

Social Reconstruction toward Wellness Tourism Development: Pivotal Roles of Woman Empowerment and Participation

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Received for publication: 07 July 2025.

Accepted for publication: 01 September 2025.

Abstract

Drawing on feminist ecology theory, this paper explores how woman empowerment (i.e., psychological, social, political, and economic aspects) may lead to social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the existing paper examines the mediating role of women's participation in the development of wellness tourism. This paper employs an empirical quantitative method to analyse the interrelations among these variables, using 438 responses from Saudi and non-Saudi women. Findings confirmed that women's participation in wellness tourism development was partially mediated in the nexuses between four woman empowerment aspects and social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development. Results showed that women's initiatives in wellness tourism (e.g., holistic retreats, healing centers, and eco-tourism) generate community resilience, contribute to gender equity, and sustain heritage. This paper presents new insights into policy development, sustainable tourism planning, and gender-sensitive economic reform in the Saudi context.

Keywords: wellness tourism, woman empowerment, social reconstruction, feminist ecological theory, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Women empowerment has become one of the most powerful tools of social change and sustainable development (Gupta et al., 2024) on psychological, social, political, and economic aspects. Women are changing roles at a fast clip and mirroring larger societal changes (Hannouch & Milstein, 2025). In the Saudi context, the cross-section of women empowerment and wellness tourism constitutes an interesting space for inquiry, when the country is making significant strides in economic diversification and Vision 2030 (Alotaibi, 2023, Elgammal, 2023). The growing participation of women in entrepreneurship is a harbinger of deeper structural shifts to reframe social norms and economic models (Stoker et al., 2024). In this vein, the subject of this paper is how women entrepreneurs serve as the growth force of wellness tourism and social reconstruction in the Saudi context. While KSA redefines itself in international politics via social and economic diversification (Al Naimi, 2022), the pivotal role of women has featured heavily in changing strategies. Traditionally, sociocultural norms have restricted women from public life and economic activities (Aju & Adeosun, 2021). Nevertheless, legal and policy transformations have created a large field for women's participation in entrepreneurship and leadership in developing settings such as the wellness tourism context (Pécot et al., 2024).

Wellness tourism, which emphasizes holistic well-being trips, sustainable practices, and cultural immersion, has emerged as a promising space for women to find ways to engage with its development (Smith, 2021). Women-led start-ups, from yoga and spa services to natural healing centres, mindfulness retreats, and eco-tourism, are redefining wellness tourism scenes in KSA. These efforts towards women entrepreneur empowerment lead to economic and social empowerment (Pécot et al., 2024). Further, they manifest as components of rehabilitation participation in a broader sense by ensuring inclusiveness, resilience, self-reliance, and cultural survival (Al Naimi, 2022). However, the woman empowerment-wellness tourism nexus is not linear. As such, this paper employs feminist ecological theory (FET) as its guiding theoretical perspective. Unlike reductionist explanations that isolate single dimensions of women empowerment, FET situates individuals and social and political contexts as mutually shaping (Zaremba et al., 2021). FET illustrates how empowerment plays out across the micro (individual), meso (community), and macro (institutional) levels (Maschi et al., 2022).

In this context, each dimension of woman empowerment is critical. Psychological empowerment (i.e., positive self-efficacy, confidence, and resilience) is an essential mechanism that helps women overcome hurdles and respond to entrepreneurial opportunities (Khalid et al., 2025). Supporting social empowerment will provide better access to networks, information, and collective resources (Avelino et al., 2022), which are critical to establishing and maintaining health-promoting businesses. Whereas political empowerment enables women to make their voices heard in decision-making (Dehankar & Das, 2025), economically empower them to have a say in their economic conditions (Khalid et al., 2025). These dimensions are intricately interrelated and mutually reinforcing, constituting an integrated empowerment ecosystem to facilitate women's participation in wellness tourism development (Dehankar & Das, 2025). As KSA intensifies its human capital-building efforts and promotes gender justice investment (Gu et al., 2021), dissecting these dimensions of empowerment and how they interact.

Despite the importance of the subject, there is limited research on women empowerment in Saudi Arabia (Alhawsawi & Jawhar, 2023; Alnufaie & Beghum, 2021; Parveen, 2022). Prior studies have focused on women's integration into the labour market without legislative changes (Bruegel, 2024; Platt et al., 2022). Critically, the relationship between women entrepreneurship and wellness tourism has not been established. In addition, the existing literature is inclined to confine empowerment either in separate domains (i.e., economic, social, and political) (Lima et al., 2025; Parwez & Patel, 2022) or a theoretical approach rather than in an integrated analytical framework (Campopiano et al., 2023). This atomized approach masks the connections between different manifestations of empowerment and their cumulative ability to drive systemic change. Moreover, the pivotal role of women entrepreneurs as a bridge connecting micro-empowered benefits and wellness tourism development is an under-researched area.

This paper seeks to fill these gaps by employing an interdisciplinary and integrative view. Utilizing FET, this paper explores how women empowerment dimensions inter-relate to facilitate wellness tourism development and reconstruct society. Women's participation in wellness tourism development plays a mediating role as it is a matter of empowerment to positively cause social reconstruction (Dixit et al., 2023). By identifying drivers that influence women's participation in wellness tourism development, results can help the Saudi government in building up policies to reduce gender disparity, inclusive growth, and sustainable tourism development. Practically, this paper locates woman empowerment through an instrumental role as a means toward national development in

the wellness tourism context. This paper provides insight into the scholarly discourse of how the dynamic of woman empowerment can be utilized as a means to champion gender-inclusive growth in KSA. When viewed through this frame, wellness tourism destinations become growth markets and a means for empowerment, innovation, and social changes (Andreu et al., 2021).

Literature review

Feminist ecological theory (FET)

FET is founded on ecofeminism, which voices how environmental issues and gender injustices are connected (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021), arguing that sustainable development should equally focus on the integrity of ecological systems and social fairness (Gupta et al., 2024). Amidst women empowerment discourse, FET maintains that women in underprivileged contexts are invaluable in how they manage resources sustainably, preserve culture, and sustain economic resilience (Bala, 2024). In the Saudi context, where socio-economic reforms are reconfiguring gender relations, FET offers critical reflections concerning women's empowerment as a driver for social transformation and sustainable growth in wellness tourism. Drawing on FET, this paper demonstrates women's transformative power as instruments of wellness tourism development (Pécot et al., 2024). Wellness tourism focuses on holistic wellness and the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage (Andreu et al., 2021). It is also aided by women entrepreneur participation that harnesses traditional knowledge, environmental consciousness, and community wellness to structure their enterprise models (Arora et al., 2023). Their participation creates jobs for women that foster community bonds and environmental responsibility (Pécot et al., 2024).

The pivotal role of women entrepreneurs' participation in mediation has been an indicator of the gradual shift in supporting women in the workforce (Epezagne-Assamala et al., 2022). This shift contributes to a socially reconfigured wellness tourism landscape (Bala, 2024) where women-led businesses can contribute to economic diversification and improve wellness tourism with local cultural components (Arora et al., 2023). Employing FET, women's participation as entrepreneurs in this industry is a critical factor in developing sustainable tourism models (Loveline, 2022; Samad & Alharthi, 2022) that emphasize welfare, eco-caretaking, and financial inclusion (Andreu et al., 2021). While KSA continues to reform to increase women's economic participation (AlNemer, 2024), FET offers an articulate understanding of how gender equality and ecological awareness intersect to motivate the wellness tourism industry. The research model (see Figure 1) examines how women's empowerment as entrepreneurs enables their socioeconomic mobility to help advance wellness tourism development. In this sense, FET provides an analytical framework to unpack how gendered environmentalism, sustainable development, and economic development are implicated in wellness tourism development.

Women entrepreneur empowerment

Women entrepreneur empowerment is the mechanism by which women have the ability and confidence to expand business enterprises (Ogbari et al., 2024) and acquire increased fulfilment while contributing to socio-economic development (Onwe et al., 2024). It is critical to understand women's empowerment for several reasons. First, each dimension is central to women as change agents. Second, it has engineering, gender, and entrepreneurship outcomes. Third, it forecasts potential and influences women's ability to impact change. Psychological empowerment, as the first dimension, includes self-efficacy, resilience, and the ability to make significant choices (Saini et al., 2024), which are essential in coping with entrepreneurial challenges. Social empowerment, as the second dimension, allows women to create cooperation networks, obtain mentors, and use commu-

nity resources that help their businesses progress (Ogbari et al., 2024). Political empowerment, as the third dimension, assures women representation and a voice in policy-making, which shapes their economic rights and entrepreneurial environment (Saini et al., 2024).

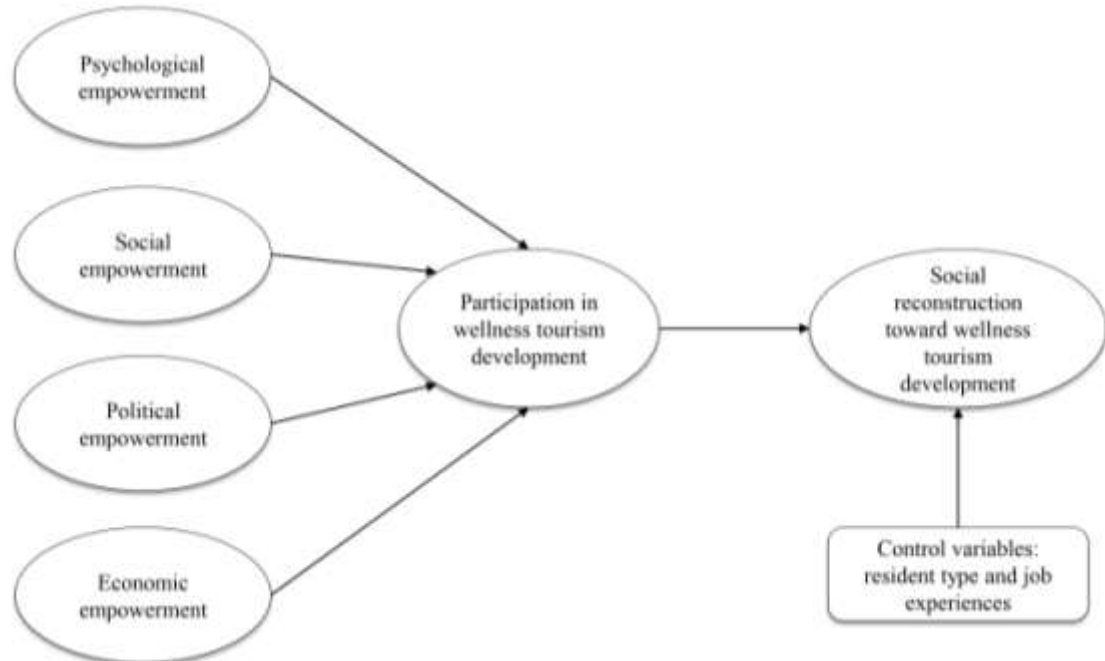


Figure 1. Research model
Source: Author preparation

Economic empowerment, as the last dimension, provides resources, investment, and financial capital, which are necessary to sustain businesses (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). Women entrepreneurship has become one of the main priorities toward KSA's transformation under Vision 2030 (Pécot et al., 2024; Miralam et al., 2025). It embodies a redefinition of gender roles and social norms (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). Softer policy changes in recent years, relaxing restrictions on mobility for women and improving access to finance (Nasrin & Chowdhury, 2024). In this domain, women entrepreneurs are starting such novel enterprises as spas, meditation centres, and eco-tourism facilities (Saini et al., 2024), which bring personal empowerment into harmony with national development targets (Andreu et al., 2021). Their works promote visibility and participation in public life, employment generation, and sustainable tourism. Superimposing the four dimensions of empowerment, women entrepreneurs are social reconstruction drivers who alter the fabric of women leaders (Dixit et al., 2023). Women empowerment is a fundamental aspect of sustainable and diversified economies (Gupta et al., 2024).

Social Reconstruction toward Wellness Tourism Development

Social reconstruction is the act of recreating and reshaping structures, connections, and norms that govern society to make it more equitable, diverse, and sustainable (Valladares, 2021). As a part of the social reconstruction in wellness tourism development (Dahles et al., 2020), women's

roles are rethought by making economic activities more participatory (Maseno & Wanyoike, 2022). In KSA, wellness tourism offers a fruitful opportunity for social reconstruction, given its focus on holistic health, environmental consciousness, and cultural authenticity (Arora et al., 2023). Hence, this intersects traditional women's knowledge and community roles. As women entrepreneurs in wellness tourism, they challenge outdated gender norms and cumulate a space of social and economic citizenship (Green, 2025). The inclusion of women in wellness tourism drives them to participate in social reconstruction by increasing women's entry into employment and decision-making (Dixit et al., 2023). Their participation provides for a more inclusive type of business, which tends to include social welfare, environmentalism, and tradition preservation. Spa services, wellness retreats, and women entrepreneurs contribute to economic diversity, social integration, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Arora et al., 2023). These endeavours redound to a healthier, more balanced society in response to the changing dreams of Vision 2030.

Women entrepreneur participation in wellness tourism development

Women entrepreneurs lead by example in wellness tourism development by designing experiences that are rooted in holistic well-being and cultural authenticity (Dixit et al., 2023). Women are capitalizing on their skill sets creativity and knowledge of their culture as the rise of Vision 2030 (Miralam et al., 2025) and the subsequent socio-economic reforms have created an enabling environment to set up wellness-based businesses (Dixit et al., 2023). These are entrepreneurial opportunities to improve health and engage women in communities (Maseno & Wanyoike, 2022). Women's role in tourism development is more than guiding the business as operators (Nordbø, 2022), spreading into their advocacy and leadership education, and keeping cultural endowments (Muhammad et al., 2021). Women business owners infuse local customs and traditional works that result in authentic experiences that resonate with wellness-seeking travellers (Nordbø, 2022). It also results in creating job opportunities for other women and encouraging women's participation in non-conventional sectors. Through creating cutting-edge wellness startups, women entrepreneurs are appearing as critical catalysts for social change (Green, 2025), promoting gender parity and sustainable tourism development in KSA.

Hypothesis development

Psychological Empowerment and Participation in Wellness Tourism

Women are rapidly becoming important contributors to sustainable tourism, particularly in the wellness sector, which frequently interacts with traditional knowledge, caregiving duties, and holistic practices (Gupta et al., 2024). Women's participation in wellness tourism, which emphasises community-based and culturally embedded experiences, not only benefits economic growth but also improves local authenticity and well-being outcomes (UNWTO, 2023). However, in many cases, structural and emotional constraints continue to hinder their participation in tourism development projects' planning, decision-making, and benefit-sharing, as asserted by Jesús Carrasco-Santos et al., (2024), when studied Iranian women's participation in the tourism industry. This divide needs a closer look at internal forces like empowerment, which can lead to increased agency and inclusion.

Recent studies have demonstrated that proactive community participation and leadership behaviours are influenced by psychological empowerment, which is characterised by a sense of significance, competence, autonomy, and impact (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2024). Women in tourism development are more likely to take the initiative, express their opinions, and participate in co-creating local tourism solutions when they feel psychologically empowered (Elgammal, 2022).

According to Feminist Ecological Theory, psychological empowerment occurs at the micro-system level, influencing individual agency, perceived control, and self-efficacy (Khalid et al., 2025). It reflects a fundamental internal motivator that allows women to see themselves as capable participants in economic and social fields, including tourism development. In Saudi Arabia, psychological empowerment has grown in popularity as access to education has increased, female role models in entrepreneurship have been more visible, and socio-cultural expectations have gradually shifted (Pécot et al., 2024). These changes have an impact on women's goals and willingness to participate in industries such as wellness tourism, which is culturally acceptable and fast developing under Vision 2030.

We believe that empowered women would take on the role of guardians of cultural and health-related assets in wellness tourism, which is centred around individualised, location-based experiences (Yadav & Maheshwari, 2025). Building on this framework, the current study posits the following:

H1. Psychological empowerment positively affects women's participation in wellness tourism development.

Women's Empowerment and Participation in Wellness Tourism

In Saudi Arabia, women's roles in public and economic issues have gradually changed because of the changing of the country social and economic structure, which is being shaped by Vision 2030 (Stoker et al., 2024). An economically feasible and culturally appropriate platform for increasing women's participation is provided by tourism, especially wellness tourism (UN Women, 2023). A key entry point for women's entrepreneurship and community involvement, wellness tourism places an emphasis on health, self-care, and cultural authenticity (Smith & Puczkó, 2014).

A thorough framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between women's empowerment and their involvement in the growth of wellness tourism is offered by feminist ecological theory. According to this paradigm, empowerment occurs through a variety of interrelated systems, including societal, institutional, relational, and personal ones (Maschi et al., 2022). Considering Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which promotes greater gender inclusion, the wellness tourism industry offers a multifaceted environment that supports women's empowerment (Pécot et al., 2024; Miralam et al., 2025).

The growth of women's rights, their access to education, and their capacity to participate in cultural and communal life are all components of social empowerment (UN Women, 2022). Women in Saudi Arabia are now better equipped to take on active roles in creating community-based wellness projects due to rising educational attainment and changing societal norms (Abdelwahed et al., 2022). Therefore, it is anticipated that social empowerment will have a positive impact on women's capacity and desire to engage in the growth of wellness tourism. Accordingly, the following is developed:

H2. Social empowerment positively affects women's participation in wellness tourism development.

Political Empowerment and Institutional Support

Within the feminist ecological theory, women's opportunities are shaped by institutional access, legal reforms, and political inclusion, and political empowerment occurs at both the meso and macro levels (Maschi et al., 2022; Saini et al., 2024). Political agency has been transformed by the Saudi government's support for women's participation in tourist decision-making bodies as well as legislative changes about guardianship and business ownership (UNWTO, 2023; Vision 2030).

The institutional ecology for empowerment is created by these structural enablers, according to feminist ecological theory.

According to Saini et al., (2024), political empowerment includes women's engagement in policy, access to decision-making platforms, and legal rights. Women now have more freedom to travel, register businesses, and hold leadership positions in the tourist industry in Saudi Arabia after the recent reformation (Stoker et al., 2024). These advancements strengthen institutional credibility and provide avenues for women to impact the growth of wellness tourism. In the current study

H3. Political empowerment positively affects women's participation in wellness tourism development.

Economic Empowerment and Resource Access

At the nexus of individual (micro), communal (meso), and structural (macro) circumstances lies economic empowerment (Maschi et al., 2022; UN Women, 2022). An enabling economic ecology is reflected in women's access to financing, business networks, and occupational training (UN Women, 2022). According to the feminist ecological lens, when all of these levels come together to support women's wellness tourism projects, economic agency arises.

Access to capital, jobs, and business prospects are all components of economic empowerment (UN Women, 2022). Saudi women are better prepared to make economic contributions through wellness tourism as a result of the growth of microfinance, small-scale tourism grants, and hubs for women-focused businesses (AlNemer, 2024). Therefore:

H4. Economic empowerment positively affects women's participation in wellness tourism development.

Participation and Social Reconstruction

Women's engagement in wellness tourism leads to social reconstruction, which is the reinterpretation of societal norms, roles, and relationships (Dixit et al., 2023). According to the feminist ecological model, women's active engagement in tourism contributes to altering gender myths and supporting inclusive development at the macro level (Maschi et al., 2022).

Women's participation in wellness tourism may also act as a catalyst for social reconstruction, which is the process of altering communal values, fostering inclusiveness, and recreating social norms on equal terms (Dixit et al., 2023). Women's engagement helps to broader developmental goals by taking on leadership roles, providing culturally relevant wellness services, and promoting local well-being.

H5. Women's participation in wellness tourism development positively affects social reconstruction.

Entrepreneurship as a Mediating Mechanism

Entrepreneurship is viewed in the current study as a bridging mechanism, a meso-level action that connects macro-empowerment processes to individual agency and collective change. Women create enterprises in wellness tourism to mediate the relationship between empowerment and social transformation, promoting economic independence, social visibility, and political inclusion (UN Women, 2022). This mediating role is crucial for transforming empowerment into long-term societal influence.

Although participation promotes societal change and empowerment makes participation possible, women's entrepreneurial involvement in wellness tourism may be the crucial component that makes this shift a reality. Women in entrepreneurial roles gain exposure, independence, and the ability to convert empowerment into observable results (Saini et al., 2024). According to this study,

we believe that women's entrepreneurship acts as a mediator between many aspects of empowerment and social reconstruction. Hence, the following is developed:

H6. Women's entrepreneurial participation in wellness tourism development mediates the nexus between social reconstruction and (a) psychological, (b) social, (c) political, and (d) economic empowerment.

Methodology

Research rationale

This paper seeks to reveal the contribution of women residents in two major cities (i.e., Riyadh and Jeddah) in influencing wellness tourism scenes and how this empowerment is assisting in wellness tourism development in this nascent industry. We select two cities because of their role as pioneer cities in Saudi cultural and wellness tourism. Riyadh is leading the country's economic and societal impositions, investing in a fresh tourism drive as part of its Vision 2030 (Ibrahim, 2025). As the government further develops wellness-focused infrastructure and services, women are benefiting in a growing way (Swenson & Bansal, 2024) and taking on valuable leadership roles in wellness tourism development (Ibrahim, 2025). On the other hand, Jeddah offers its brand of coastal charm and is characterized by combining tradition with modernity (AlGhunaim et al., 2025); it also caters to multi-cultured Saudi and non-Saudi residents. Through focusing on these two cities, this paper explores how woman empowerment enables Saudi wellness tourism development within the broader picture of social and cultural change. By investigating women's position in wellness tourism development within Riyadh and Jeddah, this paper aims to raise awareness of the opportunities facing women as entrepreneurs in this industry.

Pretest and procedure

Measuring items were constructed based on recent literature related to tourism entrepreneurship (see Appendix A). To assess women entrepreneur empowerment, Abou-Shouk et al.'s (2021) scale was employed using four sub-dimensions in this paper: psychological (four items), social (three items), political (four items), and economic empowerment (three items). Women's participation in wellness tourism development was gauged using four items extracted from Loveline (2022). Seven items were adapted to measure social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development, developed by Dahles et al. (2020) and Maseno and Wanyoike (2022). Each scale's items were answered using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7. Resident type and job experiences were included as control variables to examine their effect on social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development. These factors may have significant effects on women's perceptions, attitudes, and acceptance of wellness tourism development. We used reverse translation to safeguard linguistic and conceptual fidelity. Following the initial translation from English into Arabic, two translators recoded scale items from Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali into English. This back-test translation was compared with the original survey to check meaning accuracy.

Any discrepancies in the translation were resolved through discussion among the research team until a final Arabic version was achieved so that the questions could be understood as intended. This thorough procedure was designed to reduce any potential for misinterpretation so that the survey's reliability and cultural relevance to respondents were preserved. Translators and proofreaders optimized the readability of all items to make them easier for the targeted respondents within KSA. To ensure the content validity of the survey instrument, a pretest was carried out on 80 women resi-

dents after inviting 120 of them using Google Form-prepared online survey link. This procedure allowed for clarification of ambiguous, redundant, or irrelevant items in the questionnaire. Respondents expressed that the statements were clear and easy to understand but recommended that PSE4, ECE2, and SRC2 be reworded to make them more accessible and simpler for the targeted respondents. Accordingly, minor comments were addressed before the main data collection. We used a purposive sampling approach to represent diversity in age, education, and experience with wellness tourism development. The online and paper-based modes of collecting data enabled honing of item wording and response scales. Invited respondents did not suggest any improvements to this questionnaire, demonstrating the survey content reliability of the translated questionnaire.

Data gathering process

The choice of women residents is based on such women, attitudes and perceptions are changing in a dramatic way when it comes to their role in wellness and tourism development. In KSA, women are the key decision-makers for family travel, and they are also becoming increasingly decision-makers when it comes to fitness and wellness (Abdelwahed et al., 2022). This paper uses purposive sampling to select those women who are most likely to have rich, relevant knowledge about the development of preference for wellness tourism in Riyadh and Jeddah. Considering that wellness tourism is a relatively new concept in these cities, respondents should have experience with wellness tourism services or have work related to wellness tourism. The existing paper was designed to have a comprehensive and arranged informed consent procedure with transparent and ethical principles. All respondents provided consent to participate in the survey. Transparent and open communication with assessors was maintained, and assessors were trained to be honest in data collection and to respect respondent rights. To prevent social desirability bias, this survey was composed of indirect questions with the application of randomized response, when respondents are able to give more honest answers if they do not feel are revealed.

An online survey was conducted via Google Form that allowed respondents to make an easy response at their convenience without the time and cost requirements compared with paper-based surveys. The link was shared through health centres' social media websites in Riyadh and Jeddah. It was also distributed among a group of employees working in health centres in these two cities. Additionally, the survey was shared in a WhatsApp group dedicated to individuals interested in tourism programs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire also started with a filter question: “*Are you currently employed in a job related to tourism?*” Respondents who answered “yes” were used as the unit of analysis. Over two months (October and December 2024), 445 responses were received after 850 online surveys with a response rate (52.4%). After data sorting, seven responses with outliers were observed as spread in construct items and were omitted from the final dataset. Therefore, the final sample size was 348 valid responses. To achieve sample size adequacy, a power analysis was performed running G*power v.3.9 was employed. Power analysis determines the number of samples that are necessary to detect significant effects. Results estimated robust statistical power (≥ 0.80), which is 0.99956.

Common method bias (CMB) and analytic strategy

Response bias is problematic in survey studies and may result in misrepresentative findings if not controlled for (Elston, 2021). One frequently observed response bias is common method bias (CMB), where the same source of data or method has affected several variables (Kock & Dow, 2025). CMB can be statistically controlled by using a full-collinearity approach. This procedure checks the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each factor of the model. Results proved that VIF val-

ues of less than 3.3 indicate that there is no problem with response bias (Kock, 2021). Similarly, the marker-correlation test (MCT) was employed as another statistical procedure to eliminate CMB issues. This procedure consists of including a dummy variable that is not get related to the key constructs to be studied but is assumed not to be correlated to the other survey items (Kock & Dow, 2025). Findings showed that the model with and without MCT did not significantly differ. These claims confirmed that datasets were free from CMB risks (Kock, 2021).

We opted to apply partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data for its potential (Hair et al., 2020) to address complex relationships among data involving multiple indicators and constructs (Guenther et al., 2023). ADANCO-PLS v.2.4 was preferred because of its easy-to-use interface, high functionalities, and powerful statistical options to run PLS-SEM analysis (Salem et al., 2025). Running this software allows us to effectively estimate path models, evaluate models for measurement and structure, and perform bootstrapping to test direct and indirect paths (Dash & Paul, 2021). Further, ADANCO-PLS v.2.4 demonstrates a remarkable ability to manage medium sample sizes, an issue commonly encountered in social science research (Selem et al., 2025). Because of the fewer assumptions concerning non-normal data and latent variables, this software is perfect for our dataset.

Results

Respondent profile

Appendix B presents respondents' characteristics as follows: 45.7% had 30 to below 45 years old, 53.2% had a bachelor's degree, 39% had 3 to below 7 years of job experience, and 54.2% were expatriates. Further, 21.3% were Egyptians, followed by 20% were Sudanese, and 19.6% were Bangladeshis.

Outer model estimation

The outer model contains item reliabilities, internal consistency reliabilities, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020). First, factor loadings must be greater than 0.708 to ensure each item is consistent with its variable (Guenther et al., 2023). Figure 2 and Table 1 results confirmed that factor loading values exceed 0.70. Second, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values must be greater than 0.70. Third, average variance extracted (AVE) values must be greater than 0.50 to verify the extent to which responses to items on each variable differ. Results proved (see Table 1) that CR and alpha values were greater than 0.70, while AVE values exceeded 0.50. These results confirm that the model has strong internal consistency and acceptable convergent validity. Next, heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) was used as an ideal method to assess discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020). This method relies on the correlation ratio between variables being less than 0.85 (Aburumman et al., 2022). Results (see Table 2) indicated that all correlations between variables were below the permissible threshold, indicating that the model had strong discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2020).

Table 1. Construct reliability and validity

Constructs	Codes	Factor loadings	CR	Alpha	AVE
Psychological empowerment	PSE1	0.864	0.915	0.877	0.729
	PSE2	0.872			
	PSE3	0.807			

Constructs	Codes	Factor loadings	CR	Alpha	AVE
	PSE4	0.871			
Social empowerment	SCE1	0.857	0.887	0.809	0.725
	SCE2	0.799			
	SCE3	0.895			
Political empowerment	PLE1	0.865	0.922	0.888	0.748
	PLE2	0.851			
	PLE3	0.902			
	PLE4	0.841			
Economic empowerment	ECE1	0.889	0.899	0.834	0.748
	ECE2	0.801			
	ECE3	0.901			
Women participation in wellness tourism development	WPW1	0.866	0.906	0.863	0.709
	WPW2	0.770			
	WPW3	0.918			
	WPW4	0.805			
Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	SRC1	0.808	0.948	0.936	0.724
	SRC2	0.837			
	SRC3	0.915			
	SRC4	0.840			
	SRC5	0.819			
	SRC6	0.894			
	SRC7	0.836			

Source: Author preparation

Table 2. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Psychological empowerment								
2 Social empowerment	0.064							
3 Political empowerment	0.062	0.298						
4 Economic empowerment	0.151	0.431	0.300					
5 Women participation in wellness tourism development	0.295	0.480	0.372	0.564				
6 Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.090	0.461	0.370	0.234	0.547			
7	0.018	0.128	0.114	0.172	0.063	0.106		
8	0.022	0.089	0.120	0.091	0.078	0.001	0.061	

Source: Author preparation

Inner model estimation

This paper utilized 5000 subsamples to assess the inner model using β -values, p-values, and T-values (Guenther et al., 2023). Initially, determination coefficient (R^2) and effect size (f^2) were employed to assess the explanatory and influencing power of the model and path coefficients (Hair

et al., 2020). R^2 tests the variance in the dependent variable by the complete independent constructs (Aburumman et al., 2022). Findings (see Table 3 and Figure 2) indicated that 37.4% of the variance in women participation and 25.6% of the variance in social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development. These results revealed that the model has reasonable explanatory power (Hair et al., 2020). Further, the f^2 value is an effect size measure of one independent variable on a dependent variable and determines if a predictor exerts a strong, medium, weak, or no effect (Aburumman et al., 2022). Results (see Table 3) revealed that effect sizes of direct path coefficients ranged from weak to strong, ranging from 0.045 to 0.329.

Next, results confirmed (see Figure 2 and Table 3) that resident type ($\beta = -0.078$, $t = 1.883$, $p > 0.05$) and job experiences did not significantly affect social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development ($\beta = 0.043$, $t = 1.042$, $p > 0.05$). Yet, results proved (see Figure 2 and Table 3) that women participation in wellness tourism development was positively affected by psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.189$, $t = 4.546$, $p < 0.001$), social empowerment ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 4.905$, $p < 0.001$), political empowerment ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 4.299$, $p < 0.001$), and economic empowerment ($\beta = 0.345$, $t = 7.679$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses H1-H4 were supported. Likewise, women's participation positively affected social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development ($\beta = 0.497$, $t = 10.993$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5.

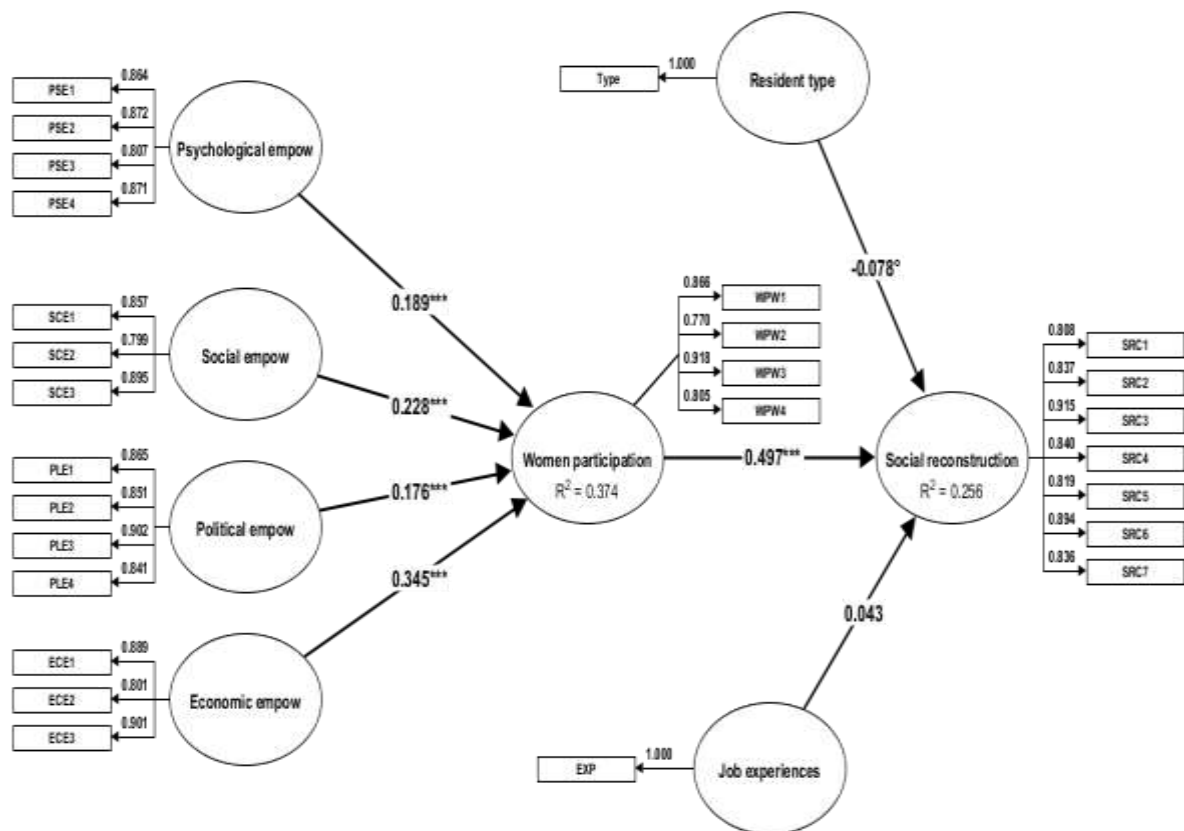


Figure 2. Structural model findings
 Source: Author preparation

Further, a confidence interval (CI) approach was used to assess indirect effects using the full bootstrapping method. CI stipulates that zero should not pass between the lower and upper bounds. Results proved (see Table 3) that psychological empowerment positively affected social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development via women participation ($\beta = 0.094$, $t = 4.149$, $p < 0.01$, CIs = 0.064; 0.172), supporting H6a. Likewise, social empowerment positively affected social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development via Women's participation ($\beta = 0.114$, $t = 4.294$, $p < 0.01$, CIs = 0.054; 0.141), supporting H6b. Similarly, political empowerment positively affected social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development via women's participation ($\beta = 0.088$, $t = 3.885$, $p < 0.01$, CIs = 0.045; 0.136), supporting H6c. Further, political empowerment positively affected social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development via women's participation ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 6.955$, $p < 0.001$, CIs = 0.125; 0.220), supporting H6d. Based on these findings, women's participation partially mediated the nexuses between four dimensions of women empowerment and social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development.

Table 3. Structural model assessment

H	Structural paths	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Decision
<i>Control variables' effects</i>						
	Resident type → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	-0.078	1.883	0.060	0.008	Not supported
	Job experiences → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.043	1.042	0.298	0.002	Not supported
<i>Direct effects</i>						
H1	Psychological empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development	0.189***	4.546	0.000	0.056	Supported
H2	Social empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development	0.228***	4.905	0.000	0.070	Supported
H3	Political empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development	0.176***	4.299	0.000	0.045	Supported
H4	Economic empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development	0.345***	7.679	0.000	0.157	Supported
H5	Women participation in wellness tourism development → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.497***	10.993	0.000	0.329	Supported
<i>Indirect effects</i>						
H	Structural paths	β	t-value	p-value	97.5% CIs	Decision

H	Structural paths	β	t-value	p-value	f^2		Decision
H6a	Psychological empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.094**	4.294	0.005	0.054	0.141	Supported
H6b	Social empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.114**	4.149	0.001	0.064	0.172	Supported
H6c	Political empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.088**	3.885	0.007	0.045	0.136	Supported
H6d	Economic empowerment → Women participation in wellness tourism development → Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development	0.171***	6.955	0.000	0.125	0.220	Supported
<i>Quality indicators</i>							
R ² for Women participation in wellness tourism development		0.374	R ² for Social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development			0.256	
<i>Note:</i> 2-tailed test; *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01							

Source: Author preparation

Discussion and conclusion

General discussion

According to the study's findings, women's psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment is crucial for increasing their involvement in the growth of wellness tourism in Saudi Arabia. The findings show that empowerment across these dimensions not only enables women's active participation in tourism but also significantly contributes to larger social reconstruction, which is in line with feminist ecological theory that emphasises the impact of multi-level systems on individual agency and collective transformation (Maschi et al., 2022).

Women's involvement in wellness tourism and psychological empowerment had a positive connection (H1), confirming that internal motivators like autonomy, resilience, and self-efficacy have a big impact on women's entrepreneurial engagement. According to Nwanzu & Babalola (2024) and Elgammal (2022), women who believe they are capable and influential are more likely to start wellness businesses and take part in community-based tourism. This is especially pertinent in Saudi Arabia, where women's aspirations and agency have been empowered by expanded educational opportunities and the slow change in gender norms brought about by Vision 2030 (Pécot et

al., 2024). The widespread adoption of H1 supports the idea that empowering women psychologically is essential to fostering their leadership and inventiveness in the travel industry.

Participation was also strongly impacted by social empowerment (H2), indicating that community ties, mentorship, and support systems boost women's self-esteem and access to resources for entrepreneurship. The significance of social capital in maintaining women-led companies is emphasised by the works of Ogbari et al. (2024) and Maseno & Wanyoike (2022), particularly in the wellness industry where relational trust and cultural relevance are crucial. This outcome is consistent with Saudi Arabia's larger social shift, as more women participate in networks that encourage individual development and community service. According to the findings, women transition from supporting roles to key players in the growth of wellness tourism as their relational competencies and visibility increase.

The validation of H3 demonstrates the importance of political empowerment in facilitating women's tourist entrepreneurship. Institutional reforms in Saudi Arabia, such as the relaxation of guardianship rules and increased representation of women in senior positions (Stoker et al., 2024; UNWTO, 2023), have increased women's participation in decision-making processes. These structural enablers catalyze empowering women to co-create policies and design inclusive tourism plans. The findings confirm Saini et al.'s (2024) argument that political engagement improves institutional legitimacy and legitimises women's leadership in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

The study findings supported H4, which highlights the importance of economic empowerment as a concrete facilitator of women's wellness tourism business. Saudi women now have the financial independence to invest in culturally relevant wellness services thanks to access to microfinance, grants, and female-focused business hubs, as noted by UN Women (2022) and AlNemer (2024). This result is consistent with the feminist ecological paradigm, which holds that when supportive systems function at the micro, meso, and macro levels, economic agency arises. Economically empowered Saudi women are creating specialised wellness goods that combine innovation and tradition, such as herbal remedies, spiritual retreats, and health consultations.

Importantly, the study findings revealed that women's involvement in wellness tourism greatly aids in social reconstruction (H5), supporting the notion that travel can be a tool for changing social structures and gender norms. Women entrepreneurs are social influencers who modify roles, beliefs, and expectations in the community in addition to being economic agents (Dixit et al., 2023). According to the current study, involving women in wellness tourism fosters community cohesion, gender equity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, all of which contribute to inclusive development. These findings show that tourism provides a platform for transformative leadership and cultural continuity in addition to being a commercial enterprise.

Further, findings revealed that women's involvement in entrepreneurship acts as a mediating factor between social reconstruction and empowerment (H6 is supported). This confirms the idea that entrepreneurship is a meso-level function that converts systemic and internal empowerment into tangible social results. Wellness companies run by women are becoming more popular as venues for institutional involvement, community development, and individual prominence (UN Women, 2022). Women who use entrepreneurial tools not only make money but also play a significant role in fostering social development and resilience. These results are in line with those of Saini et al. (2024), who highlighted how women's entrepreneurship has a knock-on effect on larger social change.

Indeed, the study demonstrates the interconnection of empowerment elements and their cumulative impact on tourism-driven social transformation. It further adds to the expanding body of re-

search that highlights tourism's potential as an inclusive, gender-responsive development strategy (Gupta et al., 2024; Maschi et al., 2022). It particularly broadens this discussion by situating it within Saudi Arabia's distinct cultural and political landscape, highlighting how Vision 2030 reforms are not only unlocking economic potential but also enabling cultural reinvention through empowered female leadership in wellness tourism.

Theoretical contributions

Rooted in FET, our findings provide the interplay of woman empowerment with social reconstruction toward wellness tourism development in the Saudi context. FET draws attention to the relationship between particular experiences, gendered power dynamics, and environmental experiences, focusing on how women, as primary cultivators of change (Maschi et al., 2022), work within systems to progress toward more genuine. Employing this theory to frame the discussion, the existing paper discusses how women's empowerment underpins a potentially transformative process for women in wellness tourism development. FET indicates that women empowerment may drive a more comprehensive societal transformation through the inclusive promotion of diverse and creative tourism development (Zaremba et al., 2021). This theory suggests that psychological empowerment (e.g., self-efficacy, self-determination, and emotional intelligence) serves as a determinant (Onwe et al., 2024), which enables women to be involved in entrepreneurship (Mbukanma, 2021). This empowerment creates a situation where women can act as leaders in the wellness tourism business when traditional gender roles have prevented them from participating in economic sectors (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022).

Underpinned by FET, social empowerment proves how women entrepreneurs can make partnerships and link to work in different sectors. Besides, women's participation in policy formulation provides them space to advocate for policy reforms that promote inclusive development (Mbukanma, 2021). Economic freedom, financial independence, and the ability to be women entrepreneurs contribute to individual well-being, and lead to economic growth and generate employment (Muhammad et al., 2021), of which essential factors for wellness tourism development are. Lastly, women entrepreneurs act as a conduit between women's empowerment and social-engine reformation. Women entrepreneurs are growing wellness tourism and overturning social change, challenging gender stereotypes, and creating new forms of leadership (Panse & Boluk, 2024). Women's roles in wellness tourism development illustrate how their participation can influence societal perceptions and pave the way for more equal opportunities for the next generation. In Saudi Arabia, where cultural changes towards gender equality appear to be rising (Tausch, 2021), wellness tourism women entrepreneurs find their influence on social rebuilding communities.

Managerial contributions

Regarding wellness tourism development in KSA, our pragmatic contributions rest in its examination of how woman empowerment, which is psychological, social, political, and economic, may affect social rebuilding and facilitate wellness tourism development. Focusing on the multi-criteria of women's empowerment, this paper shows how empowering women can lead to broader societal gains. Women's psychological empowerment can enable their participation in wellness tourism and other related activities to promote more meaningful visitor experiences. Social empowerment, cultural viewpoint, and social role improvement represent, which there is additional and more powerful pressure concerning women's participation in various professional fields. On the political aspect, greater involvement in decision-making processes can generate policies that better reflect women's needs and interests, increasing the visibility and importance of women in wellness

tourism. From an economic standpoint, providing women entrepreneurs with opportunities to take part in tourism projects can give a shot in the national economy and support job creation, contributing to economic diversification. This paper offers valuable insights for policymakers, tourism developers, and host communities to facilitate a climate for woman empowerment and wellness tourism development.

Further, educated, resourced, and socially supported female entrepreneurs are more prepared to lead innovative women in the empowerment context. By sponsoring more women's entrepreneurial efforts, managers can also capitalize on a growing market for wellness services that are becoming more popular. Such managerial insight promotes policy creation and business strategies that encourage women to engage in tourism by enhancing access to finance or initiating mentorship programs. Managers can also capitalize on the increasing focus on wellness tourism to promote more accessible, sustainable, and culturally appropriate tourism experiences designed to meet other needs (El-gammal et al., 2025). Lastly, the existing paper contributes more to Saudi social reformation. This paper shows how woman empowerment can lead to sustainable social and economic change strategies. With women enjoying more empowerment in societal acts, their engagement in wellness tourism can be seen as a means of women taking greater responsibility for their well-being. Active women's participation will be a game-changer for the re-imagining of Saudi wellness tourism, moving away from conventional tourism models into innovative, wellness-oriented models that promote sustainable tourism.

Limitations and future needs to research

While the current study offers insightful information about how psychological, social, economic, and political empowerment influence women's involvement in the growth of wellness tourism in Saudi Arabia, it has some limitations. First, self-selection bias might have been introduced because the sample was gathered through convenience sampling utilising a Google Form shared on social media. The likelihood of participants being socially engaged, digitally literate, or already interested in wellness and travel-related topics was higher. As a result, the results might not accurately reflect more marginalised populations, such as older women, people living in rural areas, or people with poor internet access. Even if the sample size ($N = 445$) is statistically sufficient, the results may not be as broadly applicable to Saudi Arabia's larger demographic landscape due to its urban and potentially youth-centric nature.

Second, the study's cross-sectional design limits the capacity to make causal conclusions. Participation and empowerment are dynamic processes that change throughout time. More detailed knowledge of how shifts in empowering factors affect women's continued participation in wellness tourism programs might be possible with a longitudinal approach. Third, the study only used self-reported measurements, which may have included social desirability effects or common method bias. This is especially important in culturally conservative contexts, where participants could feel pressured to give answers that support national narratives of gender inclusion and development or social expectations.

Future studies should use mixed methods approaches that combine focus groups or in-depth qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to overcome these constraints. These kinds of designs can help us better understand how women see and understand empowerment in the context of tourism-related entrepreneurship. Furthermore, adding moderating factors like age, marital status, education level, area (rural vs. urban), or family support systems may show more distinct pathways to involvement and empowerment. To evaluate the changing effects of policy changes and Vision

2030 projects on women's participation in tourism, future research could also use experimental or longitudinal approaches.

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