

Understanding the Complexities of Leadership and Intersectionality in Women in Tourism Research: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Research on women in leadership within the tourism sector has spanned several decades. However, much of this inquiry has narrowly focused on the experiences of white, middle-class women, inadvertently sidelining the leadership narratives of women from diverse backgrounds. This study adopts an intersectional lens to explore the intricate dynamics of women's leadership roles in tourism. Intersectionality theory, which acknowledges the complex interplay of social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, serves as a pivotal framework for understanding these multifaceted experiences. Through an examination of the relational dynamics within leadership constructs, this conceptual study delves into how intersecting identities shape individual experiences. The study emphasizes the need for a more expansive conceptualization of gender in leadership analysis within the tourism sector. By integrating intersectionality theory, researchers can gain deeper insights into the diverse experiences of women in leadership positions. Moreover, applying an intersectional perspective to women in leadership tourism research illuminates the unique challenges faced by women from marginalized backgrounds, thus fostering a more inclusive understanding of leadership in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Leadership, Gender, Social identities, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The female leadership issue has centered the attention of researchers under two main themes: barriers or challenges that women face in accessing management positions (Powell & Butterfield, 1994) and the analysis of presumed differences between leadership styles associated with the masculine and feminine genders (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). This interest has also permeated tourism and hospitality studies (Guchait et al., 2023), especially given the industry's job segregation in managerial positions, in which men predominate even though most of the workforce is made by women (Russen et al., 2021).

Motivated to contribute to the solution of this problem, several academics have focused on making visible the obstacles women face in terms of access and performance in leadership positions in tourism (Costa et al., 2017). However, most of these investigations have been developed in the context of the global North and have assumed that the needs and challenges of the women studied are generalizable to all women (Mavin et al., 2023).

In this context, the theory of intersectionality stands out as one of the necessary components in leadership research with a gender approach: first, due to the hierarchical nature of organizations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), and second,

because it considers the experiences of women managers in the overlapping of oppression systems. (Kriger et al., 2022). Still, tourism research has been limited in incorporating intersectional analyses that consider different aspects of identity (Mooney, 2018) due to the theoretical complexity and methodological uncertainty recognized in this paradigm (Nash, 2008).

This study addresses this gap through a conceptual analysis of intersectionality and leadership in women's studies, intending to clarify the relationship of the constructs that are part of the leadership dynamics in tourism from the gender point of view. This has relevant implications for academics since it contributes to the debate on how intersectional theory applied to leadership research with a gender perspective can provide a better understanding of the reality of women managers in the tourism and hospitality sector in the sense of illustrating what results in intersectional research obtains, and why they are not negotiable in gender studies.

This study employs a conceptual analysis approach to delve into the intricacies of leadership dynamics within the tourism industry, particularly through the lens of intersectionality theory in women's leadership research. Conceptual analysis entails a thorough examination and interpretation of existing literature and theories to gain insights into a specific phenomenon.

With a focus on women in leadership roles within the tourism sector, this article aims to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to critically evaluate existing conceptualizations of leadership in tourism, highlighting their limitations and implications for understanding gender dynamics. Additionally, the study aims to present empirical findings on the representation and experiences of women in leadership positions, shedding light on any disparities or challenges encountered.

Moreover, the article endeavors to analyze the contribution of intersectionality theory to the study of gender in tourism leadership. By examining how intersecting social identities shape women's experiences and opportunities within the industry, the study aims to deepen our understanding of gender dynamics in tourism leadership.

The paper follows a structured approach, organized into four distinct phases. These include acknowledging the significance of intersectionality in feminist studies, identifying critical components of leadership conceptualization, embracing reflexivity toward gender in leadership research, and discerning gaps in the existing literature.

Through this comprehensive exploration, the study endeavors to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of women's leadership experiences in the tourism industry, while also highlighting the importance of intersectionality theory in advancing gender-inclusive research practices.

This article intends to contribute to good practices in implementing the intersectional theory in the analysis of gender leadership in tourism, which will impact more inclusive studies from different contexts that avoid the reproduction of biased or incomplete knowledge.

THEORY BACKGROUND

Feminism and intersectionality theory

The term intersectionality was coined by the North American academic Kimberlé Crenshaw in her effort to explain how racist and gender systems of oppression came together in the lives and experiences of black women. She intended to demonstrate how these women were not represented either by the feminist movement or by the black movement (Crenshaw, 1989). While the former was racist, ignoring black people, the latter was sexist, ignoring women. As a corollary, their interests were left out of both movements (Gopaldas, 2013).

Crenshaw (1989) argued that, like intersections in traffic, social identities intersect in people and determine experiences of disadvantage in society. Race, gender, age, social status, religion, legal status, and so forth, in many combinations, generate concrete forms of discrimination that vary from one person to another. She provided, through this analysis, one of the fundamental keys to solving many of the problems of feminist thought and movement: the differences between women, who do not represent a heterogeneous group as was proclaimed (Kings, 2017), and the hegemony, hierarchy, and exclusivity of the interests of heterosexual white women within feminist thought, which ignored the interests of black women, migrants, women of different sexual orientations, religions, nationalities, etc., (Nash, 2008).

Therefore, the intersectionality paradigm has been recognized as the most important theoretical contribution to women's studies (McCall, 2005). It was used by feminist thought as a tool to take the one-dimensional gender analyses carried out at that time to a deeper level. This perspective allowed scholars to capture various experiences that had been ignored or made invisible (Kings, 2017). It demonstrated that people could experience oppression in multiple ways and that these oppressions are not simply their sum but interact with each other in complex and often interdependent ways (Gopaldas, 2013).

Although promising, the insertion of this theory in women's studies has generated several challenges among academics. One of them is the complexity of determining the multiple intersections of categories and dimensions in the subjects of analysis, which, if argued, could be endless. This implies that the scope of knowledge generation about intersectionality is considerably reduced (McCall, 2005). Similarly, the interdependence of identities and systems of oppression mentioned above represent a problematic picture for researchers to capture. An example is the study of the economic situation of women, in which educational level is generally used as the primary variable, ignoring the combination of identities such as migratory status, nationality, ethnicity, race, etc., and their impact and influence on the labor and financial performance of women.

The theory of intersectionality has also received various criticisms. Jordan-Zachery (2007) exposes the lack of appropriate study methods and the additional approach researchers erroneously use in their analyses. In the same way, he maintains that the term "intersections" of the systems of oppression used by Crenshaw (1989) implies that these systems could separate from one another at some point. In this sense, how multiple identities could be separated, being intrinsically mixed components emerges as a matter of analysis.

Nash (2008), on the other hand, refers to other elements that have constituted problems within the academy in intersectionality. In addition to the lack of a defined methodology for its application in research, as Jordan-Zachery refers, she points out the limitation of academics to the study of black women as intersectional subjects par excellence and the lack of a clear definition of this paradigm.

Within the conceptual limits of intersectionality, it is debatable whether it is aimed solely at making visible the identities and combinations of oppression systems that affect certain groups of women in society. Because what can represent a disadvantage in one context implies an advantage in another, intersectionality also allows us to see the social groups that have better conditions and benefits. This might be as useful as the first purpose for which it was conceived. Those identity structures that benefit the most are those that, for cultural or other reasons, have been determined by society as the norm, and the rest are perceived as flawed. In this sense, identifying and deconstructing favored identities makes it possible to eliminate systems of oppression from the base, acting on the cause and not on the consequences, as it is to identify the barriers that affect the most disadvantaged.

Leadership conceptualization

In developing and accumulating knowledge, researchers must generate a precise vocabulary of the phenomena under study that provides exact descriptions to facilitate and standardize the bases for their analysis. The leadership attribution of business success in terms of economic results, innovation, and customer commitment has generated growing interest among researchers, leading to its conceptualization (Guchait et al., 2020). However, like many other constructs from different areas, it lacks an agreed definition among the academy, and its characteristics or attributes seem dark (Meindl et al., 1985).

Generally, leadership has been studied and defined as motivation and influence, attributes, management, authority system, roles, and relationships with subordinates (Spicker, 2012). It has been conceived as an action, process, behavior, ability, quality, virtue, influence, or a combination of all the above. However, one of the elements with the most significant connotation within its conceptualization is power, which leads Janda to define leadership as "a particular form of power relations" (Janda, 1960, p. 345). In general, many researchers agree that it is a process of interpersonal influence in which authority and power are used to motivate the fulfillment of specific objectives (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

This last element is studied through the operationalization of leadership from the figure of the leader, who is recognized as the person who exerts the most significant positive influence among its members to establish and achieve common objectives. This dynamic is generally created on different power bases such as reward, coercion, legitimacy, referent, and expertise (Janda, 1960), which means that leadership emerges in different contexts not necessarily as a personality characteristic but because of the relationship between group members (Fener & Cevik, 2015).

Volkmann (2012) agrees with these authors in an interesting conceptual map of leadership (Figure 1). The scheme provides a framework for analysis showing three fundamental non-hierarchical components of leadership dynamics: the

leader, the context, and the followers. That relation implies that leadership is characterized by the influence exerted and determined by the context in which it takes place in such a way that if the context changes, the leadership will also change.

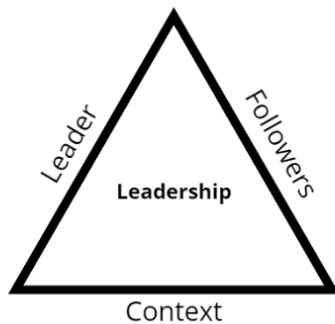


Figure 1. Barbara Kellerman conceptual framework (Volckmann, 2012)

Even so, certain qualities are recognized in the academic leadership literature, representing common elements among leaders. Charisma, motivation, influence, and persuasiveness are just some of these (Silva, 2014; Spicker, 2012). It is also recognized that the characteristics of a leader are not innate but can be acquired (Silva, 2014).

In tourism, most research has focused on prevailing and emerging leadership styles and their effects on organizations (Guchait et al., 2020). On a conceptual level, one of the most repetitive findings from leadership research is that it is portrayed differently for different people (Janda, 1960).

All mentioned have implications that will be reviewed below if they are considered in research on female leadership in the tourism and hospitality industry and influence methodologies and operationalizations.

Critical Leadership Theory

Critical leadership theory emerged in the 1990s as a critical examination of traditional leadership theories and practices. It challenges the idea that leadership is a set of skills, behaviors, and traits individuals possess in formal leadership roles. Instead, critical leadership theory views leadership as a complex process involving leaders, followers, and contexts (Collinson, 2011).

One of the main principles of critical leadership theory is that leadership is relational, not residing solely within leaders but emerging through interactions between leaders and followers (Collinson, 2014). Power dynamics are central, as critical leadership examines how power operates through leadership and shapes leader-follower relations. Critical leadership also recognizes that leadership is contextual; effective leadership depends on social, cultural, and organizational contexts—identity factors like race, class, and gender shape leadership processes and experiences.

Some theorists argue that traditional leadership theories ignore power, privilege, and marginalization issues in leadership by focusing narrowly on the actions and behaviors of people in leadership roles (Collinson, 2014; Ford, 2016): ideologies and social inequalities. Critical leadership examines leadership through perspectives like feminism, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory to reveal biases. Therefore, it strongly connects with intersectionality theory, focusing on how identity, power, privilege, and social structures shape leadership processes. An intersectional, critical lens reveals complex dynamics within tourism leadership. This industry relies heavily on female labor, yet men disproportionately fill senior leadership roles due to gender and other identity factors like race and class.

Critical perspectives reveal that gender biases persist in tourism leadership despite women's predominance in the workforce. Leadership norms, ideologies, and practices favor masculine traits, contributing to a prevalence of male leaders and masculine leadership styles. Gender stereotypes depicting women as unsuited for senior leadership roles remain common. Additionally, women leaders in tourism face double standards and extra scrutiny compared to male peers.

Both critical leadership theory and feminism highlight the need to move beyond leader-centric approaches fixated on positional leaders. Intersectionality provides tools to expose leadership as a collective social process shaped by matrixes of privilege and disadvantage. For example, a Black transgender woman's leadership experiences in tourism cannot be separated from broader cultural prejudices.

RESULTS

Gender in leadership in tourism research

One of the most studied issues in gender in leadership tourism research is the belief that the qualities associated with men are more suitable for leadership positions than those associated with women, which is analyzed as masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral leadership styles. Even at a conceptual level, business leadership obeys a gender bias in which everything is compared to the male norm (Kimbu et al., 2021). Several studies have attempted to understand how these perceptions affect the entry of women into organizations and how they influence their access to management positions (Costa et al., 2017; Mooney, 2020).

In the same way, the veracity of the fact that females differ in leadership styles from their male colleagues has been analyzed, for which the investigations have been divided into two main approaches: in one, leadership styles are defined and studied according to the characteristics culturally attributed to women and men; At the same time, in the other, these differences associated with genders are blurred, and leadership is analyzed from a neutral perspective. Although the focus on female leadership as something different from the male norm and the use of traditional theoretical frameworks reinforce stereotypes about the primacy of women's domestic work (Mooney, 2020), this approach has prevailed in the academic literature (Guillet et al., 2019).

This type of analysis has found that, in general, there are few or no differences between the leadership styles adopted by women and those put into practice by men (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Although characteristics are associated with each gender that influence their leadership, women have multiple leadership styles (Guillet et al., 2019). This not only implies that women and men differ in values, risk attitudes, and leadership styles but that there are considerable differences between women and men.

Other authors show that the enormous gender inequality in managerial positions is not due to women's lack of adequate leadership skills but to barriers called the glass ceiling. The term refers to an invisible barrier that prevents women and other marginalized groups from advancing to the upper levels of an organization, regardless of their qualifications or abilities. This concept has since been widely used to describe the systemic barriers that limit the upward mobility of women and other marginalized groups in the workplace (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). These barriers are complex and are determined by various factors (Samuelson et al., 2019). Although it has been shown that gender diversity on corporate boards can improve the performance of organizations (Russen et al., 2021; Song et al., 2020), specifically in tourism, long working hours, mobility, organizational culture, and the dilemmas that are generated between work and family represent missing steps on the leadership ladder for women (Mooney & Ryan, 2009).

Even so, women overcome these situations and enter leading positions in tourism organizations. The dynamics in which they establish their priorities and determine how they deal with the glass ceiling are equally variable among all women (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). Therefore, studying this phenomenon under the only variable of gender would yield incomplete results and keep hidden several systems of oppression.

The contribution of intersectionality in gender in tourism research

The intersectional approach as a methodology, paradigm, and analysis tool for gender studies has been forgotten, with some exceptions, in tourism leadership research. The importance and urgency of implementing this theory in research designs is obtaining more accurate and complete results of the female reality in the corporate context of tourism organizations. Both the analysis of the differences in leadership styles between women and men and the barriers that women face to climb in the industry are incomplete if they are designed under the only variable of gender since it is evident that there is a great variety of experiences among women, which are equally important to study.

A successful case of research that includes the theory of intersectionality in its methodology is the one conducted by Mooney and Ryan (2009), who analyze how not only gender but also age and the stage of their career impact the experiences leadership of women in tourism. This study identifies the variety of challenges and experiences of women in their attempt to break through the glass ceiling. This allowed them to explore how the ages of women in management careers influence and shape their interests in the industry and how they negotiate this with their personal needs. As a result, they concluded that some barriers affected all women generally while others affected only certain groups.

Another contribution to this topic is the study of Guillet et al. (2019), in which it is analyzed whether female executives have a masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral approach in terms of leadership. The authors include other variables such as their origin, education, country, and age in the study. As a result, they obtained that women have various leadership styles and that not all of them show orientations that adhere to the values of the indigenous culture.

Recognized global minorities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and political orientation interrelate to create unique experiences and systems of oppression. Hence, implementing studies that consider these elements and the dynamics established between them will also allow access to unknown power structures and unexplored interdimensional relationships to date. The multiplicity of variables and their combinations can represent an opportunity for gender leadership studies in tourism.

It is important to closely observe the production of knowledge in this field, as biased approaches in research have been perpetuated due to the dominance of men (Mooney, 2020).

In the same way, the narratives of the contexts of the Global North and urban areas prevail, leaving studies of rural regions and other elements that do not constitute demographic variables in the shadow of research. (Kimbu et al., 2021). This bias is problematic as it can lead to an incomplete understanding of gender and leadership in the tourism industry. Rural regions, for example, may have unique challenges and opportunities for women in leadership positions that differ from those in urban areas. By neglecting these regions, we miss critical insights that could inform policies and practices to promote gender equality in the tourism industry. Moreover, other factors beyond demographic variables, such as cultural and societal norms, may also play a critical role in shaping gender and leadership dynamics in tourism.

Gaps in the literature

Several aspects are necessary to highlight in this section. One is operationalizing leadership in the tourism industry as the analysis only of people who occupy management positions. At a conceptual level, leadership is determined by a position of influence and the dynamics the leader can generate within the group or team. In this sense, it is essential to include this relationship in the studies since there is a risk of studying non-leaders in organizations. Although this implies greater complexity in the analysis of leadership in tourism due to the considerable size of some firms, it is essential to consider this element if one intends to examine leadership and not management. Leadership is a relationship that involves two terms, and it is impossible to study the agent who exerts influence without studying those who are influenced (Fener & Cevik, 2015).

Another point to highlight is the lack of consideration of the context in the study of leadership in tourism organizations and its impact on the attitude and performance of leaders. Based on the elements indicated by Latham (2014) in his conceptual model of business leadership, aspects such as the organizational system, values, and organizational culture are an integral part of the dynamics that surround the leaders of the organizations and are aspects that affect the styles or forms of leadership, both men and women.

Likewise, considering external factors, such as the results of leadership strategies for all interested parties, allows a broader view of the relationships established between the different systems that make up leadership dynamics. Although it may be tempting for researchers to narrow the scope of studies, simplistic analyses are not helpful for knowledge production.

CONCLUSION

Applying an intersectional lens to analyze women's leadership in the context of tourism brings necessary complexities and challenges. Intersectionality demands grappling with multiplicity, interdependency, fluidity, positionality, power structures, and more. This framework disrupts simplistic notions of gender and leadership, revealing tourism workplaces as sites where complex matrices of identity, advantage, and oppression collide.

At a basic level, intersectionality recognizes that people hold multiple identities shaped by interlocking systems of privilege and subordination tied to race, class, gender, sexuality, and more. These identities intersect in endless permutations that mediate an individual's leadership experiences and opportunities in tourism. Capturing and conveying this diversity in its full richness is an ever-present struggle. Categories fail to encapsulate lived intricacies.

Relatedly, intersectionality posits identities as mutually constitutive - race, gender, and class intricately shape one another. Attempts to isolate a single identity factor and pinpoint its distinct leadership impacts inevitably falter. For example, a Black woman's encounter with racism while leading in tourism cannot be differentiated from concurrent experiences of sexism. Systems of oppression chain together.

This interdependency flows across scales. Macro forces like colonialism and microaggressions entwine and jointly produce leadership realities. Constructing coherent narratives amidst such multilayered forces remains challenging. Even framing identifiable intersectional groups such as "LGBTQ leaders of color" falters amidst heterogeneity within

any grouping.

Here, the fluidity and instability of social identities further complicate matters. Womanhood, Blackness, queerness - these are not fixed states. Leadership scholars must grapple with identity as an active negotiation and performance shaped by changing contexts. For a woman leading tourism enterprises in multiple nations, acceptable presentations of self constantly shift.

Related complexities emerge from positionality – the researcher’s social location and lens. A researcher’s gender, race, nationality, and access to elite institutions influence the questions, data collected, and conclusions drawn. Intersectional approaches demand reflexivity regarding knowledge production’s embedded, often invisible power dynamics.

Beyond describing diverse identities, intersectionality also directs focus to the power relations undergirding leadership as a social practice. Leadership emerges through actions shaped by legacies of colonial control, racist economic systems, and paternalistic gender norms. Analyzing leadership divorce from these oppressive structures rings hollow.

However, structures of inequity are challenging to capture fully, as they are sedimented into mundane habits and normalized practices. The abstract concept of “patriarchy” materially shapes everything from tourism workforce demographics to day-to-day workplace microaggressions. Making visible these mundane manifestations of power requires digging beneath the surface.

Finally, employing intersectionality means situating identities and leadership experiences as fundamentally place-based and cultural. Gender operates differently across societies. Islands of the Caribbean or villages in West Africa represent distinct contexts, intensifying certain facets of identity over others. The globally mobile nature of tourism work further strains universal generalizations.

In grappling with these knots of complexity, critical and feminist theories provide needed ballast. Postcolonial, queer, and critical race perspectives unveil submerged complexities within power arrangements undergirding tourism leadership. The goal becomes not simplified categorization but offering tools to expose and counteract intersectional marginalization. Then, leadership emerges not as an abstract set of decontextualized practices but as an ever-shifting social and political project shaped by clashing identities, societal inequities, cultural discourses, and researcher positionality. Intersectionality provides conceptual leverage to confront these intricacies head-on.

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