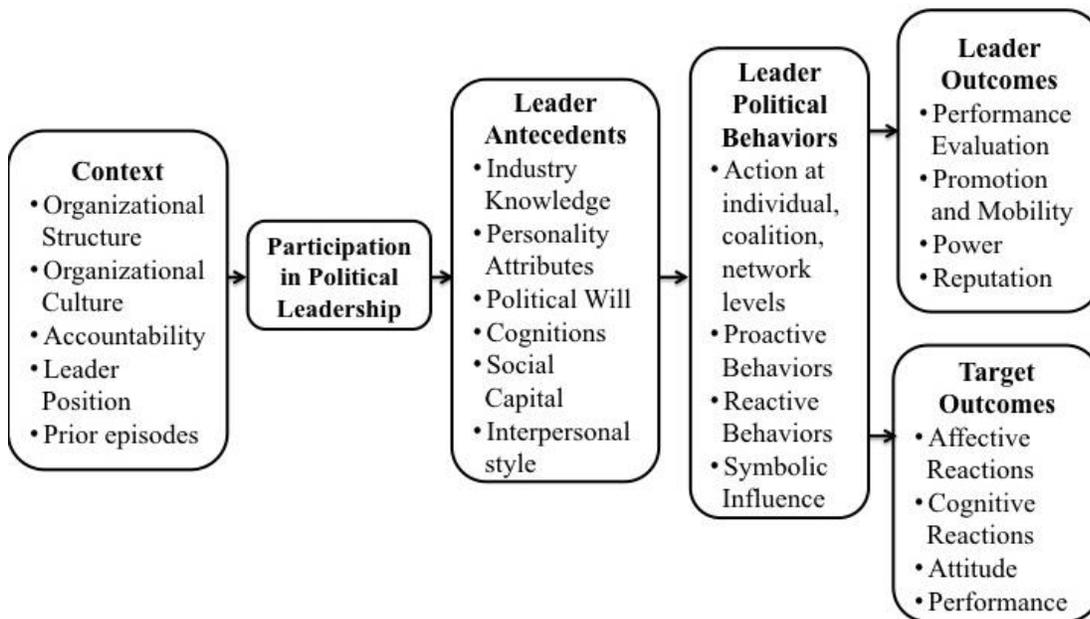


Figure 1. Ammeter et al.'s (2002) Political model of Leadership adapted for use in tourism

The following research questions were developed to help explore both the perspectives of the tourism advocates and tourism industry members:

RQ1: How do contextual elements influence tourism advocates' participation in political leadership?

RQ2: What antecedents determine tourism advocates' selection of political behaviors used to influence members of the tourism industry?

RQ3: What are VHTA tourism advocates' perceptions of the outcomes of their political behaviors directed to members of the tourism industry?

RQ4: What are tourism industry members' perceptions of the outcomes of tourism advocates' political behavior?

This presentation will cover the process used to develop a mixed-method study designed to answer these research questions. In addition to outlining the methods utilized, it will also discuss the challenges associated with employing a mixed method study and analyzing its data.

Methods Description

The use of an interpretivist paradigm for this study supported the exploratory nature of the research questions outlined above. Throughout the study the researcher was guided by an ontological perspective that accepts that reality is shaped by contextual elements, such as an individual's past experiences and education, and thus multiple realities can exist (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). Furthermore, the researcher subscribed to an epistemology that accepts the study participants and the researcher are equal partners in knowledge creation (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). The interpretivist paradigm allowed for utilization of a mixed methodological approach to addressing the above research questions, and it will facilitate a richer understanding of political leadership in the context of tourism (DeCrop, 2004). The use of a mixed methods approach allowed for the expression of diverse views, the exploration of different research questions, and a triangulation of data sources (Bryman, 2006)

The modification of Ammeter et al.'s (2002) model to suit the context of tourism required that both tourism advocates' and their followers' voices contribute to the exploration of political leadership. For this study in-depth interviews were utilized to permit tourism advocates to discuss the contextual elements and antecedents that each perceives influence their political behavior and its outcomes. Interviews were the most appropriate data collection method for this population as Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 required an exploratory examination of variables that have not yet been examined in the context of tourism. Furthermore, the use of interviews provided tourism advocate informants with an opportunity to explore and explain the concepts in Ammeter et al.'s (2002) modified model (Figure 8) in their own voice. This provides a richer profile of tourism advocates as a whole which will extend the understanding of their development and behaviors and ultimately may help further modify Ammeter et al.'s (2002) model for use for analysis of tourism. The inclusion of the followers' voice in the study required the use of quantitative methods, namely an online survey. Therefore, Research Question 4 was explored using a survey of tourism industry members, which contains scales designed to measure followers' perceived outcomes of leadership behavior.

An exploratory sequential design is employed for this mixed method study which combines the strengths of both quantitative (large sample size, generalization) and qualitative methods analytic approaches (small sample size, in-depth details). As described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) an exploratory sequential design begins with qualitative data collection and analysis. The

findings from the qualitative stage can then be used to shape the tools used in quantitative data collection (Figure 2).

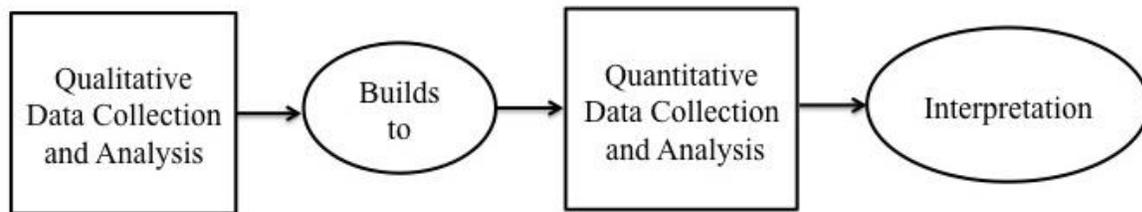


Figure 2. Cresswell and Plano Clark's (2011) Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design.

An exploratory sequential design is valuable in studies where the relationships between study variables are unknown and quantitative measurement instruments must be created or modified to a new context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Harrison & Reilly, 2011). Such a research design was well suited for this study as the interviews with tourism advocates revealed concepts related to followers' outcomes (e.g. their affective and cognitive reactions, attitudes, and behaviors) that were incorporated in the quantitative stage of the study. In this study, data saturation within the qualitative findings indicated the opportunity to incorporate those findings into the quantitative data collection tool. These emergent findings were used in concert with the scales identified in the above literature review, and together they were used to measure followers' outcomes.

Ultimately the qualitative and quantitative data were connected and related to understand more comprehensively who serves as tourism industry advocates in the Commonwealth of Virginia, what behaviors they engage in to gain the support of tourism industry members, the influential forces behind those behaviors, and how both advocates and industry members assess the relative success of those behaviors. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) have argued, merging of the two independent datasets presented some challenges, particularly in integrating data collected for two different purposes (generalization and in-depth understanding) and addressing contradictions in the data. Specifically, contradictions in the data may provide an opportunity to identify shortcomings in leadership behavior, or followers' limited understanding of leadership action. This required the researcher to be aware of the potential for these contradictions and to be prepared to discuss why they occur.

However, the exploratory sequential design offers benefits, such as facilitating data, methods, and participant triangulation. Triangulation of data, methods, and participants improves the trustworthiness of the study's findings (DeCrop, 2004) by providing multiple perspectives across various sources of information. Data triangulation was achieved in this study through the use of qualitative data, quantitative data, and the review of secondary data sources such as VHTA documents and records as well as tourism advocates' resumes. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods provided the opportunity for method triangulation. Finally participants'

triangulation was accommodated through the use of multiple study populations, the two main categories being tourism advocates and their followers. Within these populations, efforts were made to ensure various sectors of the tourism industry are represented in the responses. Further efforts to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative findings and the reliability and validity of quantitative findings will be addressed in the subsequent sections.

Lessons learned about utilizing mixed methods research

Based on the implementation of the mixed methods design outlined above several important lessons were learned about the use of mixed methods research:

- 1.) *Great care must be given to maximizing the potential for data collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods.* This study was designed to gain multiple perspectives on how tourism advocates built relationships with tourism industry members. The interviews with 26 tourism advocates yielded their ideas on relationship building, but gaining tourism industry members' perspective was more challenging. It would not have been as valuable to elicit the tourism industry members' general opinions about their relationships with tourism advocates, so the survey had to be designed in such a way to allow them to evaluate their relationships with specific advocates, specifically those that had participated in the interviews. Doing so allowed for a direct comparison of the advocates' perspectives on their relationship building activity to the perspectives of the tourism industry members with whom they had built a relationship.
- 2.) *Gaining quality data can limit your quantity of data.* While the comparison of advocates and tourism industry members' perspectives on relationship building had high potential to yield meaningful results, it also posed challenges for gathering a sufficient amount of quantitative data. Concerns were raised about tourism industry members' ability to recognize and reliably assess their relationships with the tourism advocates who had participated in the interviews. By limiting the advocates they could evaluate through the survey, there was the potential for a significant amount of sample members to start the survey, but not complete it or not start the survey at all. If only a limited number of surveys were completed, then quantitative analysis could become complicated. To address this challenge, survey sample members were asked to evaluate three different advocates within the survey. While this may have caused some sample members to not participate at all, it also tripled the amount of cases (an evaluated advocate) for each completed survey. Thus, with 50 survey respondents a total of 128 cases were created for analysis.
- 3.) *It takes time to make meaning out of mixed method data.* Between the 26 interviews and 128 survey evaluations of tourism advocates there was ample data available to explore the research questions developed for this study. However, deliberate care had to be given to ensure that the data was analyzed in a meaningful way. This required a great deal of open and axial coding of the qualitative findings which helped to develop a profile for

each of the participating advocates. This profile could then be compared to the quantitative findings from the tourism industry members' evaluations of the advocates. It was notable that not all advocates were recognized by the tourism industry members and some were only recognized by one or two members. These limitations made it difficult to ensure the reliability of the findings, but did offer valuable information about the recognition of many tourism advocates. Therefore, it was necessary for the research to remain open minded about the data available and to attempt to utilize all of it that was available in a meaningful way.

Mixed methods studies have the potential to provide powerful findings that maximize the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative data. Therefore, more researchers may turn to them as a way to increase the contribution of their findings. The lessons learned through this study provide the opportunity to discuss the challenges and benefits related to mixed methods studies.

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