Women's empowerment and tourism development: A cross-country study

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A B S T R A C T

Women's empowerment has become a crucial component of sustainable tourism development in tourist destinations. Meanwhile, achieving gender equality and empowering women constitutes the fifth goal of the United Nations sustainable development agenda (UN-SDGs). The present study aims to investigate the influence of women's empowerment on tourism development across three different Arab countries: Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. With partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) employed to analyse the perceptions of 784 respondents across the three countries, the findings reveal that perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship are significant predictors of women's empowerment in the tourism sector. Furthermore, the results show significantly different effects of women's empowerment on tourism development in the three countries. Among the three Arab countries included in the current study, the United Arab Emirates ranks first for the impact of women's empowerment on tourism development, followed by Egypt and then Oman. The findings hold significant implications for women's empowerment in Arab and Muslim countries. Limitations and directions for future research are also addressed.

1. Introduction

The United Nations sustainable development goals (UN-SDGs) address the global challenges facing the world, including poverty, gender inequality, climate change, environmental destruction, peace and justice. Achieving gender equality and empowering women constitutes the fifth UN-SDG. This goal is not only an essential human right, but also a crucial foundation for a world of peace, affluence, and sustainability (UN, 2020).

The UN has set some targets for achieving women's empowerment. One of them is to ensure the efficient involvement of women in society and to give them equitable prospects for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. The second target is to give women fair access to economic resources as well as rights to ownership. The final target is to implement sound policies and enforceable laws to foster gender equality and empower women at all levels (UN, 2020).

Tourism is believed to be one of the key sectors that can help in the achievement of these targets and the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment (The World Bank, 2018). A study by Tinker

(2006) claimed that tourism could strongly contribute to women's empowerment and enhance their economic status. Thus, if women, particularly in developed countries, were given more opportunities to work in the tourism sector and promoted to higher levels of management, this would certainly fulfil the fifth UN-SDG by providing gender equality in economic aspects, and promoting the concept of granting women equal access to economic resources and equal opportunities for decision-making (The World Bank, 2018). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016), however, women have low representation in managerial and supervisory positions in tourism and hospitality.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept. Boley and McGehee (2014) used social exchange theory to measure the impact of empowerment on residents' attitudes towards tourism development. Afterwards, Boley, Maruyama, and Woosnam (2015) developed a tourism empowerment scale to measure the empowerment of residents in tourism destinations. The developed scale includes three main dimensions of empowerment: psychological, social, and political. Psychological empowerment relates to people's feelings of pride and self-esteem due to having unique attractions and heritage assets in their

destinations. Social empowerment reinforces the connection between people and their communities and promotes their involvement in the activities of these communities. Political empowerment occurs when local community members are fairly involved in the decision-making process for developing tourism. Arroyo, Barbieri, Sotomayor, and Knollenberg (2019) have added the economic dimension of empowerment to measure the empowerment of the Andean Communities.

As stated by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2019), in most emerging economies, particularly in the Arab countries, North Africa and Southern Asia, gender inequality in the labour market is widely observed, mainly because of cultural values. Therefore, the present study expands the work of Boley, McGehee, Perdue, and Long (2014) and their use of the social exchange theory to measure and compare the effect of women's empowerment on tourism development in three Arab countries: Egypt, UAE, and Oman. Moreover, it measures the perceptions of the society towards women's work and women's entrepreneurship as indicators of women's empowerment.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Based on studies of empowerment in the literature (i.e., Arroyo et al., 2019; Boley et al., 2014; Boley et al., 2015; Boley & McGehee, 2014), four dimensions are used to measure women's empowerment: psychological, social, political, and economic. However, these four dimensions could be better predicted within any society if perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurial activities were investigated. This study investigates whether working in tourism can fulfil the UN's economic targets for empowering women, which represents the fifth UN-SDG. The following sections will thoroughly discuss the society's views of women's work in tourism, women's entrepreneurship, the four aspects of empowerment for women, and the relationship between empowered women and tourism.

2.1. Perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's empowerment

Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, and Chancellor (2015) found that women's work in tourism supports their empowerment in terms of economic and social independence. Recent global statistics show that more than half of those working in the tourism sector are women and around 23% of tourism ministers are women (World Tourism Organization, 2019). However, in some regions, including Arab and Islamic countries, there is gender inequality in the tourism field of work, due to social and cultural restrictions and norms related to the role of women in society (Hutchings, Moyleb, Chaic, Garofanod, & Moore, 2020; WTTC, 2019). Similarly, Aghazamani, Kerstetter, and Allison (2020) have shown that cultural aspects influence women's perceptions of empowerment.

There is a common misconception in the Arab and Islamic world that working in the tourism industry is inconsistent with religious values and causes moral failure of the individual. This misconception prevents young people, especially females in those societies, from going into tourism work. The idea is due to the workplace atmosphere that is exposed to mixing, excessive entertainment and consumption of alcoholic drinks, especially in the hospitality sector in comparison to other tourism sectors such as airlines, government, or travel agents (Tan et al., 2016).

Other studies in the Arab context have also confirmed that the community's negative perception of women's work in tourism is affecting their employment and empowerment in the sector. Alrwajfah, Almeida-García, and Cortes-Macías (2020), for example, showed that employers in the tourism sector think that women are incapable of fulfilling their work requirements because of their family responsibilities and a lack of the required skills. They added that the cultural customs and traditions in society that do not accept women's interaction with strangers also hinder their employment and empowerment in the sector. However, Alsawafi (2016) found that respondents in the conservative Omani society had positive views of women working in tourism,

especially in government jobs. He expected that the pessimistic views of the Arab community regarding the empowerment of women in tourism industry would diminish in the future. Thus, the first hypothesis of the present study is formulated as follows:

H1. The societal perceptions of women's work in tourism are a predictor of women's empowerment in the tourism sector (psychologically (H1.1), socially (H1.2), politically (H1.3), and economically (H1.4)).

2.2. Entrepreneurship and women's empowerment

As stated in the UN-SDGs, undertaking changes to grant women fair rights to economic resources, as well as rights to ownership, is a crucial objective that will need to be met in order for women to achieve empowerment (United Nations, 2020). WTTC (2019) has stated that the tourism and travel sectors provide greater employment of women and empowerment opportunities for them than other sectors, particularly in developing countries. In the meantime, entrepreneurship is seen as one main driver of the tourism sector's development (Mahmoud, Abou-Shouk, & Fawzy, 2019; Mahmoud, Abou-Shouk, & Fawzy, 2020). Many studies have revealed that entrepreneurship activities help women to be actively self-employed and thus economically and socially empowered (Figueroa-Domecq, de Jong, & Williams, 2020; Hutchings et al., 2020; Movono & Dahles, 2017; Shingla & Singh, 2015; Vujko et al., 2019; World Tourism Organization, 2019). Guest houses, other family-run tourism businesses and home-made handcrafts are common examples of women's entrepreneurship activities in the tourism and hospitality sector, and these activities act to empower women economically and socially within their families and societies (Çiçek, Zencir, & Kozak, 2017). Likewise, the findings of Pandey (2015) revealed that fostering entrepreneurship was the best way for women to become empowered and for gender inequality to be reduced. Furthermore, according to Aghazamani et al. (2020), tourism provides unique opportunities for women's empowerment as it helps women to improve their family income, gain self-confidence, and increase their social status. Carvalho, Costa, Lykke, and Torres (2019) added that tourism not only contributes to women's economic status but also to their psychological, social, and political empowerment. Based on the above, the second hypothesis of the current study is as follows:

H2. Women's entrepreneurship in the tourism sector contributes significantly to women's empowerment (psychologically (H2.1), socially (H2.2), politically (H2.3), and economically (H2.4)).

2.3. Women's empowerment and tourism development

Literature has highlighted the role of tourism organizations in improving the sustainable livelihoods of local communities (Elbaz & Abou-Shouk, 2016) and the importance of residents' perceptions with regards supporting sustainable tourism development in different contexts (i.e., Gannon, Rasoolimanesh, & Taheri, 2020; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, & Ahmad, 2017; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, & Ramayah, 2015). Integrating the extant research, the present study focuses on empowerment as a crucial component of tourism development plans (Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka, 2017), particularly women's empowerment. Bhattacharya and Banerjee (2012) took the view that women's empowerment was the main development strategy, helping to increase their scores for health, knowledge and autonomy. According to Boley and McGehee (2014), empowering residents contributes towards the achievement of sustainable tourism development goals. The participation of residents helps relevant decisions to be made that solve societal problems. Furthermore, the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) stated that empowering women would help decrease the poverty of individuals and improve community economic empowerment. In addition, empowering women through entrepreneurial activities would help women to establish their own small tourism firms (i.e. handicrafts, cultural heritage

aspects) that would support the local economy.

Moreover, Boley et al. (2015) showed that empowerment was the best example of community involvement besides stakeholders' engagement in the sustainable development process. Boley et al. (2014) found that the psychological dimension of women's empowerment positively affected residents' support for tourism, as it increased their pride in their destination's culture and heritage. Similarly, Strzelecka et al. (2017) found that psychological empowerment was one of the best drivers of communities' support for sustainable tourism development. A recent study by Aghazamani et al. (2020) revealed that women's empowerment is affected by their society's culture and claimed that the relationship between women's empowerment and tourism development, particularly in emerging economies, should be investigated with consideration of cultural matters. To this end, the third hypothesis of the present study is formulated as follows:

H3. Women's empowerment dimensions (psychological (H3.1), social (H3.2), political (H3.3), and economic (H3.4)) positively support tourism development.

2.3.1. Measuring empowerment

Empowerment has been measured in previous studies. For example, Scheyvens (1999) presented a four-dimensional framework to measure the empowerment of local communities through eco-tourism. This framework included four main constructs for measuring empowerment: (1) economic, (2) psychological, (3) social, and (4) political. Later, Cole (2006) looked at empowerment as an active psychological and political participation of the local community in sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, Boley et al. (2014) developed and validated a measure of residents' empowerment through tourism (RETS). The measure included three main dimensions: psychological, social, and political empowerment. Additionally, Boley et al. (2014) further developed their RETS by adding a tourism economic benefits dimension to investigate the impact of empowerment on residents' attitudes towards tourism in three counties in Virginia. To test RETS across cultures, Boley et al. (2015) also applied it in the Japanese context. Moreover, Ramos and Prideaux (2014) added an environmental protection dimension to the existing empowerment measures, referring to natural resources in destinations being conserved by the local community. Later, Movono and Dahles (2017) presented some case studies from businesses, showing that women could be empowered through entrepreneurship, not only economically, but also psychologically, socially, and politically. Likewise, Strzelecka et al. (2017) measured empowerment through three dimensions, psychological, social, and political, in addition to economic benefits through tourism, while Arroyo et al. (2019), based on Scheyvens's framework, measured the contribution of agritourism to women's psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment. The following sections deal with the four dimensions of empowerment: economic, psychological, social, and political.

2.3.1.1. Economic empowerment.
Economic empowerment refers to the economic benefits and access to productive resources (providing regular income) arising from employment opportunities that are generated and the fair distribution of economic benefits (Scheyvens, 1999). Arroyo et al. (2019) pointed out that tourism empowers women by not only providing them with business opportunities but also giving them control over the profits generated, making them independent and highlighting their role in supporting their families. Furthermore, Boley et al. (2014) revealed that community residents are significantly affected by the economic profits of tourism, even if they are not working in tourism, which explains their help for tourism development. Similarly, Scheyvens (2000) and Strzelecka et al. (2017) emphasized the role of economic empowerment as an important predictor of local communities' support for tourism development.

2.3.1.2. Psychological empowerment.
While economic benefits are a vital component of women's empowerment, the World Tourism Organization (2019) has reported that the concept of women's empowerment should be looked at beyond the economic perspective. Psychological empowerment is another dimension considered in the women's empowerment literature. It refers to feelings of pride in their local traditions and culture (Scheyvens, 1999). This pride in one's local culture leads to residents having a sense of self-esteem and uniqueness (Boley & McGehee, 2014). According to Boley et al. (2014), psychological empowerment positively influences residents' attitudes towards the positive influences of tourism, and their encouragement for tourist activities. Similarly, Arroyo et al. (2019) revealed that agritourism plays a significant role in empowering women psychologically, and strengthens their sense of independence and self-esteem. In the same vein, Boley et al. (2015) revealed that residents' sense of pride in their country and culture is an aspect of psychological empowerment that signifies their support for tourism.

2.3.1.3. Social empowerment.
Social empowerment refers to the sense of community cohesion resulting from an activity such as women's involvement in tourism activities (Scheyvens, 1999). It is claimed that social empowerment is the most important dimension of empowerment, and it is the basis for both political and psychological empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Friedmann, 1992). According to Strzelecka et al. (2017), tourism projects can bring community members together and strengthen their joint social relationships. These tourism activities help increase social interaction between residents and their community, and also increase their feelings of community attachment (Boley & McGehee, 2014). In previous research, social empowerment is referred to by multiple terms, including community collaboration and social capital, which are basic requirements of development strategies (Boley et al., 2014). Arroyo et al. (2019) revealed that tourism activities elevate the social status of women in their society. In fact, social empowerment has been discovered to be the essential driver of citizens' optimistic attitudes towards tourism development (Boley et al., 2015).

2.3.1.4. Political empowerment.
Empowering women and youth, to engage them in the decision-making process, guides the development process of tourism projects (Scheyvens, 1999). Political empowerment motivates residents to use and control social resources, and participate in relevant decisions related to the achievement of sustainable tourism development (Strzelecka et al., 2017). Participation in decision-making helps residents control the direction of tourism development (Boley & McGehee, 2014). It also allows them to have an active role in tourism planning processes (Boley et al., 2014). Despite the cultural restrictions on women's representation in leadership positions in tourism, it is evident that women's participation in the decision-making process is positively affecting tourism development (Arroyo et al., 2019). Demonstrating the increased political empowerment of women, recent statistics show that tourism has the highest representation of female ministers (23%, globally one in five ministers of tourism is a woman) and that countries with a female tourism minister score higher on the women's political index (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

2.4. Women's empowerment in the current study's settings

Noting the WTTC (2019)'s highlighting of the fact that the gender gap is in wide existence in emerging countries and the Arab countries in particular due to cultural norms, the present study compares the perceptions of women's empowerment in three Arab countries, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the Sultanate of Oman, and how this empowerment influences the support for tourism development. This section highlights the practices being applied by the three countries to empower women.

The three countries selected in the present study have similar

cultural aspects, including religion, culture and language. However, looking at the global gender gap index, there are significant differences in the performance of women's empowerment strategies among the three countries. The UAE ranks second best among the Middle East countries. It has witnessed significant reforms in legislation and policies that help to empower women across all sectors (The UAE's Governmental Portal, 2020). On the other hand, the Omani society has strict customs and traditions that warrant its description as a conservative society (Alsawafi, 2016). This supports Afifi and Al-Sherif (2014), who argued that culture was the key challenge for women's empowerment in the tourism industry in Oman. Recently, giving cause for optimism, the Omani society, with government support, has begun to look positively at the tourism sector and its contribution to society economically, socially, and environmentally (Afifi & Al-Sherif, 2014). Falling somewhere in between the second-best performer for women's empowerment in the Middle East (i.e., the UAE) and the conservative society of Oman, Egypt is an open society that is actively trying to reduce the gender gap in various ways. Egypt has developed a strategy to empower women across a wide range of areas of society and has conducted a sweeping legislative reform in order to do so (National Council for Women, 2017). There is remarkable growth in women's contribution to the labour force and in governmental representation, particularly in the tourism sector (World Economic Forum, 2019). Therefore, the present study compares three different models of women's empowerment in three Arab and Islamic countries with similarities in culture, religion and language.

2.4.1. Egypt and women's empowerment

Egypt ranks 8th among the Middle East countries in the global gender gap index. It has reduced 62.9% of its gender gap so far, 25% of ministerial positions are held by women, and 24.7% of the labour force is female (World Economic Forum, 2019). In line with its Vision 2030, Egypt has developed a strategy to empower women and enable them to contribute to the country's development, while maximizing women's protection and empowerment economically, politically, and socially. Egypt has reformed much of its legislation to increase women's political participation and to decrease the gender gap and ensure women are represented in leadership positions. In addition, Egypt has recently started promoting entrepreneurship initiatives for recent university graduates of both genders (Mahmoud et al., 2019). The Egyptian government encourages entrepreneurial women through entrepreneurship initiatives and financial support schemes that are directed towards women through national banks. Furthermore, the government has planned numerous capacity-building training programmes for women, to help them build the qualities needed to obtain work. Socially, several pieces of legislation have been reformed to support women and the care of the elderly and disabled (National Council for Women, 2017).

2.4.2. The UAE and women's empowerment

The UAE is the second-best performer among the Middle East countries in the global gender gap index. More than half of the labour force in the UAE is female (52%), and 29% of ministerial positions are held by women (World Economic Forum, 2019). Furthermore, it ranks eighth in the Middle East, in wage equality for similar work. The UAE established the Gender Balance Council in 2015 to support Emirati women's role in the country's development. In 2018, the UAE approved a law of equal wages for women and men. In addition, the UAE has launched a number of initiatives aimed at empowering women economically, and in 2012 a decision was approved to enforce mandatory membership of the boards of directors of federal bodies, companies and organizations by Emirati women. Women in the UAE have equal rights to access economic resources, and women own 10% of all private-sector business (The UAE's Governmental Portal, 2020).

2.4.3. Oman and women's empowerment

Oman ranks 13th among the Middle East countries in the global gender gap index. Only 6.7% of ministerial positions are held by women

and 32.4% of women are in the labour force (World Economic Forum, 2019). In 2001, Oman launched the National Strategy for Omani Women Development project. In 2010, the economic participation of Omani women reached 25.2%. A number of pieces of legislation were issued to preserve women's rights and ensure equal wages for men and women. 282 articles for women's rights are included in the Omani Personal Status Law. Oman celebrates the Woman's Day on 17th of October every year to appreciate the great efforts and contributions of women towards the Omani society's development (The Official Oman eGovernment Services Portal, 2020).

2.5. Research framework

Previous studies have investigated women's empowerment from different perspectives. Some studies have examined the relationships between empowerment and residents' attitudes towards tourism support (i.e., Boley et al., 2014; Boley et al., 2015; Strzelecka et al., 2017). Other research has investigated the role of the tourism industry in empowering women (i.e., Arroyo et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2015; Hutchings et al., 2020; Pandey, 2015; Tinker, 2006). A third category of previous research has studied the relationship between entrepreneurship and empowerment (i.e., Aghazamani et al., 2020; Carvalho et al., 2019; Çiçek et al., 2017; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Hutchings et al., 2020). Integrating these previous studies' findings, the present study has developed a research framework that includes women's empowerment as a mediator between general attitudes towards women's work, women's entrepreneurship, and tourism sector development. Fig. 1 shows that perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship are predictors (i.e. antecedents) of women's empowerment, as referred to in the first and second hypotheses. Moreover, the present study examines the consequences of empowering women in terms of the contribution to tourism development (the third hypothesis).

From Fig. 1, it is clear that there are three main hypotheses regarding how the empowerment dimensions act as mediators between perceptions of women's work in tourism, women's entrepreneurship and tourism development.

3. Research method

The present paper adopted the quantitative method, using a questionnaire form to gather data from university students (i.e. tourism major) across the three countries. Participants were randomly selected from universities across the UAE, Egypt, and Oman. Based on the findings of Shunmuga, Sekar, and Subburaj (2015), the level of education is a significant enabler of women's empowerment and the main medium through which women become empowered. Therefore, the researchers believe that university students should have a reasonable level of education sufficient to allow them to identify the empowerment practices in their societies. Furthermore, it is easy and convenient to access participants within this population (i.e., university students). The researchers used their colleagues and friends from universities in the three countries to help randomly distribute the questionnaire form among students. Simple random sampling was employed in the present study. This is a common type of probability sampling that helps decrease bias in participant selection and improves the representation of the target population, as well as being suitable for data collection from large geographical areas via electronic mediums (e.g. an online survey) (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).

Thus, data were collected via an online survey, with a link sent to university students through the help of colleagues and friends. Following the recommendations of Kock and Hadaya (2018) and Kock (2020), the statistical power and sample size requirements' function in WarpPLS was used and indicated that the recommended sample size should be 160 or above. The data collected in the present study exceeded the threshold of 160, with 784 responses collected from female university students across the three countries investigated in the study:
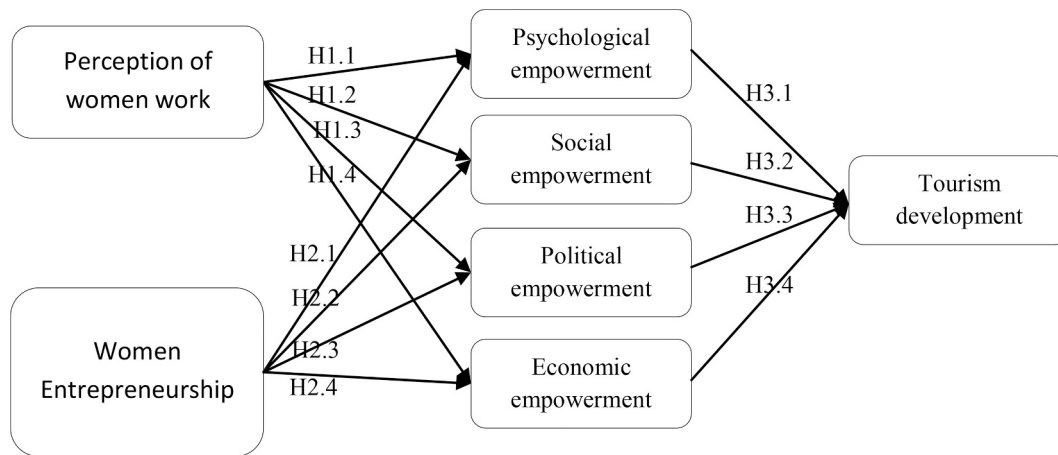
Fig. 1. The research proposed model.

Egypt (266 responses), the UAE (265 responses) and Oman (253 responses). Table 1 shows the number of responses collected from each country along with universities' names.

The questionnaire form used in the present study was developed based on the literature (see Appendix A). The scale of perceptions of women's work in tourism was adapted from Alrwajfah et al. (2020) and Alsawafi (2016), and is based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree – 5 = strongly agree). The women's entrepreneurship scale was adapted from Pandey (2015) and Shingla and Singh (2015). The items relating to women's empowerment dimensions (i.e. psychological, social, political and economic) and tourism development were adapted from previous research (i.e., Boley et al., 2014; Boley et al., 2015; Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999).

As for data analysis, PLS-SEM, an advanced multivariate technique, was used to measure the research model hypotheses, with WarpPLS (7) software. PLS-SEM is applicable when research involves theory development (Hair et al., 2016). First, a statistical model was run for each country. Then, a comparison of the three models was conducted to reveal significant implications for women's empowerment in the research's three settings. In addition, descriptive statistics of the study's constructs (means, standard deviations (SD), and ANOVA statistics) were calculated and are presented in the next section.

4. Findings

4.1. Mean and SD of research model constructs

Table 2 shows that respondents in the three research settings have positive responses towards the research constructs: perceptions of women's work in tourism, women's entrepreneurship, the empowerment dimensions (psychological, social, political, and economic), and tourism development. However, the ANOVA test shows that there are significant differences among the mean responses in the three countries

Table 2
Constructs' mean and ANOVA test.

Construct	Egypt	UAE	Oman	F	Sig.
Perceptions towards women work	3.79	4.20	3.58	50.193	<0.01
Women entrepreneurship	3.64	4.07	3.67	27.024	<0.01
Psychological empowerment	3.60	3.78	4.23	36.388	<0.01
Social empowerment	3.86	4.24	3.67	39.503	<0.01
Political empowerment	4.09	4.27	3.37	120.404	<0.01
Economic empowerment	3.64	4.18	3.69	41.099	<0.01
Tourism development	3.81	4.13	3.96	12.262	<0.01

(i.e. Egypt, the UAE, and Oman), in terms of the respondents' level of agreement with the research constructs.

4.2. Measurement models

The measurement model looks at the association between the latent variables and their indicators. To ensure the quality of the measurement models in the current study, all instruments were investigated for validity and reliability purposes. Table 3 shows the reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) of all the constructs. In addition, the square roots of the AVE are shown in Table 4.

Based on Taheri, Olya, Ali, and Gannon (2020), Table 3 demonstrates that both the composite reliability and the Cronbach's alpha values exceed the threshold of 0.7, showing the measurement models of the present study to be reliable. Besides, Table 3 illustrates appropriate convergent validity for all constructs adopted in this study, with all the AVEs being larger than the minimum threshold of 0.5 (Hair Jr, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). Table 3 also indicates that all constructs' variance inflation factors (VIFs) are less than 5, demonstrating the non-existence of both multicollinearity and common method bias (Hair Jr et al., 2020; Kock, 2020). Table 4 illustrates that the square roots of AVEs of all the

Table 1
Number of responses collected from the study's settings.

Egypt			UAE			Oman		
Universities	No.	%	Universities	No.	%	Universities	No.	%
Fayoum University	37	14.0	University of Sharjah	61	23.0	Salalah College of Applied Sciences	51	20.2
Southern Valley University	31	11.7	University of Sharjah, Khorfakkan	39	14.6	Nizwa College of Applied Sciences	44	17.4
Helwan University	29	10.9	University of Sharjah, Kalba	35	13.2	Ibri College of Applied Sciences	45	17.8
Alexandria University	31	11.7	University of Sharjah, Al Dhaid	31	11.6	Rustaq College of Applied Sciences	41	16.2
Minia University	35	13.2	United Arab Emirates University	100	37.6	Salalah College of Technology	39	15.4
Mansoura University	31	11.7	Total	266	100	Oman Tourism College	33	13.0
Sadat City University	36	13.6				Total	253	100
Beni-Suef University	35	13.2						
Total	265	100						

Table 3
Reliability, convergent validity and multicollinearity.

Variable	Composite reliability			Cronbach's alpha			AVE			VIF		
	EGY	UAE	OM	EGY	UAE	OM	EGY	UAE	OM	EGY	UAE	OM
PWW	0.853	0.933	0.894	0.793	0.913	0.857	0.591	0.698	0.584	4.68	3.045	1.169
WEP	0.818	0.908	0.882	0.763	0.848	0.800	0.605	0.768	0.714	3.85	4.687	1.620
PSY	0.816	0.863	0.994	0.795	0.786	0.838	0.534	0.617	0.682	1.30	1.410	1.391
SEM	0.852	0.930	0.886	0.737	0.886	0.806	0.662	0.815	0.721	3.06	4.869	1.897
PEM	0.920	0.928	0.925	0.884	0.896	0.891	0.742	0.763	0.754	2.89	4.044	1.329
EEM	0.872	0.942	0.877	0.779	0.907	0.788	0.694	0.843	0.704	3.00	3.216	1.488
EDV	0.908	0.945	0.905	0.848	0.912	0.843	0.768	0.850	0.761	3.78	3.919	1.588

Note: PWW = Perception towards women work in tourism; WEP = Women Entrepreneurship; PSY = Psychological empowerment; SEM = Social empowerment; PEM = Political empowerment; EEM = Economic empowerment; EDV = Tourism development; EGY = Egypt; UAE = United Arab Emirates; OM = Oman.

Table 4
Discriminant validity of the correlations among constructs.

Study	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Egypt	1.PWW	(0.769)						
	2.WEP	0.708	(0.778)					
	3.PSY	0.351	0.430	(0.731)				
	4.SEM	0.765	0.635	0.348	(0.814)			
	5.PEM	0.733	0.573	0.373	0.747	(0.861)		
	6.EEM	0.753	0.686	0.315	0.640	0.547	(0.833)	
	7.EDV	0.696	0.727	0.459	0.629	0.643	0.631	(0.876)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) UAE	1.PWW	(0.836)						
	2.WEP	0.830	(0.876)					
	3.PSY	0.488	0.504	(0.786)				
	4.SEM	0.778	0.808	0.416	(0.903)			
	5.PEM	0.800	0.832	0.428	0.853	(0.873)		
	6.EEM	0.826	0.835	0.490	0.775	0.818	(0.918)	
	7.EDV	0.822	0.863	0.522	0.763	0.808	0.831	(0.922)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) Oman	1.PWW	(0.764)						
	2.WEP	0.233	(0.845)					
	3.PSY	0.214	0.440	(0.826)				
	4.SEM	0.282	0.538	0.449	(0.849)			
	5.PEM	0.240	0.423	0.238	0.420	(0.839)		
	6.EEM	0.302	0.275	0.193	0.301	0.424	(0.868)	
	7.EDV	0.179	0.382	0.382	0.552	0.398	0.326	(0.873)

constructs surpass all the other cross-correlations among the latent variables, assuring the discriminant validity of the constructs (Cheah, Sarstedt, Ringle, Ramayah, & Ting, 2018). Finally, the novel heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) rate of relationships is also used to test the instruments' discriminant validity (Henseler, 2018). Based on Kock (2020), if the HTMT value is less than 0.90, then the discriminant validity is said to be good. This is the case for all the latent variables, indicating sufficient discriminant validity.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

The structural models shown in Fig. 2 introduce the path coefficients (β), the p values and the R^2 values for the hypothesized model of this research. In the following sections, the structural results for the three countries, Egypt, the UAE and Oman, will be introduced.

4.3.1. Study (1): Egypt
The results show that positive perceptions of women's work in tourism have a positive effect on women's psychological empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.11$ and $p < 0.05$), social empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.64$ and $p < 0.01$), political empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.67$ and $p < 0.01$), and economic empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.60$ and $p < 0.01$). Hence, H1.1, H1.2, H1.3, and H1.4 are respectively accepted for the Egyptian model and the society's positive perceptions of women's work in tourism are positively affecting the perceptions of women's empowerment, psychologically, socially, politically, and economically.

Besides this, the results show that women's entrepreneurship has a positive influence on women's psychological empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.38$ and $p < 0.01$), social empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.24$ and $p < 0.01$), political empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.11$ and $p < 0.01$), and economic empowerment ($\beta1 = 0.26$ and $p < 0.01$). Thus, H2.1, H2.2, H2.3, and H2.4 are respectively accepted for the Egyptian model, leading to the finding that women's entrepreneurship is one of the main drivers of women's empowerment. Generally, the perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship explain 21% of the variance in women's psychological empowerment ($R^2_1 = 0.21$), 61% of that in their social empowerment ($R^2_1 = 0.61$), 65% of that in their political empowerment ($R^2_1 = 0.65$), and 66% of that in their economic empowerment ($R^2_1 = 0.66$).

From Fig. 2, it is clear that economic empowerment has a strong positive effect on tourism development in Egypt ($\beta1 = 0.31$ and $p < 0.01$) (H3.4 is accepted). Similarly, psychological empowerment, political empowerment, and social empowerment have a positive effect on tourism development ($\beta1 = 0.27$; $\beta1 = 0.26$; $\beta1 = 0.15$ respectively, and $p < 0.01$) (H3.1, H3.3 and H3.2 are respectively accepted). Overall, the women's empowerment dimensions (psychological, social, political, and economic) explain 59% of the variance in the Egyptian tourism development ($R^2_1 = 0.59$), and women's empowerment is found to be one of the main predictors of women's support for tourism development in Egypt.

4.3.2. Study (2): UAE
The results indicate that the perceptions of women's work in tourism are positively affecting women's empowerment, psychologically ($\beta2 =$
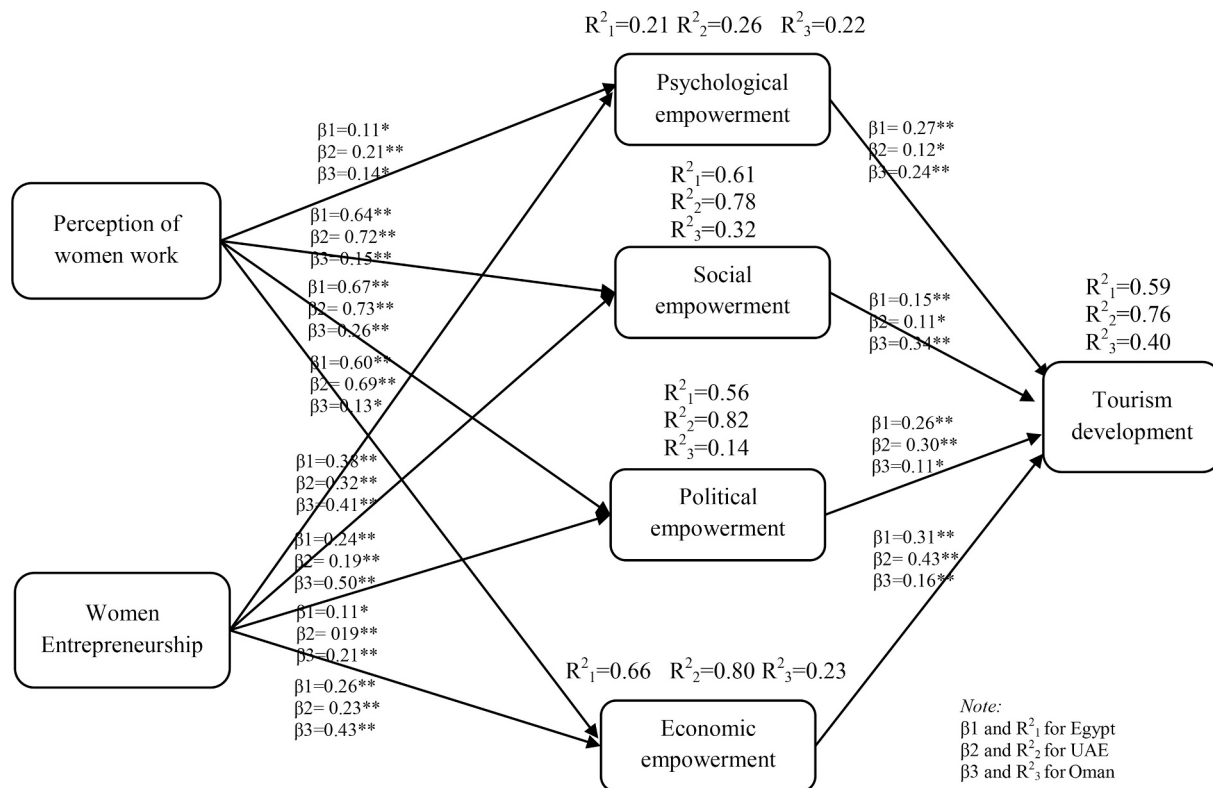
$R^2_1 = 0.21 \quad R^2_2 = 0.26 \quad R^2_3 = 0.22$

Fig. 2. The research structural models: women empowerment and tourism development.

0.21, $p < 0.01$, and H1.1 is accepted), socially ($\beta2 = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$, and H1.2 is accepted), politically ($\beta2 = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$, and H1.3 is accepted), and economically ($\beta2 = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$, and H1.4 is accepted). In addition, the results show that women's entrepreneurship has a positive influence on women's psychological empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.1 is accepted), social empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.2 is accepted), political empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.3 is accepted), and economic empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.4 is accepted). Overall, the perceptions of women's work and women's entrepreneurship explain 26% of the variance in women's psychological empowerment ($R^2_2 = 0.26$), 78% of that in their social empowerment ($R^2_2 = 0.78$), 82% of that in their political empowerment ($R^2_2 = 0.82$), and 80% of that in their economic empowerment ($R^2_2 = 0.80$).

Fig. 2 shows that economic empowerment has a strong positive influence on tourism development in the UAE ($\beta2 = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.4 is accepted), followed by the effects of political empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.3 is accepted), psychological empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$, and H3.1 is accepted), and social empowerment ($\beta2 = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$, and H3.2 is accepted). Overall, women's empowerment explains 76% of the variance in the UAE's tourism development ($R^2_2 = 0.76$).

4.3.3. Study (3): Oman

As for the Omani context, the results demonstrate that the perceptions of women's work in tourism have positive impacts on women's psychological empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$, and H1.1 is accepted), social empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$, and H1.2 is accepted), political empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$, and H1.3 is accepted), and economic empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$, and H1.4 is accepted). On the other hand, the results show that women's entrepreneurship has a positive influence on women's psychological empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.1 is accepted), social empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.2 is accepted), political

empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.3 is accepted), and economic empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$, and H2.4 is accepted). Generally, the perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship explain 22% of the variance in women's psychological empowerment ($R^2_3 = 0.22$), 32% of that in their social empowerment ($R^2_3 = 0.32$), 14% of that in their political empowerment ($R^2_3 = 0.14$), and 23% of that in their economic empowerment ($R^2_3 = 0.23$).

Fig. 2 indicates that social empowerment has a strong positive effect on tourism development in Oman ($\beta3 = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.2 is accepted), followed by the effects of psychological empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.1 is accepted), economic empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.4 is accepted), and political empowerment ($\beta3 = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$, and H3.3 is accepted). Overall, the women's empowerment dimensions, psychological, social, political, and economic, explain 40% of the variance in Omani women's support for tourism development ($R^2 = 0.40$).

5. Discussion of findings

The main aims of this study were to (1) investigate female students' perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship, as predictors of women's empowerment, and (2) measure and compare the effect of women's empowerment on tourism development in three Arab countries: Egypt, the UAE, and Oman, through the lens of the social exchange theory. To achieve the research aims, the quantitative method based on the deductive approach was adopted, with a questionnaire form used to collect data from 784 female university students across the three countries included in the study: Egypt (266 responses), the UAE (265 responses) and Oman (253 responses). Generally, the research findings support the suggested research model and all the hypotheses of the study. The study shows that women's work in tourism helps women's empowerment, socially, politically, and economically, and psychologically, to be achieved. In other words, tourism can support the achievement of the fifth UN-SDG by providing

women with jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

These results are in line with some prior studies (i.e., Çiçek et al., 2017; Hutchings et al., 2020; Shingla & Singh, 2015). Duffy et al. (2015) found that women's work in tourism supported their economic and social empowerment. Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2020) also indicated that tourism-related entrepreneurial activity had great potential for enabling women's empowerment. In addition, Pandey (2015) stated that women's entrepreneurship was the main driver of women's empowerment and gender equality, which is the fifth UN-SDG.

Besides, this study has revealed that perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship are positively affecting tourism development. However, the findings show significant differences among the mean responses and effects of these variables on tourism development in the three countries (i.e. Egypt, UAE, and Oman) because of variance in women's empowerment. These variances are in line with the gender gap index (World Economic Forum, 2019) that ranks UAE the second-best performer among the Middle East countries, followed by Egypt (8th) and then Oman (13th). This can be explained by reforms carried out by the UAE government to provide women equal rights to economic resources and entrepreneurship opportunities. Similarly, the Egyptian government encourages women to initiate entrepreneurship activities through national bank financial support schemes (National Council for Women, 2017). These countries have undertaken significant actions to accomplish the fifth UN-SDG (gender equality and empowerment for women). Regarding Oman, Alsawafi (2016) attributed Oman's lagging behind the Emirates and Egypt in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment in tourism to the conservative tendency of the Omani people regarding traditions, customs and cultural aspects.

Turning to the direct effect of women's empowerment on tourism development, the results suggest that their empowerment (i.e., the psychological, social, political and economic aspects of it) has a strong positive effect on tourism development. This means that women's empowerment plays a leading role in the accomplishment of sustainable tourism development. These results are consistent with the study of Boley and McGehee (2014), which showed that empowering women would facilitate the achievement of sustainable tourism development goals. Boley et al. (2015) explained that this was due to the fact that empowerment is the main form of community involvement in the development process and the catalyst for achieving gender equality and women's economic independence (5th UN-SDG).

More specifically, economically, tourism could empower women by offering them business opportunities, achieving the concept of women's independence, and emphasizing their role in supporting their families' livelihoods (Arroyo et al., 2019), thus fulfilling not only the fifth UN-SDG (gender equality and women's empowerment) but also the first and eighth goals (no poverty and decent and economic growth respectively). This is also in line with Scheyvens (2000) and Strzelecka et al. (2017), who asserted that economic gains and access to productive resources have an important role to play in creating residents' support for sustainable tourism development. In addition to the economic empowerment, community members' pride in traditions and local culture (Scheyvens, 1999) leads to residents having a sense of self-esteem and uniqueness (Boley & McGehee, 2014), and positively influences their attitudes towards the positive impacts of sustainable tourism development (Boley et al., 2014). In other words, Boley et al. (2015) agreed that residents' feelings of pride in their country's heritage and local culture were the most important aspect of women's psychological empowerment, stimulating their support for tourism development.

Furthermore, women's involvement in tourism activities is crucial to achieving a sense of local community cohesion (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). Ensuring women's full and effective participation strengthens their attachment to their community (Boley & McGehee, 2014). This has caused Boley et al. (2015) to conclude that social empowerment is a significant stimulant of residents' positive attitudes towards sustainable tourism development. Moreover, supporting

the empowerment of women in any society involves the political facet, which requires women's participation in the decision-making process. This participation can support residents' contribution to the direction a community needs to go in to achieve sustainable tourism development (Arroyo et al., 2019; Boley & McGehee, 2014).

Since sustainable tourism development can only be achieved with the participation of the local community in its activities, and with the community benefiting from its revenues, it can be said that the development of sustainable tourism can only be achieved through gender equality and the empowerment of women, through their involvement in the tourism sector as vital members of society. This idea is in line with the achievement of the fifth UN-SDG (The World Bank, 2018; Tinker, 2006).

Despite the critical importance of empowering women in order for sustainable tourism development to be achieved, women's participation in the decision-making process and managerial positions remains poor in the tourism and hospitality sector (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Here cultural differences and the nature of each society in terms of openness or conservativeness significantly affect the outcomes of the current research. In confirmation of previous findings, this study has found that the impact of empowering women on the achievement of sustainable tourism development is greater in both the UAE and Egypt than in Oman. Recent results revealed by Aghazamani et al. (2020) and Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore, and Yang (2020) show that the empowerment of women is affected by the culture of their society, and this is also evident from the results of the current study.

6. Conclusion and implications

This study examines the impact of women's empowerment on support for tourism development in three Arab and Muslim countries, Egypt, the UAE, and Oman. It also investigates the role of perceptions of women's work in tourism and female entrepreneurship in empowering women in the three settings of the study. The findings reveal that perceptions of women's work and entrepreneurship are antecedents of women's empowerment. Furthermore, they show that, due to the widespread adoption of women's empowerment policies, the UAE ranks first among the three countries investigated in the present study, in regards to the impact of women's empowerment on support for tourism development, followed by Egypt and then Oman. This empowerment will help these countries to achieve the UN-SDGs relating to decreasing poverty, reducing gender inequality, enhancing women's empowerment and improving economic growth. The present study adds to existing knowledge of women's empowerment and tourism development by responding to the claim of WTTC (2019) that gender inequality is prevalent in the Arab countries as a result of cultural aspects. This study provides empirical evidence from three Arab countries with different local cultural norms.

As for contribution to theory, the present study extends the framework developed by Boley et al. (2014) and the social exchange theory by adding two predictors of women's empowerment: perceptions of women's work in tourism and women's entrepreneurship. The newly added predictors provide significant empirical evidence that countries with a positive attitude towards women's work in tourism and that encourage women entrepreneurs are pioneers in regards to women's empowerment concerns, with high scores for the fifth UN-SDG. The model developed in this study is rigorously tested in three different local cultures and provides significant results. Furthermore, the present research compares the results of the structural models in the three different Arab countries and shows that these countries are trying their best to reduce the gender gap and to support women's engagement and employment in the tourism sector.

As for the managerial implications, the findings of the present research provide a roadmap for countries working to achieve the UN-SDGs by bridging gender gaps, promoting women's empowerment, and enabling women's participation in the managerial levels of the

tourism sector in particular, and in the national economy in general. The findings reveal that the UAE has taken important strides on the path to empowering women. Women's entrepreneurship should be considered a vital component of the empowerment index. Egypt and Oman need to step up their efforts to empower women in the tourism industry. Egypt has taken serious steps with regards entrepreneurship by launching a number of initiatives to encourage young people of both genders to become entrepreneurs and set up their own small businesses through funding schemes offered by the national banks in the country.

Regarding the empowerment dimensions, it can be perceived from the results that the Omani respondents solidly agreed with the women's psychological empowerment items, showing feelings of pride in their country and their culture. The UAE and Egyptian respondents also exhibited significant perceptions of their countries and identities. Similarly, the respondents' perceptions of social empowerment are positive in the three countries. As expected, economic empowerment is the main dimension of women's empowerment that drives support for tourism development. Therefore, the economic benefits gained by women cause their significant support for tourism development. Countries should use the tourism sector as an enabler of the fifth UN-SDG to reduce gender gaps and engage women in their activities and businesses (eighth UN-SDG). It is empirically proven that the tourism sector offers great opportunities for empowering women. Oman in particular should improve the economic empowerment aspects for women and encourage them to participate and work in tourism jobs.

It is also revealed that Egypt and the UAE have significant strategies in place for women's political empowerment. This is clear as 25% and 29% of the ministerial positions in Egypt and the UAE respectively are held by women versus only 6.7% in Oman. This aspect calls on the government of Oman to increase women's representation in political positions. In general, more than half of the labour force of the UAE are women, which is a direct indication of women's empowerment. Tourism initiatives should also promote the involvement of women and take gender equality into consideration. Governments should launch further initiatives to allow women entrepreneurs to take part in the development plans for tourism. Investment schemes for women should be implemented to promote the empowerment of women in hospitality, crafts and other heritage-related businesses.

7. Limitations and future research directions

Some limitations of the present research must be addressed. First, the study is limited to using female university students as the respondents. Second, the impact of the respondents' age, educational major and educational stage are not considered in this research. Future research should compare females working in and outside of the tourism sector to explore their perceptions of women's empowerment. Qualitative research should also be conducted to investigate cultural differences and their effect on women's empowerment in the tourism sector.

Appendix A. Questionnaire items

Country: a. Egypt b. UAE c. Oman University:
Major: Gender:
Perceptions of women's work in tourism (1 = Strongly Disagree = SD) to 5 = Strongly Agree = SA).
PW1. Women's work in tourism is acceptable in my community.
PW2. Women's work in tourism does not conflict with cultural norms and traditions in my community.
PW3. Women's work in the tourism public sector is more accepted by the community than working in the tourism private sector.
PW4. In my community, it is widely believed that women's work in tourism has a negative effect on their family.
PW5. In my community, it is widely believed that certain tourism jobs are more suitable for women than men.
PW6. My community opposes women working in the tourism sector.

Women's entrepreneurship (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
WE1. My community encourages women's entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.
WE2. Women entrepreneurs in my community support the empowerment of women in the tourism sector.
WE3. Women entrepreneurs in my community give women an opportunity to access the tourism market and market local products/services.
Psychological empowerment (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
PE1. I am proud to be a resident of a tourist destination country.
PE2. I feel special because individuals travel to see my country's attractions.
PE3. I feel proud to share the unique culture of my country with tourists.
PE4. Tourism helps women to have self-esteem and be independent.
Social empowerment (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
SE1. Working in tourism leads me to be connected to the community.
SE2. Working in tourism allows me to be involved in the community.
SE3. Involving women in tourism leads to useful benefits for the country and empowers women socially.
Political empowerment (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
PM1. Women have a voice that affects tourism development decisions.
PM2. There are channels for me to share my interests about tourism development in my country.
PM3. The government empowers women to work in tourism and to change negative thoughts towards women working in tourism.
PM4. Women hold leadership positions in tourism/hospitality sectors in my country.
Economic empowerment (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
EE1. Tourism provides job opportunities for women in my country.
EE2. Tourism secures a reasonable income for women in my country.
EE3. Tourism's economic empowerment of women supports their independence.
Tourism sector development (1 = SD to 5 = SA).
TD1. Empowering women in tourism activities contributes to tourism sector development in my country.
TD2. There is an actual necessity to involve women in the tourism sector in my country so as to achieve tourism development effectiveness.
TD3. Involving women in tourism activities is essential for tourism sector development in my country.

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