

## Article

# Untangling Factors Influencing Women Entrepreneurs' Involvement in Tourism and Its Impact on Sustainable Tourism Development

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**Abstract:** Women's involvement in tourism has exerted an immense impact on the nation's economy. The low involvement of women in some countries has sparked the interest of scholars in investigating the factors that influence their involvement. The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of self-efficacy (SE), perceptions of women's work (PWW), empowering leadership (EL), and psychological empowerment (PE) on tourism involvement. Consequently, the study determined the impact of tourism involvement in sustainable tourism development (STD). The population of the study was women entrepreneurs from the Saudi Arabia tourism industry. A total of 201 women participated in the study from the selected sample of 300, obtained through convenient sampling. For the data analysis, SPSS and PLS-SEM were employed. The results revealed that PWW, SE, EL, and PE significantly and positively influenced women entrepreneurs' involvement in tourism (WEIT). Further, WEIT significantly and positively impacted STD. This research is a pioneering work in which a research model was developed to incorporate PWW, SE, EL, PE, tourism involvement, and STD in light of social exchange theory and social identity theory. The findings provide implications for policymakers and academia and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women's entrepreneurship, empowerment, tourism, and business management.



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**Keywords:** perception of women's work; self-efficacy; empowering leadership; psychological empowerment; tourism involvement; sustainable tourism development

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Tourism has been identified as an area of Saudi Arabia's economy that is crucial in order to overcome the country's dependency on oil production (Abuhjeeleh 2019). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is working on the country's modernization, and it has devised Vision 2030 for national development (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017). Sustainable tourism development (STD) is one of the highlighted goals of Vision 2030. Tourism has been focused on as an alternative to an oil-based economy because the country has a plethora of tangible and intangible cultural and historical resources, making it an appealing destination for visitors from across the world (Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed 2017). The country has a very rich history that dates back thousands of years, and its numerous civilizations make it one of the most attractive tourist destinations (Luz 2020). Very recently, Saudi Arabia opened its borders to tourists across the world, inviting them to experience its rich culture and history. At the same time, the country is the central focus of Muslims as it contains holy cities Makkah and Madinah, and religious tourism remains prevalent throughout the year (Luz 2020). The KSA has encouraged more active participation in this industry, including participation from women entrepreneurs.

However, the role of women in certain professional areas, including tourism, in Saudi Arabia is not encouraging and is criticized due to the restrictions on women regarding work in many fields. The number of women involved in entrepreneurship and tourism is also still low ([Alasgah and Rizk 2021](#)). However, recently, the KSA decided to provide women with the freedom to run their own businesses, work in organizations, travel alone, and drive their own cars, as women constitute 42.60% of the Saudi population ([Al-Qahtani et al. 2020](#)). The presence of women is critical, from home to corporations. According to [Prowess \(2021\)](#) in the Victorian Times, 30% of businesses are controlled by women. As a result of these recent changes, many women are playing significant roles in Saudi Arabia as well. In response to Vision 2030, many women have started to appear in business and have taken the initiative to start their own businesses as entrepreneurs. Realizing that the tourism industry plays a key role in developing the nation into a tourism economy, the KSA has encouraged entrepreneurs involved in this industry, which includes empowering women entrepreneurs. Despite the initiatives from the government, the question that remains unanswered pertains to the fact that fewer women entrepreneurs are involved in the tourism sector. It was reported that only 1.18% of Saudi women are employed in the tourism industry ([Alasgah and Rizk 2021](#)), compared to 54% of women in the tourism sector at the global level ([Valek and Almuhrzi 2021](#)). According to [Iqbal et al. \(2012\)](#), this is because religious law pervades every aspect of Saudi Arabia's society. Moreover, women entrepreneurs' involvement in tourism (WEIT) is influenced by the policies of the government, education, economy, family values, and social norms. These factors have been also highlighted by previous researchers ([Nieva 2015](#); [Alhabidi 2013](#)).

Previous studies have highlighted several factors that have contributed to fewer women entrepreneurs being involved in tourism, which has impacted STD. [Wu and Li \(2011\)](#) contended that the factors associated with a lessened WEIT could be due to economic, social, and personal attributes (self-efficacy). Researchers have also linked the cognitive factors that constrain WEIT. Moreover, entrepreneurial competence is critical to ensuring involvement in tourism ([Verhees and Meulenbergh 2004](#)). The factors that relate to WEIT are also addressed based on the competency approach, behavioral, and attitudinal perspective. This is in line with [Mulder Martin and Collins \(2006\)](#), who contended that the concept of competence is dynamic and integrated, and it defines how knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior are applied in any professional context, including involvement in tourism. Entrepreneurial competencies that encompass personality traits also help individuals to successfully participate in business ventures. [Boley and McGehee \(2014\)](#) identified three factors of tourism involvement that impact STD: social empowerment, psychological empowerment, and political empowerment. The literature reveals that the perception of women's work (PWW), self-efficacy (SE), and empowering leadership (EL) is also linked to tourism involvement and the influence of STD, which previous studies have overlooked ([Abou-Shouk et al. 2021](#); [Chatterjee et al. 2018](#); [Elshaer et al. 2021](#)). These factors, according to [Elshaer et al. \(2021\)](#), are pertinent to WEIT and STD and should not be ignored. Moreover, [Tsung \(2013\)](#) proposed that the connection and involvement of the community or entrepreneurs in tourism can influence STD. [Richards and Hall \(2000\)](#) shared the same view, emphasizing that the participation and contribution of the local community and entrepreneurs in tourism help in STD.

[Hutchings et al. \(2020\)](#) stated that women are still less prevalent in the tourism sector, which could possibly be due to the past restrictions in Saudi Arabia; thus, women are hesitant to enter this sector. Women's involvement in entrepreneurship is still considered low compared to that of men; they do not earn a significant income due to slow business, they face failure in business, and there is a need to increase the number of women entrepreneurs involved in entrepreneurship ([Vossenberg 2013](#)). However, the literature revealed that women are achieving great work in the tourism industry worldwide ([Knutson and Schmidgall 1999](#); [Russen et al. 2021](#)). Women are perceived as soft-spoken and understanding in nature, which gives them an edge when dealing with tourism-related activities, which could contribute to female empowerment and improve their economic sta-

tus (Abou-Shouk et al. 2021). Moreover, researchers stated that cultural and social aspects significantly influence the female perception of work and empowerment (Aghazamani et al. 2020). The more women feel empowered, the more they become productive. In Islamic and Arabic countries, there is a misconception that tourism is inconsistent with religious values. Therefore, women face difficulties while working in the tourism sector (Abou-Shouk et al. 2021). Tourism involvement and social empowerment can help improve the tourism sector and make people feel more connected with the community (Elshaer et al. 2021). Though women are perceived by employers in Arab countries as less competent than males (Alrwajfah et al. 2020), in reality, women are more professional and show hospitality when interacting with people (Kattara 2005; Mooney and Ryan 2009). The perception of women's work (PWW) influences their involvement in tourism (Elshaer et al. 2021). Hence, their presence in the tourism industry cannot be ignored. The link between PWW on tourism involvement in Saudi Arabia is unclear, which warrants further research.

Past literature revealed that self-efficacy (SE) plays a crucial role in determining tourism involvement (Yoopetch 2020). SE is an important attribute of human behavior. It refers to the individual belief in accomplishing the behavior necessary to achieve a specific performance (Bandura 1977). Women in the tourism industry attain their objectives as they set before. While handling difficult tasks, women with SE deal better than those without. Further, women in tourism can successfully perform tasks and overcome challenges. In previous literature, it was found that researchers paid less attention to SE's impact on tourism involvement. Further, few research findings were set in the Saudi Arabia context. Hence, this study attempts to relate SE to tourism involvement. Another such attribute is empowering leadership (EL). Through EL, subordinates believe that their leaders have shared and transferred power, which enables their subordinates to make autonomous choices in their work roles (Amundsen and Martinsen 2014). EL is significantly related to employees' engagement with their work (Huertas-Valdivia et al. 2019). Leaders can encourage women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry to increase their Saudi Arabia tourism sector involvement.

The literature indicated a relationship between psychological empowerment (PE) and tourism involvement. PE occurs when a female feels self-esteem and pride due to tourists' recognition of the uniqueness of the natural resources and the culture of the community (Boley and McGehee 2014). This is in line with the social identity theory, which states that when employees become attached to some identity, they start feeling a sense of affiliation, as they start believing in shared value and importance, which positively motivates them and improves their performance (Scheepers and Ellemers 2019). This phenomenon encourages women to be actively involved in businesses such as tourism. This theory also highlights how social identities affect the attitudes and behavior of individuals when they are part of a group or outgroup. Social identities are influential when individuals feel a strong emotional relationship with the group members. Affiliation with a group grants self-esteem, resulting in sustainability in social identity. The research revealed that PE significantly influences tourism involvement (Elshaer et al. 2021). Accordingly, tourism involvement can determine sustainable tourism business development in Saudi Arabia. Elshaer et al. (2021) opined that tourism involvement is a significant factor in determining STD. Moreover, WEIT plays a crucial role in STD and enhances community value, generating a positive influence on STD (Scheyvens 2000).

## 1.2. Problem Statement

Preceding deliberations indicate that the perception of women's work (PWW), self-efficacy (SE), empowering leadership (EL), and psychological empowerment (PE) is crucial in determining tourism involvement and STD in Saudi Arabia. However, empirically and theoretically, the influence of PWW, SE, EL, and PE on tourism involvement and its impact on STDs in Saudi Arabia remains relatively unexplored. The motivation of this study is to uncover the extent to which PWW, SE, EL, and PE influence WEIT and its impact on STDs in Saudi Arabia. Although empirical research has established the relevance of tourism

involvement in STDs, few studies have addressed the factors that affect WEIT, an issue of clear importance to the tourism sector in KSA. Valeri and Katsoni (2021) stated that dealing with issues of gender and tourism is uneasy as it is interdisciplinary and requires tools and approaches to cope with them.

Moreover, several concepts, such as cognitive, psychological, and sociological perceptions, have been acknowledged to potentially impact tourism involvement (Abou-Shouk et al. 2021; Elshaer et al. 2021; Chatterjee et al. 2018; Aghazamani et al. 2020; Mulder Martin and Collins 2006). Nevertheless, the relationship between the concepts is unclear and vaguely identified in the literature. Furthermore, scholars have alluded to more studies to explore the factors that influence tourism involvement and STD, such as government, education, and families' impact on women's self-efficacy; values and beliefs; and the entrepreneurial potential of Saudi women (Basaffar et al. 2018). Boley and McGehee (2014) proposed that further research should include the complex attitudes and behavioral aspects of tourism involvement to achieve STD.

This study also extends the research model of Boley and McGehee (2014) anchored in social exchange theory and social identity theory by adding SE, EL, tourism involvement, and PWW in entrepreneurship and tourism. Prior researchers ignored these variables, and this study closed the gap in previous studies (Abou-Shouk et al. 2021; Chatterjee et al. 2018; Elshaer et al. 2021). Hence, this study incorporates PWW, SE, EL, PE, tourism involvement, and STD, which prior researchers overlooked. The model developed in this study is new. The extent to which the model significantly impacts the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia is unknown, which makes this study plausible. Therefore, the findings from this study are very useful for decision-makers, as the KSA has emphasized the tourism industry and encouraged more women entrepreneurs to become involved in tourism. The objectives of the study are to examine:

- a. The relationship between the perception of women's work, self-efficacy, empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and tourism involvement.
- b. The relationship between tourism involvement and sustainable tourism development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Support and Hypotheses' Development

This study is supported by social exchange theory and social identity theory. Social exchange theory follows the sociological context, working on the exchange principle (Cook et al. 2013; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). In line with the social exchange theory, McGehee and Andereck (2004) believe that a person who experiences an advantage from an exchange is more likely to praise the exchange favorably. Social identity refers to an individual's perception of togetherness with, or affiliation, to a certain social category in which people are intrinsically motivated to contribute to the common good (De Cremer and Van Knippenberg 2003; Scheepers and Ellemers 2019). Previous researchers have found that when the perception of people working in organizations becomes positive, they tend to behave positively, resulting in positive impacts on the organization (Kusluvan and Kusluvan 2000). Therefore, it is argued that when there is a positive perception about women's work, and trust from employers or organisations in their work, women entrepreneurs will be more motivated, resulting in better outcomes for the tourism industry. Similarly, Smith and Woodworth (2012) stated that when entrepreneurs start believing that they are being supported by any means, such as regulation support from the government or praise by the community and tourists, their self-esteem or self-efficacy and confidence will improve, resulting in unexpectedly positive outcomes. The literature revealed that empowerment creates a sense of identity and positive outcomes for individuals (Arshad et al. 2021). For instance, empowered leadership is one's feeling of responsibility to fulfill for his or her own benefit, which will ultimately benefit the organization. Under the social identity theory, women entrepreneurs feel psychologically empowered when their presence is being recognized and appreciated (Arshad et al. 2021; Prati and Zani 2013). Thus far, a

study using the research model that incorporates these theories in Saudi Arabia's tourism is unknown, indicating the novelty of the present study. Hence, this study develops a model that examines the influence of PWW, SE, EL, and PE on tourism involvement and the impact on STD.

## 2.2. Tourism Involvement

Tourism involvement has been researched from various perspectives. It has been studied as dependent, independent, and mediating variables (Elshaer et al. 2021). Researchers revealed that investigating tourism involvement's influence and its outcomes does not just examining participation. Tourism is defined as the individuals' perception of activities that are related to tourism and what motivates them to become involved in tourism (De Bloom et al. 2010). People's involvement in tourism is enduring, and there are no specific time frames for their attitude towards tourism activities. The literature confirmed that the divergence of tourism behaviors, such as being actively involved in tourism (Kim et al. 1997), decision-related matters, and sharing of experience (Park and Kim 2010), are due to different levels of tourism involvement. Thus, according to Prebensen et al. (2013), tourism involvement could determine individual behavior. Kyle et al. (2003) contended that tourism involvement refers to individuals' motivation, interest, and arousal to tourism activities and products. They interact socially within the surrounding environment and develop emotional links to the place. Tourism is measured by a variety of constructs. Gursoy and Gavcar's (2003) postulated three dimensions of tourism involvement: the value of pleasure from vacation, the probability of risk, and perceived value outcomes due to the wrong vacation purchase. At the same time, Suhartanto et al. (2018) proposed tourism involvement to describe individuals' feelings or satisfaction with activities in tourism. Generally, people's motivation to become involved in tourism is linked to their expected desired positive outcomes, such as feeling satisfied and a positive reward, as explained in social exchange theory; therefore, this study measured tourism involvement based on the idea postulated by Suhartanto et al. (2018). The literature revealed that many factors are related to tourism involvement. For example, Boley and McGehee (2014) proposed psychological empowerment (PE) as a factor that influences tourism involvement. However, studies on the influence of PWW, SE, and EL on WEIT in Saudi Arabia are limited. Hence, this study examined the influence of PWW, SE, and EL along with PE, as proposed by Boley and McGehee (2014) on WEIT in Saudi Arabia.

## 2.3. Perceptions of Women's Work and Tourism Involvement

The literature reveals that perception refers to individual interpretation of situations that will influence attitude and behavior in the workplace. The perception of women's work (PWW) refers to how individuals value women's ability to undertake activities and functions, such as venturing into the tourism industry. According to the Saudi *Saudi Gazette* (2021), although female workers are employed in the tourism industry, there is still a negative perception of their work. According to Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020), from a feminist political economy perspective, when discussing gender in tourism and entrepreneurship, men are portrayed as highly dominant role models. The majority of employers believe that male colleagues perform much better than women in their work. As a result, women are seen as less valuable than men at the time of hiring for a job or assigning important tasks to them. Furthermore, Hutchings et al. (2020) reported in their study that in many Islamic countries, including Middle Eastern countries, there is a practice of gender inequality in the tourism industry due to social and cultural restrictions about women's role in the community. Additionally, cultural aspects significantly determine the female perception of empowerment (Aghazamani et al. 2020). In Oman, the perception of women's works plays a significant role in determining women's empowerment and involvement in tourism (Alsawafi 2016). The researchers stated positive views of women working in the tourism sector, particularly in government jobs (Alsawafi 2016). The literature highlighted that social empowerment significantly influences tourism involvement

(Elshaer et al. 2021). Saudi Arabia provides security to women working in tourism, and the community appreciates them working freely (Elshaer et al. 2021). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was developed:

**Hypothesis 1.** *The perception of women's work is positively and significantly related to tourism involvement.*

#### 2.4. Self-Efficacy and Tourism Involvement

The term self-efficacy (SE) refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular objective and perform well (Yoopetch 2020). The literature documented that SE is widely discussed in entrepreneurship (Farrell et al. 2016). In Saudi Arabia, women are secure working in tourism, and people appreciate them working freely (Elshaer et al. 2021). The researchers found that SE plays a crucial role in determining tourism involvement (Yoopetch 2020). Through tourism involvement, women with self-efficacy can attain objectives related to entrepreneurship or business that they have initially set. With a sense of SE, women can easily accomplish tasks when they experience difficulties. Women in the tourism industry can successfully perform tasks and overcome challenges. Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020) highlighted that individuals, irrespective of gender, have the ability and potential to succeed in entrepreneurial activities in any geographical and social context. The majority of researchers used SE to determine entrepreneurial intention related to tourism involvement (Mei et al. 2017; Yoopetch 2020). However, less research has focused on determining tourism involvement through SE. Hence, this study examines how SE relates to tourism involvement. Based on the above deliberation, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Self-efficacy is positively and significantly related to tourism involvement.*

#### 2.5. Empowering Leadership and Tourism Involvement

In empowering leadership (EL), subordinates believe that their leader has shared and transferred power to enable their subordinates to make autonomous choices in their work roles (Cheong et al. 2019; Slättén and Mehmetoglu 2011). More women should be given key leadership positions in the business. For example, in European companies, only 37% of managers are women, members of boards-listed companies are 28%, and less than 1/5% hold senior executive positions (Stefan et al. 2021), indicating a low representation of women in leadership. Empirical research revealed that EL plays a crucial role in determining workers' engagement and involvement with their work (Huertas-Valdivia et al. 2019). Leaders can encourage women in the tourism industry to increase their involvement in the Saudi Arabia tourism sector. The EL developed in line with the research stream of coaching, workers' involvement, and delegating behavior in situational leadership theory (Hersey and Blanchard 1969). Previous researchers have overlooked addressing the influence of EL on tourism involvement. Thus, this study tries to cover this gap. The following hypothesis was proposed:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Empowering leadership is positively and significantly related to tourism involvement.*

#### 2.6. Psychological Empowerment and Tourism Involvement

Psychological empowerment (PE) occurs when women entrepreneurs feel pride and self-esteem due to the recognition they receive from the tourists that experience the uniqueness of the natural resources and the culture of the community (Boley and McGehee 2014). Past studies revealed that PE significantly influences tourism involvement (Elshaer et al. 2021). The tourism sector can assist female entrepreneurs to feel self-esteem and be independent. The tourism sector also feels proud to share the unique culture of Saudi Arabia with tourists coming to visit the country. Psychologically empowered female entrepreneurs

become more independent in shaping the tourism role, which permits them to accomplish their tasks professionally and align their values with the organizational tasks (Boudrias et al. 2004). The literature highlighted that psychologically empowered women involved in tourism are more satisfied and have a feeling of pride in their Saudi Arabia homeland country and the unique culture they would like to share with the tourists (Elshaer et al. 2021). Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis was suggested:

**Hypothesis 4.** *Psychological empowerment is positively and significantly related to tourism involvement.*

### 2.7. Tourism Involvement and Sustainable Tourism Development

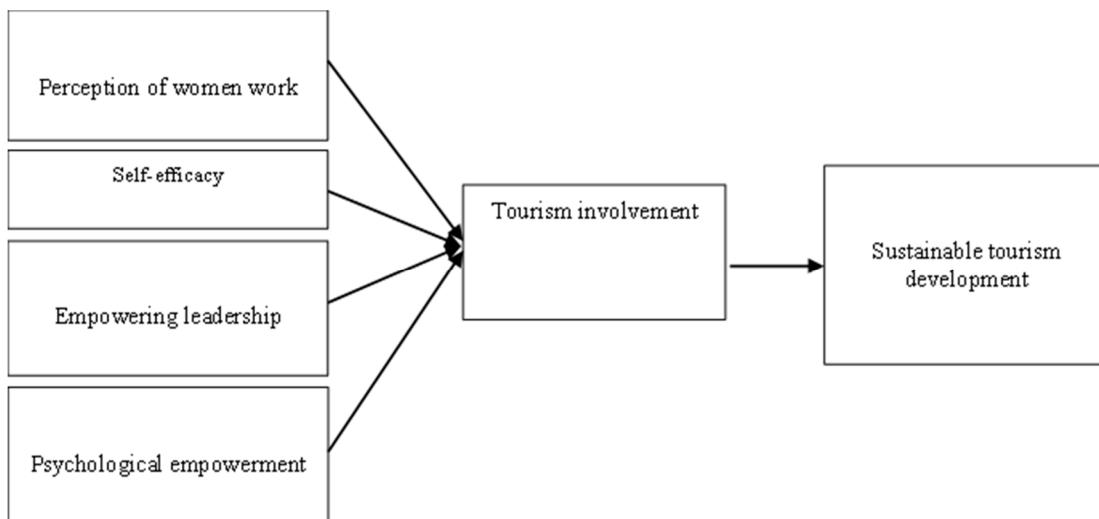
The World Tourism Organisation (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2013) defines STD as activities to fulfill the present needs of tourists and indigenous people and gives attention to the conservation and improvements of resources for future tourism development. In relation to this, according to Peeters and Ateljevic (2017), the link between tourism and development is very complex and involves a variety of intertwined forms of innovation that can be taken collectively or individually. The World Travel and Tourism Council (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) 2017) focuses on STD as the fulfillment of the present and future visitors' need with less consideration of the needs of the local community, culture, society, ecological environment, and biodiversity. STD is also defined based on social justice, economic development, and environmental integrity (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2017). This definition implies that the commitment to STD is to enhance economic prosperity from the tourism contribution, create jobs, preserve the environment and culture, and ensure competitiveness for long-term benefits. The concern of this study is how WEIT can impact STD. According to Dabrowski et al. (2019), empowered women can contribute to STD in terms of their ability to make property-related decisions, business planning decisions, and business-related decisions. This definition parallels the KSA aspiration to encourage WEIT, which ultimately contributes to STD in Saudi Arabia. Thus, for this study, the author measured STD, as proposed by Dabrowski et al. (2019).

The literature revealed that women's involvement in the tourism business plays a significant role in the sustainable development of tourism. Women's involvement in tourism will increase community values and enhance the positive influence of tourism on STD (Scheyvens 2000). It is expected that women known for having tolerance and good listeners will be better able to deal with tourism activities than males in Saudi Arabia. They can further help in developing sustainable tourism business in tourism business planning, family and business-related decisions, and property-related decisions. Globally, the share of women in the tourism sector is about 54% (Valek and Almuhrzi 2021). Particularly in Finland and Estonia, the share of women in tourism is more than 65% (World Tourism Organisation 2022). In Saudi Arabia, the involvement of women in the tourism sector is still low (Alasgah and Rizk 2021). However, women's participation in tourism gradually increased in line with Vision 2030 and is expected to reach 30% by 2030 (Ministry of Tourism 2020). Thus, more activities are still required in this sector to enhance the position of women and increase their participation in tourism (Ferguson and Alarcón 2016). The literature revealed that tourism involvement is positively related to STD (Elshaer et al. 2021; Tsung 2013; Richards and Hall 2000). This study thus has the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5.** *Tourism involvement is positively and significantly related to sustainable tourism development.*

## 2.8. Research Framework

The model proposes the influence of perception of women's work, self-efficacy, empowering leadership, and psychological empowerment on tourism involvement. Accordingly, the research examines how tourism involvement impacts STD in Saudi Arabia. The research framework of the study is in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The proposed research framework.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Measures

The study variables are the PWW, SE, EL, PE, tourism involvement, and STD. The instruments were adapted from previous studies (refer to Appendix A). For the PWW, five items were adapted from Abou-Shouk et al. (2021); Alrwaifah et al. (2020), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.900$ ; for SE, seven items were adapted from Chen et al. (2001), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.839$ ; for EL three items were adapted from Ahearne et al. (2005), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.867$ ; for PE, four items were adapted from Boley and McGehee (2014), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.865$ ; five items of tourism involvement were adapted from Suhartanto et al. (2018), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.828$ ; and finally, for STD, three items were adapted from Dabrowski et al. (2019), with reliability at  $\alpha \geq 0.897$ . The questionnaire of the study comprises two sections. The first section is the demography of the respondents, and the second section includes the items of the constructs.

### 3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

The population of the study was woman entrepreneurs from the tourism industry. For the data collection, the authors selected 300 women who were involved in the tourism sector of Saudi Arabia. A total of 201 women indicated a willingness to participate; the rest did not respond. After, the authors arranged one-on-one meetings with 201 women business owners (41 business accommodations, 97 restaurants, and 63 women were in the travel and recreation industry) and obtained the completed questionnaires. The process took six months, from July 2021 to December 2021, as it was very difficult to arrange meetings due to accessibility and busy schedules. The study employed a convenience sampling technique due to two main reasons. Firstly, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 period, when the imposed restrictions made it difficult to apply any other technique. Secondly, the entrepreneurs were nearly always busy with unscheduled activities, and it was difficult to find a common schedule. The sample calculation was based on a suggestion by Mundfrom et al. (2005) that participants between 100 to 1000 are appropriate for factor analysis. Hence, the 201 collected responses are appropriate for this study. The response rate of the respondents is 67%, which is enough to conduct the study (Krejcie and Morgan 1970).

The seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was employed in the study as it provides better accuracy and more choices to the respondents. Before this, the study questionnaire was translated into Arabic in a way that its meaning would not change. The purpose of the translation was to ensure the potential respondents felt comfortable in responding to their native language. The translation was referred to three academic experts and three respondents for content validity and distributed to respondents after their approval.

### 3.3. Demographic Characteristics

Demographics are important to understanding the background of respondents. For instance, they provide basic information about respondents' age, gender, education, location, etc. This makes it easier to understand whether the collected data represent the targeted population. In the present study, demographics regarding women entrepreneurs' age, years in business, type of business, and the location of business were included. Table 1 shows that the majority of the participants, 39.4%, belong to the age group of 31 to 40; followed by 35.3% in the age group of 41 and above; and 25.3% of participants were aged 21–30. This shows that less participation from young women may be due to local past stereotyping that women cannot go alone and work independently, as this age is considered too early to go independent. However, women in middle age, 31 to 40, are more active, and the possible reason for this is that at this age, most of the women become married, receive support from husbands, and feel experienced enough to initiate different projects.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the individuals.

Description	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21 to 30	51	25.3%
	31 to 40	79	39.4%
	41 and above	71	35.3%
Years in business	0 to 5	106	52.7%
	5 to 10	72	35.8%
	10 and above	23	11.5%
Type of business	Accommodation business	41	20.4%
	Restaurants	97	39.3%
	Travel and recreation	63	31.3%
Location of business	Riyadh	69	34.32%
	Madinah	44	21.89%
	Taif	26	12.93%
	Jeddah	32	15.92%
	Dammam	30	14.94%

Note: N = 201.

Lastly, the distribution of entrepreneurs 40 and older seems logical as Saudi Arabia has a strong economy and people have money, but due to restrictions, they were previously unable to take the initiative independently and did not start business initiatives. When answering about the number of years in business, 52.7% of entrepreneurs responded they had been conducting business for the past 5 years or less, while 35.8% responded that they had been conducting business for 5 to 10 years, and 11.5% replied that they had been conducting business for 10 years or more. This highlights the recent ease of restrictions on women, which showed more women in business, which was previously very low and rare. About the business location, 34.6% of women responded that they were conducting business in Riyadh, 21.8% were working in Madinah, 15.8% were working in Jeddah, 14.9% were working in Dammam, and 12.9% were working in Taif. This information indicates that in the bigger cities, women find more opportunities, and hence they start businesses there and less often in smaller cities.

### 3.4. Common Method Bias (CMB)

This study collected data from women entrepreneurs working in the Saudi Arabia tourism industry by using questionnaires adapted from previous research. Hence, there might be a chance that a CMB issue will disturb the data. CMB is an issue that normally occurs in self-survey reports (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). CMB impact can minimize following procedural and statistical remedies. Few researchers focus on procedural remedies. Researchers need to guarantee the respondents that their information is in safe hands and cannot be transferred to a third party without their approval.

Moreover, researchers informed the respondents that questionnaire items are written in plain language and are error-free (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Statistically, this study followed Herman's single factor test and variance inflation factor (VIF). The value of Herman's single factor is 39.41%, less than 50%, which shows no CMB issues in empirical data. Table 2 reveals that the VIF value of all constructs is below 3.3, which means that the research model has no CMB issues (Kock 2015).

**Table 2.** Reliability of the constructs and factor loadings of indicators.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	$\alpha$	VIF
Perception of Women's Work	PWW1	0.884	0.717	0.926	0.9	2.065
	PWW2	0.709				
	PWW3	0.856				
	PWW4	0.87				
	PWW5	0.899				
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.787	0.663	0.881	0.839	1.496
	SE2	0.8				
	SE4	0.756				
	SE5	0.726				
	SE6	0.713				
	SE7	0.671				
	EL1	0.862				
Empowering Leadership	EL2	0.92	0.79	0.719	0.867	2.082
	EL3	0.885				
	PE1	0.753				
	PE2	0.845	0.699	0.902	0.865	1.068
Psychological Empowerment	PE3	0.812				
	PE4	0.926				
	TI1	0.808				
	TI2	0.787				
Tourism Involvement	TI3	0.717	0.675	0.871	0.828	1.002
	TI4	0.743				
	TI5	0.734				
	STD1	0.915				
Sustainable Tourism Development	STD2	0.928	0.83	0.936	0.897	2.021
	STD3	0.89				

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

### 4.1. Statistical Analysis and Results

This study followed structural equation modeling (SEM) for testing research hypotheses by using Smart-PLS version 3.3.6. Additionally, partial least square (PLS) is deemed as a suitable method in a situation where empirical data do not fulfill the normality assumption (Hair Jr. et al. 2017). The PLS model results are more appropriate than the OLS model in the following conditions: missing values, multicollinearity issues, and smaller sample size. The use of PLS is also suitable for this study as the sample size of this study is small, and the PLS can handle the smaller sample sizes well. PLS-SEM consists of measurement and structural models.

#### 4.2. Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model includes individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (see Table 2).

Starting from item reliability, Table 2 demonstrates that the smallest loading is 0.671, and the upper loading is 0.928, greater than the threshold level of 0.50 (Hair et al. 2014). The internal consistency reliability of the present study was examined through Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability (CR) computation (Chin 2010). According to Hair et al. (2019), the value of  $\alpha$  should be  $>0.70$  for the acceptability of the construct. Table 2 shows that the obtained values for  $\alpha$  range between 0.828 and 0.900, fulfilling the threshold criteria of  $>0.70$ . Similarly, the threshold criterion for CR is also  $>0.70$ . The obtained values for CR range between 0.719 and 0.936, fulfilling the threshold criteria; hence, the internal consistency reliability of both indicators is fulfilled. Thereafter, convergent validity is the degree to which a construct measures an identical construct. The convergent validity of this study was calculated through the average variance extracted (AVE). The values of AVE range between 0.663 and 0.830, fulfilling the threshold criteria of Hair et al. (2014), recommending the value  $>0.50$ .

Researchers have calculated discriminant validity through traditional metrics (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) replaced traditional metrics because the technique was not good when loadings had smaller differences (Henseler et al. 2015). The researchers confirmed that the HTMT value is 0.90 for variables conceptually the same and 0.85 for those that are different (Henseler et al. 2015). Table 3 highlights no discriminant validity issue, as all the values range from 0.283 to 0.817.

**Table 3.** Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Variables	STD	EL	PWW	PE	SE	TI
Sustainable Tourism Development						
Empowering Leadership	0.817					
Perception of Women's Work	0.808	0.806				
Psychological Empowerment	0.679	0.464	0.401			
Self-efficacy	0.552	0.568	0.588	0.341		
Tourism Involvement	0.701	0.710	0.804	0.283	0.587	

#### 4.3. Structural Model Analysis

##### 4.3.1. Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

Table 4 shows descriptive calculation through mean and standard deviation, while correlation analysis was conducted through latent correlation matrix on PLS. More specifically, the mean and standard deviation (SD) for perception of women's work (mean = 3.837, SD = 0.907), self-efficacy (mean = 3.824, SD = 0.836), empowering leadership (mean = 4.022, SD = 0.895), psychological empowerment (mean = 3.856, SD = 0.923), tourism involvement (mean = 4.101, SD = 0.692), and STD (mean = 4.024, SD = 0.926). Table 4 also shows the values of latent variable correlation. According to Hair et al. (2019), the threshold value for latent variable correlation is 0.85. The obtained values range between 0.143 and 0.756, indicating that there is no correlation between latent variables.

**Table 4.** Descriptive and correlational analysis.

Variables	Mean	SD	PWW	SE	EL	PE	TI	STD
PWW	3.837	0.907	1.00					
SE	3.824	0.836	0.510 **	1.00				
EL	4.022	0.895	0.710 **	0.486 **	1.00			
PE	3.856	0.923	0.058 *	0.380 **	0.143 *	1.00		
TI	4.101	0.692	0.756 **	0.502 **	0.614 **	0.154 **	1.00	
STD	4.024	0.926	0.725 **	0.481 **	0.370 **	0.160 **	0.619 **	1.00

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; SD = Standard Deviation.

#### 4.3.2. Regression Model Test

This section covers the structural model for testing the research hypotheses. Researchers used Smart-PLS 3.3.6 version with 5000 subsamples. For hypotheses testing,  $\beta$ -values,  $p$ -values, and T-values were used in the structural model (refer to Table 5).

**Table 5.** Hypotheses testing.

	Paths	$\beta$ Value	SE	T-Values	BCI LL	BCI UL	$f^2$	$p$ -Values	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	PWW ≥ TI	0.636	0.068	9.322	0.487	0.718	0.548	0.000 ***	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	SE ≥ TI	0.140	0.059	2.389	0.012	0.208	0.037	0.027 ***	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	EL ≥ TI	0.112	0.053	2.122	-0.007	0.196	0.023	0.047 **	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	PE ≥ TI	0.300	0.051	3.067	0.009	0.184	0.214	0.007 ***	Supported
H <sub>5</sub>	TI ≥ STD	0.624	0.039	15.886	0.551	0.685	0.637	0.000 ***	Supported

Note:  $p < 0.001$  \*\*\*,  $p < 0.05$  \*\*, SE ≥ standard error; PWW ≥ perception of women work; SE ≥ self-efficacy; EL ≥ empowering leadership; PE ≥ psychological empowerment; TI ≥ tourism involvement; STD ≥ sustainable tourism development.

The hypothesis is supported if the t-value is at least 1.96 or the p-value is equal to or below 0.05. The perception of women's work ( $\beta = 0.636$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ,  $t = 9.322$ ), self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.140$ ,  $p < 0.027$ ,  $t = 2.389$ ), empowering leadership ( $\beta = 0.112$ ,  $p < 0.047$ ,  $t = 2.122$ ), and psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.300$ ,  $p < 0.007$ ,  $t = 3.067$ ) are positively related to tourism involvement; hence, all of the four hypotheses, H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>, and H<sub>4</sub>, are supported. Similarly, tourism involvement ( $\beta = 0.624$ ,  $p < 0.000$ , and  $t = 15.886$ ) is positively related to STD, supporting H<sub>5</sub>. The p-values in Table 5 indicate the strength of significance of each hypothesis. These results reveal that all of the hypotheses are highly significant except H<sub>3</sub>, which indicates that empowering leadership has a moderate impact on tourism involvement compared to the other factors.

#### 4.3.3. The Predictive Relevance of the Study Model

This study used R-square ( $R^2$ ) and cross-validated redundancy ( $Q^2$ ) for the predictive relevance of the research model.  $R^2$  examines the variance of the dependent variable explained by all of the independent constructs. Data in Table 6 showed that 64.3% of tourism involvement is collectively contributed by empowering leadership, the perception of women's work, psychological empowerment, and self-efficacy, while all independent constructs of tourism involvement collectively explained 38.9% of STD.  $R^2$  has three classifications: weak = 0.02 to 0.13, moderate = 0.13 to 0.26, and substantial, for which the latter  $R^2$  should be greater than 0.26 (Cohen 1988). This study indicated that tourism involvement and STD lie in substantial cases. In Smart-PLS, cross-validated redundancy ( $Q^2$ ) was measured through the blindfolding technique. Table 6 reveals that the  $Q^2$  value of tourism involvement is 0.316 and STD is 0.324, which is higher than zero, as Stone (1974) suggested.

**Table 6.** Cross-validated redundancy ( $Q^2$ ).

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 = (1-SSE/SSO)$
Tourism involvement	861.000	588.527	0.316
Sustainable tourism development	1435.000	969.428	0.324
<b>R-square</b>			
Tourism involvement		0.643	
Sustainable tourism development		0.389	

## 5. Discussion

The literature revealed that several factors influence tourism involvement, but the perception of women's work (PWW), self-efficacy (SE), empowering leadership (EL), and psychological empowerment (PE) are the clear features of previous research. This study focused on the influence of these factors on tourism involvement and their impact on STD. Thus, this study tried to examine how PWW, SE, EL, and PE enhance tourism involvement and the impact of tourism involvement on STD. The structural model supports the view that PWW, SE, EL, PE, tourism involvement, and STD are related positively and significantly. Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported. Indeed, the findings revealed a substantial contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. This study found that 64.3% of the variance in tourism involvement was explained by PWW, SE, EL, and PE, while tourism involvement contributed to 38.9% of the variance in STD, implying the importance of PWW, SE, EL, and PE on women entrepreneurs' involvement in tourism that can contribute towards STD in Saudi Arabia.

Previous empirical studies support the findings of this study, which revealed that the higher the level of PWW, SE, EL, and PE, the better the tourism involvement would be among Saudi Arabia's women entrepreneurs. These findings are consistent with previous empirical studies, which found the relationship between PWW and tourism involvement, conducted by Elshaer et al. (2021); Alsawafi (2016); SE and tourism involvement, by Yoopetch (2020); EL and tourism involvement, by Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2019); and PE and tourism involvement, by Elshaer et al. (2021); Boley and McGehee (2014). Elshaer et al. (2021); Tsung (2013); Richards and Hall (2000); Scheyvens (2000). These findings highlight that the higher the level of tourism involvement, the better the STD will be among women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia, and supported H5. This finding is parallel with previous studies by Elshaer et al. (2021); Tsung (2013); Richards and Hall (2000); and Scheyvens (2000).

## 6. Conclusions

This study's main aim was to examine the influence of SE, PWW, EL, and PE on tourism involvement among women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, it examined the influence of tourism involvement on STD. The results of this study indicated that women entrepreneurs' involvement in tourism was influenced by SE, PWW, EL, and PE. This implies that these factors enhance the involvement of women entrepreneurs, and there is a need to create specific initiatives to support women who are engaged in tourism business activities. Moreover, the findings showed that tourism involvement, which is influenced by PWW, SE, EL, and PE, has impacted sustainable tourism development. This suggests that tourism involvement serves as the determinant for sustainable tourism development in Saudi Arabia and could significantly impact the national economy. The great impact on the national economy would bring more benefits to the KSA, especially in terms of providing more employment opportunities and creating more business opportunities in the tourism sector among women entrepreneurs. At the same time, more family businesses and SMEs in tourism can be created, resulting in more women's participation in business ventures and improving their economy. These findings also will help the KSA develop and promote

comprehensive support programs for women, especially those who intend to involve in the tourism industry.

This study recommends that the KSA focuses on a policy that can foster and expedite women's involvement in tourism. For example, policies that allow more women to operate the business, support gender equality, and provide training and education programs to assist women in business; policies that support the elimination of some barriers (such as rules and regulations) that hinder women in business; and policies that support women's tourism involvement in business planning, property-related decisions, and business-related decisions.

The research findings suggest that women in Saudi Arabia are ready and willing to venture into entrepreneurship. Thus, several initiatives and incentives should be provided. This study recommends the cooperation and involvement of government, including educational institutions, financial institutions, and business entities; NGOs; as well as society and families, in providing business opportunities and support for women. The government plays a key role in formulating policy that hinders them from being involved in entrepreneurship. This includes having policies related to business ownership, business decision making, and providing autonomy to women in entrepreneurship. The government should also provide more activities to support women's participation, better applicability to business activities, the development of the entrepreneurship sector, and increase the number of entrepreneurship activities. Women in Saudi should be given more exposure to develop and explore their abilities, their own projects, learn and work with successful women, and be recognized for their accomplishments. In realizing this aspiration, the government should be involved and educational institutions. They can give better education support and provide more entrepreneurial and development programs through seminars, workshops, and conferences. Higher-learning institutions and colleges can offer courses at diplomas and degrees level to equip women with a higher level of education and qualification in line with the culture of learning and innovation and the ability to be innovative and better professionals in entrepreneurship. More learning of innovative skills, awareness of enhancing women's participation, and understanding of business should also be created. The roles of NGOs, business entities, society, and families are also vital to encouraging and supporting women's involvement in the business. Their support will help increase the number of women involved in the business. Funding support from business entities and financial institutions and support from all the parties involved will also motivate women to be more involved in the business. This study also recommends that more small and business enterprises (SMEs) in tourism are formed for women to realize the aspiration of the Saudi government to have more women involved in entrepreneurship, particularly in the tourism industry.

## 7. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The results of this research offer various theoretical and practical contributions. As for the theoretical contribution, the research extends the research model of [Boley and McGehee \(2014\)](#) along with social exchange theory and social identity theory by adding PWW, SE, EL, and tourism involvement. According to [Elshaer et al. \(2021\)](#), the research model previously lacked theoretical underpinning. At the same time, the present study tries to fill this gap through social exchange theory and social identity theory. Through social exchange theory, social identity theory, and the model of [Boley and McGehee \(2014\)](#), this study builds a research model that incorporates PWW, SE, EL, PE, tourism involvement, and STD in a single framework, showing the novelty of the study.

This study offers a clear roadmap for nations working on women's empowerment in the tourism sector from a managerial or practical perspective. The results elucidated that Saudi Arabia and tourism sectors focus on women's empowerment and the need to concentrate on the PWW, SE, EL, and PE. If the tourism sector wants to increase women's involvement in tourism, there is a need to concentrate on the perception of women's work, empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and self-efficacy. In terms of the

perception of women working in Saudi Arabia, the tourism sector should assure that women will receive support from the community and families, reduce conflicts involving cultural norms and traditions, and convince women that certain jobs in tourism are more appropriate for them. From the self-efficacy perspective, tourism involvement can be enhanced to ensure that families can successfully perform tasks and overcome challenges. This study supports that encouragement from leaders significantly determines tourism involvement among women in the Saudi Arabian tourism sector, indicating the important role of leadership in entrepreneurship. Moreover, this study also suggests the role of psychological empowerment when dealing with tourism-related activities, women's involvement in tourism, and business decision-making.

## 8. Limitations and Future Recommendations

Previous discussions indicate that the research findings have some significant implications for decision-makers and add value to the body of knowledge. However, some limitations are observed that can be a guide for future research. First, this study is cross-sectional, and future research may explore a longitudinal study. Second, the data are limited, as the study was conducted during COVID-19. Nevertheless, future studies may offer more data for better research generalizability. Third, future researchers can extend the study to a different setting to explore the perception of women's empowerment. Finally, further research can focus on other variables, such as women's entrepreneurship, subjective norms, financial support, social support, and operating risks, to determine STD.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Measurement items.

Construct	Items
<b>Perception of Women Work</b>	
PWW1	Women's work in tourism is acceptable in the community.
PWW2	Women's work in tourism does not conflict with cultural norms and traditions in the community.
PWW3	Women's work in the tourism public sector is more accepted compared in the private sector by the community.
PWW4	It is widely believed that the community perceives women's work in tourism has a negative effect on their families.

**Table A1.** *Cont.*

Construct	Items
PWW5	It is widely believed the community perceives certain tourism jobs are more suitable for women than men
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	
SE1	I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.
SE2	When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.
SE3	In general, I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.
SE4	I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.
SE5	I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.
SE6	I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.
SE7	Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.
<b>Empowering Leadership</b>	
EL1	My leaders assign me responsibility
EL2	My leader encourages me to take initiative
EL3	My leader listens to me
<b>Psychological empowerment</b>	
EL1	I am proud to be a resident of a tourist destination country.
EL2	I feel special because individuals travel to see my country's attractions.
EL3	I feel proud to share the unique culture of my country with tourists.
EL4	Tourism helps women to have self-esteem and be independent.
<b>Tourism Involvement</b>	
TI1	I am pleased to be involved in tourism activities.
TI2	I consider tourism activities to be important
TI3	I get upset when participation in a tourism activity is poor.
TI4	I am feeling a bit lost when making choices from a variety of tourism activities.
TI5	Choosing a tourism activity is rather complicated.
<b>Sustainable Tourism Development</b>	
STD1	I am able to do property-related decisions
STD2	I am confident to make tourism business planning related decisions
STD3	I believe be able to make family and business tourism-related decisions

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