

The impact of women's empowerment on sustainable tourism development: Mediating role of tourism involvement

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment has been prioritised in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) recently, in line with the Saudi Vision 2030; albeit, women are still underrepresented in tourism industry. However, if robust women's empowerment is consolidated into planning and implementation processes, tourism can act as a vehicle for encouraging gender parity. This study examines the direct impact of women's empowerment (psychologically, politically, and socially) on sustainable tourism development (STD) and the indirect impact through tourism involvement. A total of 1000 women involved in the tourism industry in KSA filled out self-administrated questionnaires, analyzed using SPSS™ and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The results suggest that tourism involvement partially mediates the relationship between psychological and political empowerment and STD. Nonetheless, it fully mediates the relationship between social empowerment and STD. Several implications of the results for both policy-makers, tourism planners and tourism scholars are discussed.

1. Introduction

For decades, a great deal of research has been conducted to advance the notion of empowerment and enhance its applicability across diverse industries. Although the term "empowerment" has been widely used as a catchphrase by politicians to pass their agenda in an exploitative way (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Topal, 2019), its instrumental effect in promoting social equity and fairness within different social groups and communities is well-recognized. Getting back to its roots, Boserup (1970) pioneered empowerment discussions in an economic development setting by creating a framework that was later used by others for empowerment. Nonetheless, the term "empowerment" was first used by Freire (1973), Rappaport (1981), and Friedmann (1992), in which they employed it as a yardstick to assess the impact of developmental policies and activities. During the 1990s, a plethora of research showed a tendency to harness empowerment for the service of women, for reasons pertaining to female mobilization and female leadership in different working and social settings (Torri & Martinez, 2014). Since then, women's empowerment has been used as a remedy for issues related to

pay gap, political participation, gender stereotyping, and gender discrimination (Agu, 2007; McMillan, O'Gorman, & MacLaren, 2011; Mosedale, 2005). This makes it imperative for women's empowerment to entail multiple facets, notably, psychologically, politically, and socially as will be considered in this research.

In 2016, the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Mohamed Bin Salaman, launched the Saudi Vision 2030 to become the Saudi strategic framework reducing over-dependence on oil and opening the door for promoting new industries, especially tourism and entertainment (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). To advance the Saudi Vision 2030, the Kingdom has issued 90 days tourism visas in September 2019 for international visitors to be obtained online or on arrival. The Saudi Vision 2030 has also promoted women's rights and encouraged their empowerment in several sectors including tourism industry. This effort was supplemented by the attempts of the Ministry of Tourism reformation which aims to raise the contribution of women to the tourism labor market to 30% (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The current proportion of women in the KSA tourism labour market is 8.1% of the overall market according to the Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the

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Middle East (UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), 2020a). In the same context, Topal (2019; 1) argued that “Saudi Arabia is a test case for questioning the extent to which business-friendly ‘women’s empowerment’ can actually contribute to the emancipation of women”. This is particularly crucial for the tourism industry, where women’s representation is growing in the Saudi tourism industry. Additionally, at these early stages of development, it is important to examine women’s empowerment since it is vital for tourism involvement and sustainable development (Boley, Ayscue, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2017). This will ultimately contribute to the achievement of sustainability in KSA and fulfillment of UN SDGs. Sustainable tourism development (STD) is defined as a continuous process that takes a full consideration of current and future economic, social and environmental tourism impacts (UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), 2020b). STD should consider the need of visitors, the industry, the environment as well as the involvement of host community (Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002). Women are almost half of Saudi’s population and a growing segment in Saudi’s tourism labor market. Albeit, their empowerment and involvement in tourism development for the sake of STD is crucial, especially at the early stage of tourism development and when tourism development is new in a country like KSA. This research addresses this issue further and examines women’s perceptions of empowerment through tourism in KSA and its impact on their involvement in tourism and ultimately on STD.

Research has shown that tourism contributes to bridging the gender inequality and ensuring women’s empowerment (Boley et al., 2017; Je, Khoo, & Chiao Ling Yang, 2020). In addition, it is well documented that the tourism industry has the possibility to empower women and effectively involve them in development, especially in countries with traditional values, e.g. KSA (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, Sotomayor, & Knollenberg, 2019; Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore, & Yang, 2020; UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), 2020a). Notwithstanding, less attention has been paid to the unequal methods in which the benefits of tourism are circulated between men and women, particularly in the developing world, i.e. KSA. This research examines the direct and indirect impact of women’s empowerment, via tourism involvement, on STD in KSA, where tourism development is new and women’s empowerment is at its early stages. The results have several implications for policy-makers, tourism planners, and scholars on the relationship between women’s perceptions of empowerment, their involvement and acceptance of STD.

2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis building

2.1. Women’s empowerment for tourism involvement

Boley and McGehee (2014) argued that to better understand empowerment through tourism context, it is crucial to undertake a “multi-dimensional conceptualization of empowerment” which includes psychological, political, and social facets which has been developed in Western context and also validated in Eastern context (Boley, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2015). Hence, this research adopts a “multi-dimensional” conceptualization to examine women’s empowerment and its influences on STD. Psychologically, empowerment is conceptualized as a type of intrinsic stimulus that is embodied in four major constructs: meaning, competence, impact, self-determination (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). These constructs can be defined from a feminine perspective to fit the context of women’s empowerment; meaning it is about an individual’s caring towards her assigned work and is well-explained through the alignment between the individual’s own set of values and organizational tasks (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Competence is usually tied to the extent, to which an individual considers herself sufficiently skilled while performing duties (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The impact is expressed by an individual’s feeling of being capable to robustly affect outcomes and drive results at her organizational level (Spreitzer, 1995). Self-

determination is reflected through an individual’s capability to make decisions when she commits to a particular role, as well as her ability to choose from different alternatives while initiating a specific action (Singh & Sarkar, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995).

Politically, women’s empowerment has emerged as an additional paradigm to assist women to lead their lives with power, independence, and dignity at the individual, organizational, and social levels. The political empowerment of women is perceived as a process that accelerates the potential of women by enabling them to constantly access opportunities; raising their voices to influence change and aiding them to leave their mark on society (Sundstrom, Pamela, Yi-Ting, & Staffan, 2017). This perception can be fractionated into four elements: resources, agency, achievements (Kabeer, 2005), and rule of law (Barro, 1997; Bjornskov, 2012; Dollar & Kraay, 2003; Rodrik, Subramanian, & Trebbi, 2004). While resources denote to the sum of capabilities available to women, the agency is better explained as women’s capacity of having choices that may defy power relations. The concept of achievements refers to women’s strength to excel and realize their potential. Rule of law is manifested in enforcing the laws that enhance women’s economic activity, enable their political participation, and eliminate discriminatory regulations.

Socially, empowerment is a multi-sphere process that assists to weed out social norms for the sake of gaining full domination on their lives and freely addressing issues that entail specific values to them (Page & Czuba, 1999). The two fundamental spheres that determine the social empowerment of women are culture and social practices (Bayeh, 2016). Culture is specifically important given its ability to influence social arrangements that are associated with the ideals of human rights (Merry, 2009). Along the same line, social practices are decisive in shaping the status of women within societies and engaging them in diverse social networks, as well as boosting their social impact and capacity (Gizelis, 2009). The collective effect of culture and social practices on the social empowerment of women is well-evident in its contribution to the lower roles, jobs, and statuses it attaches to women (Bayeh, 2016).

By integrating the concept of women’s empowerment into the tourism context, a need for a broader multi-disciplinary application of the concept seems to be obvious in order to create shifts that might attain a better involvement of women in the tourism business. This is attributed to the reality that within the tourism literature, concepts with a lesser level of involvement like participation are wrongly used to reflect a form of empowerment, which makes it necessary to conduct further research purposefully oriented towards identifying the dimensions of empowerment (Movono & Dahles, 2017). It is also imputed to the underrepresentation of women in senior and leadership positions within the tourism industry and the domination of their male counterparts, though they represent the largest portion of the workforce in the industry (UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), 2019). Based on the model of Scheyvens (1999) on empowerment, it could be argued that the economic participation of women in tourism industry is conditioned by the extent, in which those women are psychologically, politically, and socially empowered (McMillan et al., 2011). Psychologically empowered women tend to be self-reliant in shaping their tourism roles and careers, which then capacitates them to better perform their tasks, enhance their professional life and accelerate their occupational potential (Boudrias, Gaudreau, & Laschinger, 2004). In another vein, politically empowered women via pro-women tourism regulations are likely to establish their descriptive existence at the level of tourism senior positions and withstand the dynamism and complexity related to assuring their sustenance in the tourism industry (Cingranelli & Richards, 2014; Landman & Carvahlo, 2009; Sundstrom et al., 2017). Driven by supportive societal cultures and norms, socially empowered women might find their road to success in the tourism industry paved enough and loaded with growth opportunities at different levels (Anju, Sidney, & Boender, 2002; Chaudhary, Chani, & Pervaiz, 2012; Flintan, 2008; Gholipour, Rahiman, Mirzamani, & Zehtabi, 2010; Mosedale, 2005). Joo, Woosnam, Strzelecka, and Boley (2020) found that

residents' perceived knowledge of tourism, including women, positively and significantly affect their perceptions of psychological, political, and social empowerment and ultimately their involvement in tourism development. Following the above arguments, the following hypotheses are advanced (see Fig. 1):

Hypothesis 1. Women's psychological empowerment has a positive influence on the involvement of women in tourism.

Hypothesis 2. Women's political empowerment has a positive influence on the involvement of women in tourism.

Hypothesis 3. Women's social empowerment has a positive influence on the involvement of women in tourism.

2.2. Women's empowerment for sustainable tourism development

Psychological empowerment occurs when a woman's pride and self-esteem are enhanced by tourists who know the exclusivity value of her community's culture and natural resources (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). Hence, this type of empowerment has a positive impact on the local community in increasing and maintaining a group's self-esteem. This was obvious in Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) research that emphasised self-esteem as one of the most significant non-economic profits related to ecotourism growth in the Amazon. Scheyvens (2000) claimed that developed ecotourism in a culturally sensitive manner will lead to psychological empowerment. The same author argued that women are the center of efforts to preserve features of tradition. In essence, few pieces of tourism research investigated if differences between genders exist (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Medina, 2003; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Moswete and Lacey (2015) focus on tourism development's activities such as the type of products available in the tourist destination in order to raise women's self-esteem. Psychological disempowerment arises when the development makes women feel inferior, or they have no control of the direction of development and this is leading them being uncomfortable and wanting to dissociate with their communities (Boley et al., 2017; Scheyvens, 2000).

Social empowerment refers to the relationship between community participants and in what way tourism activities affect the women's sense of unity and their ability to cooperate with the community (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000). Also, in some communities, the development of projects or groups in tourism supports community unity and improved quality of local people's life (Gil Arroyo et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 1995). The opposite of social

empowerment occurs in tourism by considering power to generate pressure within a destination resulting in unsatisfactory delivery of tourism's optimistic yet undesirable impacts (Boley et al., 2017). An optimistic social empowerment example for women derives from Moswete and Lacey (2015) that highlighted work in tourism as a tool to expand social networks with tourists. The negative social empowerment example in tourism was documented by Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) study in the Amazon in which local community members experienced difficulty in maintaining their traditions. Alarcón and Cole (2019) & Boley et al. (2017) suggested conducting further investigation in order to identify the perceptions of social empowerment issues by gender that will help both tourism sustainable development and local communities in developed and developing countries.

Political empowerment addresses the relations of power within tourism development and representing women's views (Madrigal, 1993; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009; Rappaport, 1987). Scheyvens (2000) mentioned that tourism political empowerment occurs when all residents are equally represented and are able to share their concerns about development and the planning process of tourism within their communities (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000). Boley et al. (2017) emphasised the local residents' participation, e.g. women, in all tourism development stages, and moving from non-participation and degrees of tokenism to ultimate resident control at the top in order to represent all community stakeholders fairly. However, the majority of research on empowerment and gender in sustainable tourism is concerned with the ways that women have or have not been afforded access to power positions (Alarcón & Cole, 2019; Boley et al., 2017; Scheyvens, 2000; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). Moswete and Lacey (2015) showed some of the positive women's political empowerment issues in cultural tourism activities such as a high level of active participation, economic independence, and freedom from the traditional family structure. Nevertheless, there are several barriers facing women's empowerment in the tourism industry such as lack of capital to start their own project, low potential wages, and cultural restraints on participation in meetings and on decision-making opportunities (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 2000). Several recent studies (e.g. Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014; Joo et al., 2020; Maruyama, Woosnam, & Boley, 2016; Maruyama, Woosnam, & Boley, 2017; Strzelecka, Boley, & Strzelecka, 2017; Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017) have shown that residents' attitudes and perceptions of empowerment through tourism, including women, are considered a key aspect and pre-requisite for STD. A recent cross-country study on women's empowerment influences on tourism

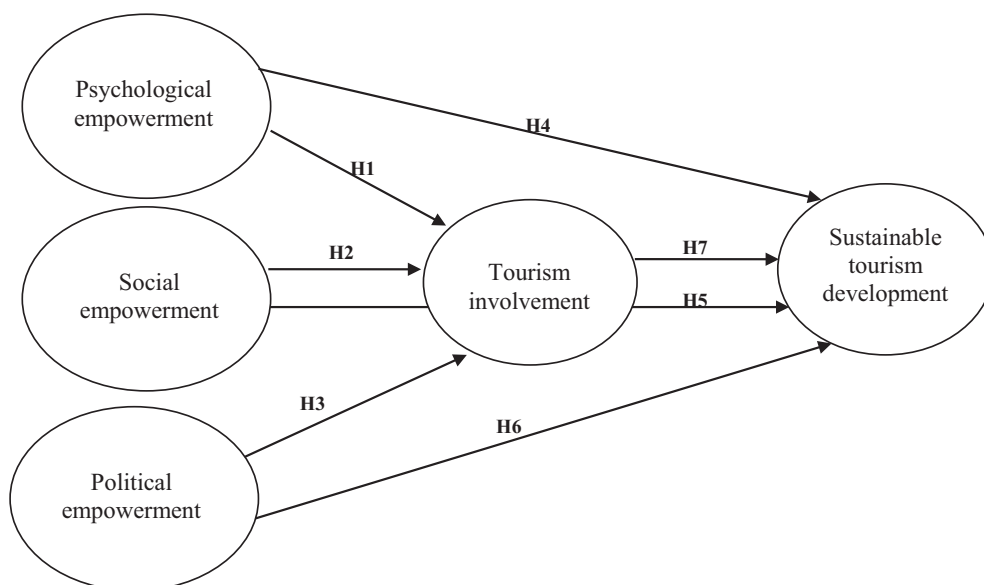


Fig. 1. The research conceptual framework.
 *H8 Tourism involvement mediates psychological empowerment and sustainable tourism development.
 **H9 Tourism involvement mediates social empowerment and sustainable tourism development.
 ***H10 Tourism involvement mediates political empowerment and sustainable tourism development.

development showed that all dimensions of women's empowerment significantly, positively and directly influence tourism development in the three countries under the study, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Oman (Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, & Elbaz, 2021). According to these arguments, as shown in Fig. 1, the following hypotheses could be suggested:

Hypothesis 4. Women's psychological empowerment has a positive influence on sustainable tourism development.

Hypothesis 5. Women's political empowerment has a positive influence on sustainable tourism development.

Hypothesis 6. Women's social empowerment has a positive influence on sustainable tourism development.

2.3. Women's tourism involvement and sustainable tourism development

STD has been widely discussed in the literature, many scholars identify some benefits that development provides to the local communities, such as: improving economic growth, protecting and sustaining environmental natural resources in the long term, in addition, to improving the quality of life of residents (Eagles, McCool, Haynes, & Phillips, 2002). As a result, women-based tourism development has become a crucial means for sustainable management (Sebele, 2010).

Women's involvement shows a major role in the sustainable development of tourism as women's involvement may increase the value of the community by increasing the positive effects of tourism and decreasing its negative effects (Scheyvens, 2000). Globally, 54% of tourism employees are women, and in a number of countries, e.g. Estonia and Finland, is over 65% are women, however, the lowest female participation rate in tourism employees was to be found in Saudi Arabia at 1.5% (Baum, 2013, p.39–40), but growing and expected to reach 30% by 2030 (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). Hence, researchers (e.g. Ferguson & Alarcón, 2016) suggested some actions have been taken to improve women's positions in tourism such as the creation of women's executive networks.

Alarcón and Cole (2019); 905 argued that "sustainable tourism is not possible if gender remains an additional element for sustainable tourism development, or if the veneer of gender is used as a way of silencing feminism". Studies (e.g. Hardy et al., 2002; Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle, & McLennan, 2015) stressed the importance of gender equality as tourism has required achieving sustainable development from the economic, social and environmental triple bottom line. In addition, the equality of gender is often ignored when sustainability is followed by tourism stakeholders. According to these arguments, the following hypothesis could be proposed:

Hypothesis 7. The involvement of women in tourism has a positive influence on sustainable tourism development.

2.4. The mediating role of tourism involvement in the relationship between women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development

The above two (Sections 2.1, 2.2) discussed the direct and positive effect of the three dimensions of women's empowerment on tourism involvement (Section 2.1) and STD (Section 2.2). Section 2.3 discussed the effect of women's involvement in STD. There is evidence that tourism facilitates women's empowerment and participation within their community (Scheyvens, 2000). When women feel tourism generates those chances for them, they are more likely to get involved. This in turn will impact on STD (Boley et al., 2017). Despite these confirmed relationships, a review of research on these issues showed no published research confirming the mediating role of the women's involvement in the mediating relationship between the three dimensions of women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development. Hence, this research makes the first attempt to examine this relationship. Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 8. The involvement of women in tourism mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and sustainable tourism development.

Hypothesis 9. The involvement of women in tourism mediates the relationship between political empowerment and sustainable tourism development.

Hypothesis 10. The involvement of women in tourism mediates the relationship between social empowerment and sustainable tourism development.

3. Research methods

3.1. Measures

All variables in this study were derived from well-established previous scales. Boley and McGehee's (2014) multi-dimensional scale for women's empowerment was employed. The scale has three dimensions named: psychological empowerment (5 items), social empowerment (3 items), and political empowerment (4 items). Tourism involvement was measured by six items derived from Suhartanto, Dean, Nansuri, and Triyuni (2018). Finally, a 6-item scale was employed to measure sustainable tourism development (STD), adopted by Nicholas, Thapa, and Ko (2009). Respondents were asked to assess the level of agreement on each item using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

3.2. Data collection and sampling

A self-administered survey was constructed to collect data. According to official published statistics by the Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics (2018) the total number of female employees in tourism sector is 20,732, but this number is increasing dramatically each year as a part of the Saudi's Vision 2030 that aims to empower women in tourism sector. Data on this paper were obtained by targeting a total of 1400 participants, representing around 7% of the total population. The survey questionnaires were distributed during November and December 2019 between women working in restaurants, airports, hotels, and travel agencies in the four main regions; Riyadh Province, Makkah Province, Eastern Province, and Madinah Province. These four regions possess 76% of KSA total population (Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics, 2018). The research team gets advantage of their wide range of personal networks to drop and collect questionnaires, as this was the most helpful approach for collecting a high response rate (Ibeh, Brock, & Zhou, 2004). This process yielded 1000 valid questionnaires. Independent sample *t*-test method was employed to analyze the mean differences scores for early and late responses. No statistically significant differences were found between early and late responses ($p > 0.05$), giving evidence that bias of non-response was not an issue in this research (Armstrong & Overton, 1977).

Common method variance (CMV) was measured in this study because both independent and dependent variables were responded by a single woman. Numerous procedures recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), were assumed to evaluate the expected CMV. First, all participants were assured their responses would be anonymous and confidential. Second, the dependent items were located before the independent items in the questionnaire structure (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Third, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 40 practitioners from the hospitality industry and 20 academics from the faculty of tourism & hotels and reviewed accordingly to make it clearer. Fourth, Harman's single factor procedure was analyzed using SPSS™ v21 to test CMV, all study variables are exposed to be analyzed by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and the factors extracted decision is fixed to 1 with no rotation procedure. Consequently, one dimension is extracted to explain 23.5% of the variance. Taken together, all the above techniques indicate that CMV was not a problem in this study.

3.3. Data analysis

SPSS™ vs 21 was employed to obtain the descriptive properties of the respondents, conduct the independent sample *t*-test, and to test the reliability of the study dimensions using Cronbach’s alpha values. Due to the complexity of the proposed model, the structural properties of the conceptualized model were examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA (and structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS vs 18. All necessary conditions (i.e. dealing with missing data, outliers, normality, multicollinearity, and linearity) to run CFA and SEM were tested and met.¹

4. The results

4.1. The profile of respondents

The majority (56%) were between 21 and 30 years of age, and 35% were between 21 and 40 years of age. In relation to marital status, 42% were married women while 48% were unmarried. The mainstream (54%) of the responses came from women working in hotels and restaurants, whereas 29% of respondents from airports and the rest of respondents (17%) came from travel agents. The respondents were educated, with 43% having a university degree, and 37% having obtained a high school certificate. The majority (41%) of women’s monthly income ranged between 1600 and 2400 U.S. Dollar, while 39% of women’s monthly incomes were below 1600 U.S. Dollar (Table 1). The mean scores are between 3.72 and 4.15, the standard deviation values are ranged from 1.078 to 0.876 (see Table 2) which gives evidence that the data are more spread and less focused around its mean (Bryman & Cramer, 2012) (Table 2).

4.2. Measurement model

First order CFA with Amos vs 18 was employed to evaluate the study measurement model validity and reliability. As shown in Table 2 and Fig. 2, the model shows good data fit χ^2 (220, N = 1000) = 913.22, $p < 0.001$, normed $\chi^2 = 4.151$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.044, standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) = 0.049; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.964 (Table 2).

Table 1
The demographic characteristics.

N = 1000	%	Groups	N = 1000	%
Age		Hotels	310	31
Under 20	10	Airports	290	29
21–30	56	Restaurants	230	23
31–40	35	Travel agents	170	17
>41	80			
Marital status				
Married	420		42	
Unmarried	580		48	
	200		20	
Education level				
Less than high school degree	200		20	
	200		20	
High school degree	370		37	
University graduate	430		43	
Monthly income				
Under 6000	390		39	
6001–9000	410		41	
9001–12,000	90		9	
12,001–15,000	70		7	
Over 15,000	40		4	

Table 2

Results of first-order confirmatory factor analysis- *M* and standard deviation.

Factors and items	Standardized loading	T-value	M	S. D
Psychological empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014) (a = 0.970) (CR = 0.969, AVE = 0.861, MSV = 0.305)				
Tourism in KSA makes me proud to be a KSA resident	0.876	b	4.12	0.956
Tourism in KSA makes me feel special because people travel to see my county’s unique features	0.891	41.613	4.12	0.884
Tourism in KSA makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer in KSA	0.972	41.613	4.13	0.881
Tourism in KSA reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors	0.934	51.761	4.15	0.878
Tourism in KSA makes me want to work to keep KSA County special	0.963	46.544	4.14	0.882
Social empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014) (a = 0.957) (CR = 0.958, AVE = 0.884, MSV = 0.305)				
Tourism in KSA makes me feel more connected to my community	0.957	b	3.86	1.024
Tourism in KSA fosters a sense of ‘community spirit’ within me	0.910	55.168	3.94	0.990
Tourism in KSA provides ways for me to get involved in my community	0.953	66.131	3.92	0.920
Political empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014) (a = 0.977) (CR = 0.976, AVE = 0.912, MSV = 0.473)				
I feel like I have a voice in KSA tourism development decisions	0.939	b	4.00	0.876
I feel like I have access to the decision-making process when it comes to tourism in KSA	0.971	70.340	3.97	0.914
I feel like my vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in KSA	0.971	70.045	3.96	0.905
I feel like I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in KSA	0.938	59.843	4.00	0.889
Tourism involvement (Suhartanto et al., 2018) (a = 0.979) (CR = 0.979, AVE = 0.903, MSV = 0.473)				
I am pleased to be involved in tourism activities.	0.964	b	3.95	1.047
I consider tourism activities to be important.	0.964	79.727	3.91	1.069
I get upset when participation in a tourism activity is poor.	0.969	82.409	3.91	1.078
I am feeling a bit lost when making choices from a variety of tourism activities.	0.906	57.525	3.91	1.069
Choosing a tourism activity is rather complicated.	0.946	70.712	3.89	1.073
Sustainable tourism development (Nicholas et al., 2009) (a = 0.950) (CR = 0.952, AVE = 0.769, MSV = 0.298)				
I participate in the development of community-based sustainable tourism initiatives	0.875	b	3.75	0.935
I participate in sustainable tourism-related plans and development	0.949	47.277	3.84	0.880
I adopt the Regulatory environmental standards to reduce the negative impacts of tourism	0.882	40.015	3.93	0.923
I participate in cultural exchanges between local residents and visitors	0.824	34.904	3.72	1.01
I cooperate with tourism planning and development initiatives	0.874	39.239	3.86	0.923
I participate in the promotion of environmental education and conservation”	0.852	37.245	3.75	1.006

¹ Analyses are available from authors upon request

Model fit: (χ^2 (220, $N = 1000$) = 913.22, $p < 0.001$, normed $\chi^2 = 4.151$, RMSEA = 0.044, SRMR = 0.049, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.964, NFI = 0.963, PCFI = 0.843 and PNFI = 0.817).

Note: CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, MSV = Maximum shared value. ^b Fixed to set the scales. M = Mean, S. D = standard deviation.

The Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability (CR) scores are above the recommended 0.80 level for all the items (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which signal high internal reliability. All factor loadings for all the items were between 0.824 and 0.972, which surpasses the desirable score of 0.7 with t-values above 34.90 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) (Table 2).

This indicates a significant and positive relationship between the items that measure the study's dimensions (see Fig. 2). Therefore, convergent validity is assured. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores for all dimensions surpass the proposed 0.50 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), further approving the convergent validity.

Two techniques are widely proposed to measure discriminant validity. The AVE square root for every single dimension should surpass the values of the shared correlations with other dimensions in row and column (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson

(2014) recommended for discriminant validity, the AVE should surpass the maximum shared value (MSV) for each dimension. As shown in Table 2 the AVE scores surpass the MSV and all items loaded on their factor more highly than on any other (Table 3), approving discriminant validity at the item level. In other words, the results displayed satisfactory reliability and validity for the measurement model.

Table 3.
Discriminant validity based on Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis.

	1	2	3	4	5
1-Sustainable tourism development	0.877				
2-Psychological empowerment	0.413	0.928			
3-Social empowerment	0.353	0.552	0.940		
4-Political empowerment	0.519	0.405	0.508	0.955	
5-Tourism involvement	0.546	0.381	0.460	0.688	0.950

Note: Diagonal numbers embody the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVEs) for the related factor.

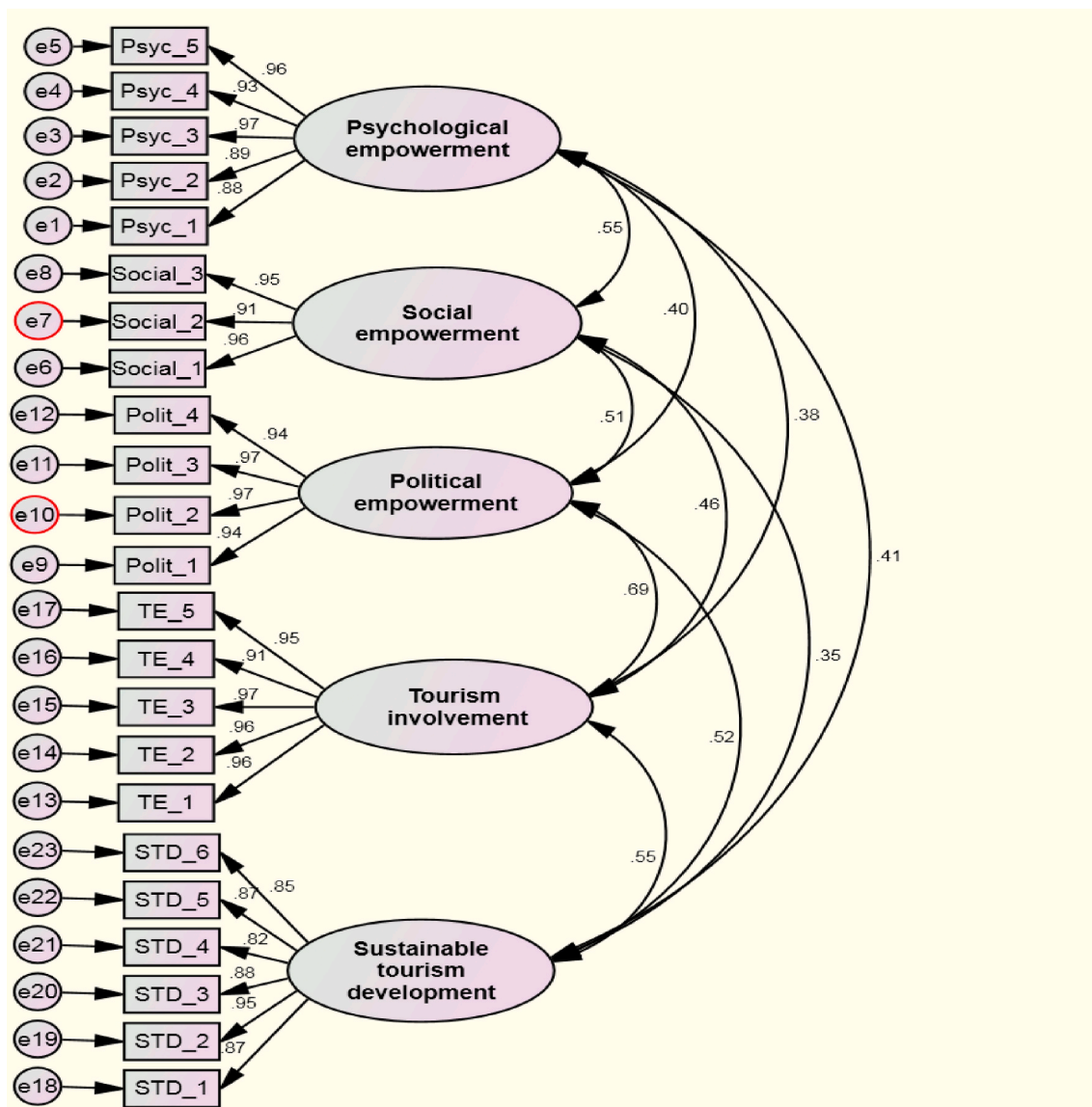


Fig. 2. First-order CFA.

4.3. The structural model

Structural equation modeling (SEM), and maximum likelihood estimation, were carried out to test the causal interconnectedness between research variables. SEM is an appropriate data analysis technique as it permits a simultaneous and comprehensive analysis of relations to be conducted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Overall, the fit indexes for the structural model ($\chi^2 = 746.827$, $df = 233$, $p < 0.01$; $CFI = 0.951$; $SRMR = 0.044$; $RMSEA = 0.024$) propose a high model fit to the data (see Table 4). Additionally, the structural model suggests satisfactory prediction power; as the squared multiple correlations (SMC) are 0.42 for tourism involvement; and 0.47 for sustainable tourism development.

4.4. Testing research hypothesis

Table 4 and Fig. 3 display the interrelationships (direct/indirect) between the research variables. The results suggest that women’s psychological empowerment has a positive and significant relation with tourism involvement ($\beta = 0.41$, t -value = 11.823, $P < 0.001$), and sustainable tourism development involvement ($\beta = 0.22$, t -value = 6.357, $P < 0.001$), accordingly H_1 , and H_4 were supported. Similarly, women’s political empowerment was found to have positive and significant effects on tourism involvement ($\beta 0.36$, t -value = 9.473, $P < 0.001$), and sustainable tourism development involvement ($\beta 0.32$, t -value = 10.823, $P < 0.001$), H_3 , and, H_6 were therefore accepted.

Likewise, the effect of social empowerment on tourism involvement was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.35$, t -value = 9.086, $P < 0.001$) supporting H_2 . However, social empowerment impacts on sustainable tourism development were weak, positive but insignificant ($\beta = 0.016$, t -value = 0.689, $P > 0.05$) which gives evidence that H_5 was not supported. Tourism involvement in return was found to have positive and significant impacts on sustainable tourism development ($\beta = 0.57$, t -value = 17.214, $P < 0.001$) H_7 was therefore accepted.

To detect mediation effect, all regression coefficients were observed

Table 4
Results of the research hypotheses.

Hypotheses		Results of the research model			Hypotheses results
		Beta (β)	C-R (T-value)	SMC	
H1	Psychological empowerment → Tourism involvement	0.41***	11.823	-	Supported
H2	Social empowerment → Tourism involvement	0.35***	9.086	-	Supported
H3	Political empowerment → Tourism involvement	0.36***	9.473	-	Supported
H4	Psychological empowerment → Sustainable tourism development	0.22***	6.357	-	Supported
H5	Social empowerment → Sustainable tourism development	0.016	0.689	-	Not Supported
H6	Political empowerment → Sustainable tourism development	0.32***	10.823	-	Supported
H7	Tourism involvement → Sustainable tourism development	0.57***	17.214	-	Supported
Tourism involvement		-	-	0.42	-
Sustainable tourism development		-	-	0.47	-

Model fit: ($\chi^2 (223, N = 1000) = 746.827$, $p < 0.001$, normed $\chi^2 = 3.349$, $RMSEA = 0.024$, $SRMR = 0.044$, $CFI = 0.951$, $TLI = 0.961$, $NFI = 0.962$, $PCFI = 0.874$ and $PNFI = 0.817$).

via recommendation from (1) Kelloway (1995) for full and partial mediation conditions; (2) Zhao, Lynch Jr, and Chen (2010) for direct and indirect regression procedures; and (3) SEM standardized indirect regression weights. Zhao et al. (2010) suggest that to detect mediation, whether, through employing SEM or regression, the indirect impacts only should be significant to show the full effect of mediation, whereas if the direct and indirect regression coefficients are significant partial mediations supported. Consequently, as shown in Table 4 all relationships are significant (except social empowerment to sustainable tourism development path). These results indicate that tourism involvement partially mediates the relationship between psychological and political empowerment with sustainable tourism development and fully mediates the relationship between social empowerment and sustainable tourism development. The earlier result is confirmed by investigating the SEM standardized indirect impact from psychological empowerment to sustainable tourism development as the direct effect increased from ($\beta = 0.22$, $P < 0.001$) to a total effect of ($\beta = 0.33$, $P < 0.001$). Similarly, the direct effect of political empowerment to sustainable tourism development ($\beta = 0.32$, $P < 0.001$) increased to a total effect of ($\beta = 0.40$, $P < 0.001$). Finally, the direct insignificant effect of social empowerment to sustainable tourism development ($\beta = 0.016$, $P > 0.05$) increased to a total effect of ($\beta = 0.23$, $P < 0.01$). These results suggest that tourism involvement partially mediates the relationship between psychological and political empowerment with sustainable tourism development and fully mediates the relationship between social empowerment and sustainable tourism development.

5. Discussion and implications

This research empirically examines women’s empowerment through tourism and its direct impact on sustainable tourism development as well as indirect impact through tourism involvement. The research adopted a multi-dimensional scale of empowerment; mainly psychological, social, and political empowerment, developed by Boley and McGehee (2014) to assess women’s empowerment through tourism. The results supports recent studies on KSA context that tourism is a means for empowering women in KSA (Almuthami et al., 2020; UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), 2020a). Women agreed that they are psychologically ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 0.896$) and politically ($M = 3.98$; $SD = 0.896$) empowered. Psychologically, women found tourism in KSA gave them pride in their a KSA residency and unique culture which they would like to share this with their visitors. As a result psychologically empowered women become self-reliant in shaping their tourism role which allows them to perform their tasks professionally and align their values with organizational tasks (Boudrias et al., 2004). Politically, women agreed they are also empowered. This could be clearly seen when they have a say in tourism development and get involved in the decision-making process. Additionally, they also found themselves supported by leadership and policy-makers. Hence, their voices and concerns about tourism development are highly recognized. On the other hand, the results showed that women in tourism industry in KSA are socially less empowered ($M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.978$). The results showed that women felt less connected and supported by the community. They also did not find the sense of community spirit. Hence, they were less supported by their community and thus less empowered socially. This could also be due to several challenges that face working women in KSA tourism industry such as challenges related to culture, social network, work place environment, education and training, gender diversity and regulations (Almuthami et al., 2020).

Supporting the work of Movono and Dahles (2017), the results showed that women’s psychological and political empowerment has a positive and significant relationship with tourism involvement. These results coincided with McMillan et al. (2011) findings that residents’ involvement in tourism, including women, are influenced by how psychologically and politically empowered they are. The results also support other studies (e.g. Boley et al., 2017; Strzelecka, Boley, &

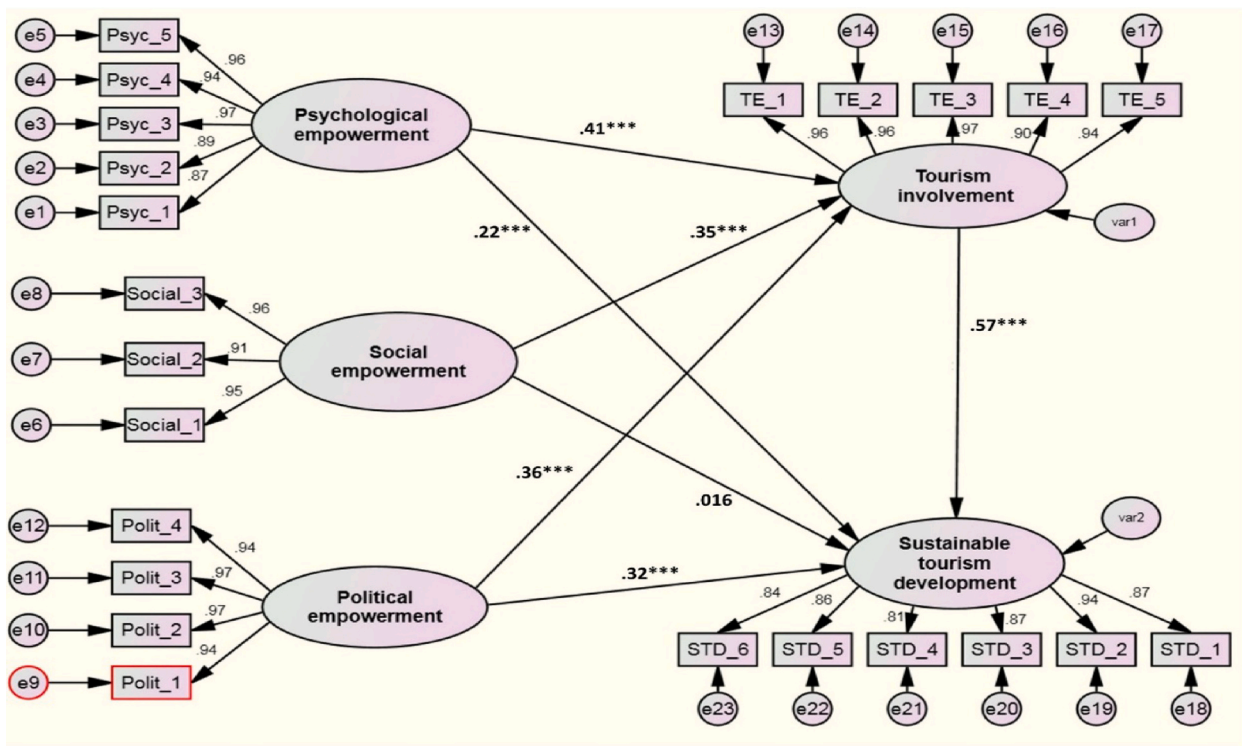


Fig. 3. The research structural model.

Strzelecka, 2017) psychological and political dimensions of residents’ empowerment; e.g. women’s empowerment, has a positive influence on STD. The results are also in line with the work of Abou-Shouk et al. (2021) that both psychological and political dimensions of women empowerment positively and significantly influence STD.

The results, however, revealed that the direct impact of women’s social empowerment on STD was weak, positive but insignificant. Considering the nature and culture of KSA with men’s dominance as well as community perceptions of women as homemakers; hence, the community support of women’s working in tourism was inadequate or was not up to women’s expectations. This was supported by the notion made by Bayeh (2016) that culture and social practice affect women’s social empowerment. Nonetheless research (e.g. Joo et al., 2020; Maruyama et al., 2017; Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosnam, 2017) has confirmed the role of collective empowerment, including social empowerment in achieving STD. However, the KSA community’s perceptions, culture, and social practices have affected the level of women’s social empowerment and untimely STD. The results confirmed that the KSA policy-makers are empowering women through tourism by raising their voices, developing their skills, and enhancing their opportunities in the tourism industry, including advancement opportunities and being in leading positions (The Ministry of Tourism, 2020). Thus, women perceive themselves politically and psychologically empowered; nonetheless, they perceived themselves as less cohesive within their community. This explains why women are less socially empowered which has a weak impact on STD. Notwithstanding this, previous research studies (see for example, Stronza & Gordillo, 2008) showed that the impact of limited social empowerment among women is not the opposite of positive empowerment which could include limited collaboration within the community (Boley & McGehee, 2014) since women perceive themselves stigmatized by the community and/or perceive gender inequality (Boley et al., 2017; Joo et al., 2020; Maruyama et al., 2017).

The results, predictably, showed that tourism involvement partially mediates the relationship between psychological and political empowerment on one side and STD on the other side. Moreover, the results showed a full mediation in the relationship between social

empowerment and STD. This means that STD cannot be fully achieved with current women’s empowerment unless they are involved socially in tourism. Hence, women should be involved in tourism development to achieve sustainable development in tourism. This confirms that women’s involvement in tourism is critical for STD (Boley et al., 2017; Sebele, 2010). In other words, STD will undoubtedly not be achieved if women are not socially empowered or fully involved in tourism development.

The results have several implications for both tourism policy-makers, “especially in developing countries”, and scholars. First, policy-makers and tourism planners often, in developing countries, i.e. KSA, where tourism development is new, politically empower women to advance their development agenda (Topal, 2019). However, limited or no actual consideration is given to social empowerment and integration of women within their wider community. This could hinder support for tourism development, and impeding its sustainability (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). It also could add more challenges to tourism development (Almathami et al., 2020). Second, to ensure better involvement in tourism as well as STD, policy-makers should raise the awareness of local communities concerning the vital role of women and their involvement in tourism development. This poor perceptions of working women and issues of cultural values as well as gender inequalities should be fully addressed not just politically but also socially with participation from local communities to make women perceive themselves more cohesive with their communities. Third, both policy-makers and local community need to make women feel a sense of pride and foster an awareness of the value of tourism in their country to be able to share their skills and experience with their visitors. Tourism organizations, e.g. hotels, should integrate women in their community and promote the sense of community spirit with women’s participation. This also includes full access to advancement opportunities and leading positions.

The results also have several implications for tourism scholars. First, it is crucial that scholars adopt a multi-dimensional consideration of empowerment for a better understanding of women’s empowerment through tourism, i.e. empowerment through tourism scale developed by

Boley and McGehee (2014). This research showed while women were politically and psychologically empowered, they were socially less empowered which has a weak and insignificant impact on STD. Women should be empowered collectively (politically, socially, psychologically) and fully involved in tourism and ensure a positive impact on STD. Second, the current research confirms that it is crucial that researchers understand the culture and social practices of community, since this shapes social empowerment and ultimately influences sustainable tourism development. The research also confirmed the interrelationship in the structural model (Fig. 3) between women’s empowerment using a multi-dimensional scale, tourism involvement, and STD. Third, the research made the first attempts to examine the mediating role of tourism involvement in the relationship between women’s empowerment (psychologically, politically, and socially) and STD. Fourth, this paves the road for other research studies with different mediations or moderations to ensure tourism sustainability, which is vital for many countries, especially when tourism development is new. The research also addressed how countries could achieve STD and contribute to the achievement of UN SDGs through women’s empowerment and their involvement in tourism development.

6. Limitations and further research

The study has some limitations and several opportunities for further research. First, the study respondents are women working within

tourism industry in KSA, thereby limiting the generalization of results. It would therefore be advisable to collect data from women in different countries within different contexts. Second, socio-demographic attributes of respondents could be further analyzed to examine the differences based on marital status, age, education, and income level. Third, type of enterprise (i.e hotels, restaurant, travel agent, airports) could have an influence on the examined relationships as well. Therefore, further studies can undertake multi-group analysis to investigate such differences between different sub-sectors of the tourism industry. Fourth, the cross-sectional sample strategy employed in this research is another limitation. In any research in which causality is supposed, longitudinal studies provide greater support for inferences made (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consequently, while causal relations can be attained, they cannot be strictly established in cross-sectional studies. Fifth, the study did not consider the economic empowerment of women through tourism. Further research could consider this aspect of women’s empowerment through tourism and its relationship with STD. It is hoped that the study findings enhance our understanding of the literature and deliver a starting point for greater research concerning Women’s empowerment through the tourism might be conducted.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire used in this study

Dear participant

This questionnaire was designed to identify the direct impact of women’s empowerment (psychologically, politically, and socially) on sustainable tourism development and the indirect impact through tourism involvement; your contribution will be appreciated; your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes. The analysis of the survey will involve statistical aggregates making the individual responses impossible to be identified by the study results.

Please circle the one number for each question that comes closest to reflecting your perception about it where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree

Section 1: Measures of sustainable tourism development

- 1 I support the development of community-based sustainable tourism initiatives 1 2 3 4 5
- 2 I participate in sustainable tourism-related plans and development 1 2 3 4 5
- 3 I adopt the Regulatory environmental standards to reduce the negative impacts of tourism 1 2 3 4 5
- 4 I participate in cultural exchanges between local residents and visitors 1 2 3 4 5
- 5 I cooperate with tourism planning and development initiatives 1 2 3 4 5
- 6 I participate in the promotion of environmental education and conservation 1 2 3 4 5

Section 2: Measures of measures of women’s involvement

- 7 I am pleased to be involved in tourism activities. 1 2 3 4 5
- 8 I consider tourism activities to be important. 1 2 3 4 5
- 9 I get upset when participation in a tourism activity is poor. 1 2 3 4 5
- 10 I am feeling a bit lost when making choices from a variety of tourism activities. 1 2 3 4 5
- 11 Choosing a tourism activity is rather complicated. 1 2 3 4 5

Section 3: Measures of women’s empowerment

Psychological empowerment

- 11 Tourism in KSA makes me proud to be a KSA resident 1 2 3 4 5
- 12 Tourism in KSA makes me feel special because people travel to see my county’s unique features 1 2 3 4 5
- 13 Tourism in KSA makes me want to tell others about what we have to offer in KSA 1 2 3 4 5
- 14 Tourism in KSA reminds me that I have a unique culture to share with visitors 1 2 3 4 5
- 15 Tourism in KSA makes me want to work to keep KSA County special 1 2 3 4 5

Social empowerment

- 16 Tourism in KSA makes me feel more connected to my community 1 2 3 4 5
- 17 Tourism in KSA fosters a sense of ‘community spirit’ within me 1 2 3 4 5
- 18 Tourism in KSA provides ways for me to get involved in my community 1 2 3 4 5

Political empowerment

- 19 I feel like I have a voice in KSA tourism development decisions 1 2 3 4 5
 - 20 I feel like I have access to the decision-making process when it comes to tourism in KSA 1 2 3 4 5
 - 21 I feel like my vote makes a difference in how tourism is developed in KSA 1 2 3 4 5
 - 22 I feel like I have an outlet to share my concerns about tourism development in KSA” 1 2 3 4 5
-

Optional questions (section Four)

Name

Type of Organization: Hotel Restaurant Airport Travel agent Gender: Male Female Marital status: Unmarried Married Educational level: Less than high High school degree University graduate Age: under 20 21-30 31-44 More than 40 Income level: Less than 6000 SAR 6001–9000 SAR 9001–12,000 SAR
12,001–15,000 SAR Over 15,000 SAR

Your contact details email address (optional).....

Your name (optional).....

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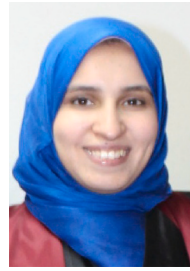
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