

Tourism Involvement, Women's Empowerment, and Sustainable Tourism Development: A Literature Review

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Abstract:**Purpose**

The United Nations recognizes empowerment of women as a key goal towards the development of society and correlates it with sustainable development of tourism. Hence, empowerment of women and sustainable tourism are two broader themes of recent academic studies.

Objective

The purpose of this research was to analyze whether women's involvement in the tourism sector empowers them and whether their involvement in the sector helps in sustainable tourism development. The research objectives are in harmony with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Methodology

From 2016 to 2025, a literature review was conducted on the participation of women in the tourism industry, its impact on their empowerment, and on their promotion of sustainable tourism.

Findings

The implication of the research is that female participation in tourism is most essential in empowering women and laying the foundation for sustainable tourism development. Additionally, women need to be empowered into management since women are also expected to embrace sustainable practices in the travel industry. But the research also cites the stereotypes limiting their participation in the tourism sector.

Keywords: women's empowerment, sustainable tourism development, women in tourism, women's participation in tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of women to sustainability and economic growth is now completely understood, especially in the sector of tourism (Visiana, 2025). A great deal of research has long been ongoing with a focus on conceptualization of empowerment and broadening its use across different sectors. Tourism has been proven to have great potential in advancing gender equality and empowering women. It is strongly established that travel and tourism have the capacity to empower women and actively involve them in the development process. Women's empowerment is a very crucial element of sustainable development; therefore, it is important to discuss women's empowerment in terms of sustainable development. The United Nations has identified the travel and tourism sector as a tool for empowering women socially, politically, and economically. Governments and international agencies have insisted that they come up with and implement sensible policies promoting gender equality in working conditions towards involving women in tourism activities, business, and decision-making positions (EI-Manhaly & Taha, 2024). In order to be effective in collaboration, sharing of resources, and the development of an integrated tourism product, women entrepreneurs must establish and engage in local stakeholder networks that are essential for total development (Martini et al., 2020). The intricate relationship of sustainable tourism development emphasizes integrated community plans initiated by the locals to promote economic development, empower women, and conserve local culture (Hidayat & Saskara, 2024). The development of the tourism sector has contributed significantly to the economic and environmental well-being of the nation. Sustainable tourism is the key promoting factor of quality development balancing that has a close relationship with this directly. Sustainable development of tourism is generally interested in economic, social, environmental, and political aspects and includes the cooperation of governments, tourism groups, people, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Apart from that, the growth of sustainable tourism

in a country also depends on its cultural integrity and biodiversity conservation (Lee et al., 2024). Empowerment of women is another fundamental element of sustainable tourism development and should be supported through quality education, wisdom, and self-confidence. Substantial research has confirmed that the empowerment of women can increase their participation in socio-cultural affairs and promote sustainable development, mostly in regional and local tourism (Lee et al., 2024). Sustainable development of tourism is highly reliant on the home country's population, women, and considers not just the short-term economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism but also long-term impacts (UNWTO, 2020b). The United Nations has been working to eradicate hunger, poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation through its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The fifth Sustainable Development Goal is to achieve gender equality and empower women for peace and prosperity (EI-Manhaly & Taha, 2024). UN Women and UNWTO have been working towards gender mainstreaming in tourism policy instruments and supporting women's participation in the tourism industry (Singh et al., 2023). The UNWTO Department for Ethics, Culture, and Social Responsibility has also been on the front foot in pursuing these endeavors (Singh et al., 2023). As a result, there has been research established that is examining the question of gender in tourism, such as achieving gender equality through tourism but Sustainable Development Goal 5 is lurking in the shadows (Boluk et al., 2024). There has been some kind of research gap since there is not much research that has been added to empowering women workers in the tourism industry by their job and contribution towards sustainable tourism growth. This study examines the question, "How does participation of women in tourism influence their empowerment and their role towards sustainable tourism development?" This study will critically review the literature on women's participation in tourism and design a conceptual framework to explain the inter-relationships between women's participation, empowerment, and their role towards sustainable tourism development. This study contributes to studies on women in tourism and their contribution to the development of sustainable tourism behavior.

Literature Review and Proposition Building

Women's Involvement in Tourism

The consideration of sustainable tourism practices has drawn considerable attention recently. The sustainability approach seemed to be supported by new forms of tourism, such as volunteer, environmental, pro-poor, and community-based tourism. Tourism is a vital sector that helps alleviate poverty for women in local communities, generates income, and provides them with employment opportunities (EI-Manhaly & Taha, 2024). Tourism participation is the active involvement of people in activities of tourism, which is usually economically rewarding through the creation of jobs and businesses. In tourism research, participation has been a focus of utmost interest, especially because of its transformative potential on people and society (Gannon et al., 2021). Engagement in tourism has been a successful enterprise and powerful driver of sociopolitical transformation that has influenced traditional gender roles in an indigenous community (Movono & Dahles, 2017). Engagement in the tourism industry can help unleash the generation of new job opportunities, reducing poverty, and developing an inclusive, sustainable tourism industry (Giampiccoli, 2020). Tourism has been noted as a likely driving force for local community development and has also supported the advancement of sustainable tourism strategies. Furthermore, such involvement may enhance self-confidence, income, and critical awareness among participants, thereby fostering both personal and communal growth. Women often possess traditional knowledge and skills in areas such as handicrafts, gastronomy, and storytelling, making them ideally suited to participate in various sectors of the tourism industry (Visiana, 2025). Women in Vatuolalai village have gained influence through a process that began with their involvement in the tourism industry and was further strengthened by successful business ventures. Essentially, economic empowerment was the first step towards achieving empowerment, which progressively expanded to include social, psychological, and political empowerment. Their capacity to recognise injustice and shortcomings sparked initiatives that have increased their sense of self-worth and self-assurance to start their own business (power within). The results also show that women can act on their plans, exercising ingenuity, and make important decisions (Monovo & Dahles, 2017). What distinguishes tourism from other industries is its potential to empower women economically, socially, and culturally. This empowerment, while supporting community development, also enhances the well-being of women. For instance, tourism-related initiatives that involve women can lead to increased cultural pride, preservation of local heritage, and stronger community bonds (McCall

& Mearns, 2021; Rinaldi & Salerno, 2020). Women's participation in tourism is also crucial in helping to further promote sustainable tourism growth. Women's participation assures that tourism planning and implementation are fair and responsive to various community needs. In addition, tourism will empower women so that they become the driving forces to define the objectives of sustainability and empowerment will allow these countries to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of poverty alleviation, gender equality, women's empowerment, and promotion of economic growth (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). As noted by Yuan et al. (2019), engaged residents tend to be emotionally committed towards their place, and this lends support towards tourism activities and more sustainable implications. This kind of emotional and participative attachment is crucial for destination loyalty and long-term sustainability. The sustainable framework of tourism development must take into account the interests of all stakeholders, including tourists, service providers, residents of the local community, and the natural environment (Hardy et al., 2002). Women, constituting nearly half of the world's population, form a growing number of employees within the tourism labor market and the market as a whole. Their active participation is therefore essential to support balanced and equal growth. Literature across various contexts, i.e., the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, illustrates the impact of tourism on their empowerment and sustainable practices (Elshaer et al., 2021). Inserting the voice of women into tourism planning can thus aid the realization of the "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), especially gender equality-based, women's empowerment-focused, and sustainable economic growth-based SDGs (Zhang & Zhang, 2020; Chin et al., 2023). This essay also further examines the impacts of women in tourism based on evidence summarized in Table 1, where years of publication, authorship of the studies, geographical locations, and major findings are all comprehensively detailed.

Table 1. Relevant Studies on Women's Empowerment Through Tourism and Sustainable Tourism Development

Sr. no	Author	Year	Area	Explanation
1.	Visiana.	2025	Jakarta, Indonesia,	The paper explores the salient contributions of women's involvement in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to community empowerment and tourism development. It looks at specific skills women offer their businesses, skills that range from ecotourism to cuisine to traditional crafts. This research was conducted to explore the economic development of women joined in MSMs focusing on how arts and crafts of the choosen category contributed to economic development and sustainable tourism by way of exploring the roles that the women had in MSM.
2.	Rizky et al.,	2025	Sumatera, Indonesia.	In terms of gender equality and women's participation in the blue economy and sustainable tourism development. This study offers important arguments and implications that have broad implications for the sustainable development of coastal communities and tourism. Promoting gender equality is not just a social concern but also a business necessity, as the study shows that it has a favorable effect on economic well-being in the context of the blue economy and tourism. The study also shows that women's participation is a key mediator between economic well-being and gender equality, indicating that women's active participation in the blue economy and tourism sector is necessary to convert equality into real economic gains.

3.	Hidayat and Saskara.	2024	Bali, Indonesia	The article suggested that six major factors have a significant impact on sustainable tourism: employment, social capital, gender equality, traditional institutions, infrastructure, and local culture. The destination's sustainability and tourist attractiveness are enhanced by the significant emphasis on capital and the ties within the community, as well as by traditional rituals. The study emphasized that the development of more inclusive tourism also suggests that local culture and traditional institutions play a role in preserving travel destinations.
4.	Vujko et al.	2024	Serbia	The research highlights the importance of tourism in enhancing women's livelihoods while promoting sustainable tourism development. The study's findings demonstrate that women's active involvement in the tourism sector has contributed to sustainable tourism development in Serbia.
5.	EI-Manhaly and Taha.	2024	Nuba region of Egypt	This study demonstrates the significant impact of community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives on empowering Nubian women and promoting sustainable development in the Nuba region. Based on current findings, it is evident that community-based tourism initiatives in Nuba have influenced sustainable development and women's empowerment. According to the study's findings, Nubian women comprised the majority of participants; these women were unmarried primarily and often shared a home with their parents, siblings, or sisters. The statistics also clearly show that the majority of Nubian women worked in crafts such as leather and cloth before transitioning to work in hotels.
6.	Lee et al.	2024	Bali, Indonesia	The results of this study have an impact on the growth of sustainable tourism, as cultural identity can still spur its development even in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the role of women in advancing tourism is further constrained by their lack of empowerment in the entrepreneurial sector. Women are not included in the design of sustainable tourism, however, because of the stigmatisation of the industry, which sees tourism as a high-risk industrial sector. Women only work in tourism-related jobs that don't require education or skills, like local business managers, tour guides, and hotel servers. Women, however, do have the opportunity to grow the cultural tourism industry.
7.	Quang et al.	2023	Vietnam	The study says that economic involvement can result in more social empowerment since it has a favourable effect on women's status in their families and communities, in addition to the financial gains. There are also signs that women's participation in this field has decreased the number of domestic abuse cases, underscoring the profound effects

				of economic empowerment on women's safety and welfare. Looking at it more broadly, the homestay concept appears to be a viable way to support sustainable rural development by creating jobs, protecting the environment, and preserving local culture.
8.	Guo et al.	2023	China	This research provides important implications and results for tourism contribution research and practice to women's empowerment in China's Hainan island, which is inhabited by ethnic minority Li. A conceptual framework of women's empowerment in ethnic tourism is constructed through uncovering five dimensions of empowerment: economic and psychological. Social, political and familial. This study determines the role played by cultural resources in facilitating the process of empowerment and the dual advantage of comprehending this intricate process by demonstrating the process of empowerment over time through a dynamic resource-agency-achievement paradigm.
9.	Rahman & Trisha.	2023	Bangladesh	It is founded on the mediating function of tourism involvement, in a big study with regard to the empowerment-women's relationship and sustainable tourism sector development in Bangladesh. Political dimensions are encompassed in multidimensional empowerment analysis. It is the degree to which societal and psychological dimensions contribute to our understanding of the tourism industry development-empowerment relationship. The last conclusion of the study indicates that political and psychological empowerment of women are positively and strongly related to the sustainability of tourism. This indicates the role of women in the case of tourism to be sustainable in the future.
10.	Dong & Khan	2023	China	This research contributes to the existing knowledge on how women's empowerment facilitates the building of sustainable rural tourism. This research introduces a novel theoretical model that incorporates the four main determinants of women's empowerment as human capital, education, social capital, and entrepreneurship. The research proves that empowering women positively contributes to building sustainable rural tourism, which facilitates communal, economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability. Based on this study, empowering women can be advantageous to rural communities in general.
11.	Abou-Shouk et al.	2021	Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.	This study presents a novel theoretical framework that combines the four key drivers of women's empowerment as human capital, education, social capital, and entrepreneurship. The study demonstrates that women's empowerment enables the development of sustainable rural tourism, which enables communal, economic,

				environmental, and cultural sustainability. From this study, women's empowerment can be a benefit to rural communities as a whole. In highlighting the contribution of women empowerment towards Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman tourism development, the implication of this study has broad gender equality as well as sustainable tourism development implications.
12.	Diaz-Carrion & Vizcaino.	2021	Mexico	The research examined the mechanisms that women use in dealing with spatial limitations that arise from gendered stereotypes and role entrenchment within the tourism sector. The research concludes that women in the sector always experience disparities in their social engagement within their households and societies.
13.	Elshaer et al.	2021	Saudi Arabia.	The research is carried out in the context of Saudi Vision 2030, which is devised for diversifying the economy and establishing tourism as a strategic industry. Constructing the tourism labour market with more female participation and women's empowerment are major elements of the mission. On behalf of empowering women, the research utilises an integrated strategy. Social, political and psychological determinants are considered by the study. In a country where tourism as a sector is relatively new and women's empowerment is just starting out, this study attempts to contribute to the pool of existing knowledge regarding improving the contribution of women to tourism towards sustainable development through identifying both direct and indirect impacts of women's empowerment towards STD.
14.	Vukovic et al.	2021	Villages in Serbia.	The research has a number of important implications for women's empowerment in rural Serbia, that is, through entrepreneurship and development of the tourism sector. Support to entrepreneurial activities in tourism can be a viable instrument of economic empowerment since research reveals that one of the primary goals for women's empowerment in such areas is self-employment. The research points to the importance of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in supporting women entrepreneurship through information supply, networking, and assistance to new firms. The survey also confirms that rural Serbian women are extremely keen on traditional handicraft and craft firms, demonstrating potential for creating tourism products using local cultural heritage.
15.	Shantika et al.	2021	Bali	The in-depth examination of women's entrepreneurship in tourism and gender equality has been conducted. The study's findings emphasize that the tourism business reflects a notable gap in gender, as women constitute the bulk of the labor force across the globe but are uniformly underrepresented in management". The research results indicated that the most significant barriers to women

				entrepreneurs in the tourism industry are work-life conflict, gender stereotyping, and sociocultural norms. This indicates that facilitating legislation and wider social change are necessary.
16.	Alshareef & AlGassim	2021	Saudi Arabia	The article is research on women empowerment in Saudi Arabia's tourism and hospitality sector, which has major economic and social development dimensions. The survey indicates that despite the progress, there are still challenges in the path of achieving total gender equality in the sector. Women have the perception that they do not receive equal benefits, respect, or career prospects as men, which shows the necessity for implementation of stricter laws and culture shifts to guarantee true equality and empowerment.
17.	McCall and Mearns.	2021	South Africa	This study of community-based tourism (CBT) and women empowerment in South Africa presents a set of salient points of contention and inference. To begin, it illustrates that tourism and CBT, specifically, can serve as effective channels for empowering women in developing countries to support Sustainable Development Goal 5 on women's empowerment and gender equality and be aligned with the perspective of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. The research is an affirmation of the interconnectedness of social and economic empowerment, indicating that when female individuals are economically empowered through tourism, they invest back into society and hence foster social empowerment.
18.	Martini et al.	2020	Trentino, Italy	Persuasive arguments and implication on women's entrepreneurship of sustainable tourism development in rural regions are given in this report. The report gives the chief contribution of women in these regions' sustainable tourism development, resulting in environmental conservation, culture preservation, and economic growth. An authentic and engaging experience to visitors is provided through the unique authenticity and experientiality by women entrepreneurs in businesses.
19.	Nara and Irawan.	2020	Siem Reap, Cambodia	The paper offers important arguments and impacts for the development of sustainable tourism and women's empowerment in Cambodia's community-based tourism destination. According to the study, tourism has been a significant driver of women's political, social, psychological, and economic empowerment in the community. This suggests that effectively run tourist programs can support women's rights and gender equality in developing countries. According to the study's overall findings, community-based tourism can effectively support gender equality, sustainable tourism development, and

				community empowerment in rural areas of developing nations if it is well-managed and inclusive of women.
20.	Doudman et al.	2020	Shiraz, Iran.	The research established that increased participation of women is likely to be a driver of sustainable tourism development in the long run. From the research, social participation of women and how they view sustainable tourism development are strongly positively correlated, which may ultimately translate into more sustainable tourism activities within the community, which can lead to employment. Increased participation is geared towards more economically driven sustainable tourism activity, which can lead to employment. Creation and economic diversification are accorded high respect of women's role in the economic growth of the tourism sector. Increased participation of women would ensure stronger local cultural preservation and promotion by tourism.
21.	Ertac and Tanova.	2020	Northern Cyprus	The research examined the correlation between ecotourism women entrepreneurs' growth attitude, prosperity, and psychological empowerment. 200 women entrepreneurs were used in data collection, and for analysis, a cross-sectional survey method was used. The findings of the study show that ecotourism women empowerment is able to improve the quality of life and promote sustainable tourism development of women entrepreneurs.
22.	Vizcaino Suarez.	2018	Metepec, Mexico	The research explored the effect of tourism on women's empowerment in terms of creating and marketing handicraft pottery in central Mexico. Tourism significantly contributes to women's socialization and provision with legitimate work, thereby enhancing their economic and psychological empowerment. The research illustrates the ways in which women can surpass societal limitation by redefining and negotiating their roles and identities.
23.	Foley et al.	2018	Papua New Guinea	The paper makes important claims and offers implications for empowering women in Papua New Guinea through sustainable tourism development, especially along the Kokoda Trail. Small-scale, locally oriented tourism projects, according to the study, can provide long-term ways to improve the lives of women from underprivileged backgrounds. It is suggested that empowering women through microbusinesses may have long-term beneficial outcomes for community development and stability, illustrating how women's participation in microbusinesses can challenge both traditional gender roles and patriarchal institutions currently existing in their communities. Together, these arguments imply that although the

				development of sustainable tourism can be a potent instrument for women's empowerment.
24.	Movono & Dahles.	2017	Fiji	According to the research, traditional Fijian power structures and gender roles have undergone major shifts as a result of women's success in tourism-related companies. This suggests that economic empowerment can cause culture to change rather than remain constant. This study demonstrates how empowered women are defying patriarchal norms and becoming important leaders and decision-makers in their communities. These changes show that strong women may be effective change-makers in society. The accomplishments of female entrepreneurs in a range of tourism-related fields indicate that women can be extremely important to the growth of sustainable tourism development, especially in niche sectors.
25.	Panta & Thapa.	2017	Nepal	The study investigates the benefits and challenges faced by women in the buffer zone communities of Nepal who are involved in hotel and homestay enterprises. The findings reveal that women entrepreneurs demonstrate increased self-confidence, generate higher income, and possess enhanced decision-making capabilities for their families, thereby contributing to their overall empowerment.
26.	Tajeddini et al.	2016	Bali, Indonesia	The study examines the role of an expanding sector within the hospitality industry in promoting female empowerment, particularly through women's participation in food stalls and small restaurants. It was observed that various factors, including religion, ethnicity, marital status, and traditional gender roles, influence women entrepreneurs in Bali. These women receive both financial and moral support from their social, religious, and ethnic networks in establishing their businesses.

Women's Empowerment through Tourism

The goal of empowerment is to create a fair, civilized, and efficient social framework that benefits both individuals and the environment. It is also anticipated that it would have a lasting effect on society's social sector. Nowadays, it is not unusual for women to play a part in tourism. Both the community and the empowerment of women benefit from this. Women's participation in the workforce is influenced by the mechanisms and psychological empowerment initiatives established by the government through its economic sector programs. One of the many elements that contribute to Sustainable Tourism Development is Women's Empowerment (Lee et al., 2024). Implemented in the field, Women's Empowerment has inspired a range of ideas and activities that enable women to establish their identities, achieve financial independence, and make informed decisions through their business ventures (Lee et al., 2024). To serve the changing needs of the tourism labor force, the industry continues to absorb skilled and unskilled women workers. The entrepreneurial nature of the tourist industry means that women have opportunities to participate in diverse forms of employment, from formal wage labour to entrepreneurship, to leadership and participation in community-based development schemes. such as hospitality, ecotourism, cultural tourism, travel agency services etc. women are given opportunity not only to work as an employee

rather to become an entrepreneur and women leader in the society (Singhanian et al., 2021). The existence of such positions and preparedness for them demonstrates that tourism is an important tool for the social and economic inclusion of women at a time when more traditional forms of employment remain difficult to find. Scheyvens' (2000) captures the potential of ecotourism in promoting gender-equitable economic development. claim that tourism, and specifically tourism focused on sustainable action, can bring about empowerment to women in terms of economic status and social position, particularly in the developing world. Such activities tend to promote community-based forms of development, which put emphasis on involving women in decision-making and sharing the benefits. As Aghazamani and Hunt (2017, p. 333) expressed, tourism empowerment can be understood as “a multi-dimensional process that is characterized by contextual uniqueness creating individuals and communities with the ability to bring about the quality of life-enhancing change through tourism”. The definition encompasses the potential of tourism to change not just the economic but also the social nature of women's lives. Empowerment here is not just economic but also includes boosts in confidence, gaining knowledge, social capital, and involvement in decision-making. Empowerment is also made more complex by its dependence on particular socio-cultural and geographical locations. Movono and Dahles (2017, p. 10) argue that shifts in people, communities, and society affect empowerment triggered through a negotiated social process. It is here through their interactions within the context of society that men and women gain the ability to influence positive changes in their own lives and communities. These negotiated processes often lead to shifts in traditional gender roles, enabling women to access and utilize new resources, networks, and leadership opportunities that had previously been inaccessible. This aspect is particularly relevant in tourism, where community engagement and collective identity often play a vital role in the success of tourism initiatives. By participating in tourism, women can strengthen not only their economic standing but also contribute to building more cohesive and resilient communities.

Figure 1: Dimensions of Women's Empowerment



Source: Researcher

Economic empowerment constitutes an essential component that allows women to reach equal incomes with men while gaining better financial influence over their possessions and business interests (Stanistreet et al., 2007). Financial independence proves crucial because it allows women to gain control over their life decisions (Soroushmehr et al., 2012). When women derive their income through tourism, they gain economic power that increases their fulfillment in family and community roles (Moswete & Lacey, 2015). Economic development of women leads to active social participation for enhanced social role performance (Foley et al., 2018). The attainment of economic autonomy fails to guarantee complete empowerment because women face ongoing social and political restrictions, mainly observed in the tourism industry (Duffy et al., 2015).

Social Empowerment: Social empowerment often receives insufficient attention. However, it provides essential means for women to bring change in social interactions while developing institutions and legal systems and defending their rights

(Jütting & Morrisson, 2005). Women gain social empowerment through supportive cultural norms, legislative systems, and institutional frameworks that promote gender equality and raise women's status in society (Vujko et al., 2019). The development of community inclusion, accompanied by belonging for local women, defines this form of empowerment according to Vuković et al. (2021). Social status alongside community backing determine how a woman feels about herself and her value (Díaz-Carrión & Vizcaíno, 2021; Su et al., 2020).

Political Empowerment: Political empowerment lets women take part actively in leadership positions as well as join policy development processes and become represented members of political bodies (Stanistreet et al., 2007). Institutional policies together with frameworks ensure the empowerment of women as they strive for higher societal status (Elshaer et al., 2021). Tourism initiatives now welcome more women during the planning and implementation stages because this practice enables women to share their perspectives on development direction (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Boley & McGehee, 2014). The active participation of women in politics plays a vital role in social norm transformation because participation leads to social expectation changes and individual empowerment (Mendelberg and Karpowitz 2016).

Psychology empowerment: The concept of psychological empowerment includes both self-efficacy levels and the ability to conquer restraining factors (Zimmerman, 1990). The tourism industry enables women to develop greater self-confidence in conjunction with personal independence, together with a positive image of themselves. The identification of personal independence leads women toward freedom from familial restrictions (Su et al., 2020) as they develop psychological empowerment. A Change in perception frequently develops into feelings of personal success through achievements (Miettinen, 2006) as well as favorable tourism sector experiences (Boley and McGehee, 2014; Pleno, 2006). Participating in tourism provides women with new learning opportunities that enhance their capabilities, thus supporting their enhancement in this specific environment (Scheyvens, 2000). Based on these arguments, the following proposition may be proposed.

P1: Women's tourism involvement positively influences their overall empowerment

Women and Sustainable Tourism Development

Women's contributions to sustainable development have, in the recent past, been given extensive coverage, especially in the tourism industry. Women tend to be associated with a sympathetic communication style and greater sensitivity towards the environment, traits which are some of the fundamental elements of sustainable development. Hence, their involvement in sustainability interventions has been increasing, especially in the tourism industry. Women's involvement with tourism is most directly linked to sustainability initiatives as they have core roles to play in developing and maintaining eco-tourism and other sustainable tourism initiatives. Women's tourism enterprises have been most directly linked to culture and nature conservation—both of which are core aspects of sustainable tourism development (Samad & Alharthi, 2012). Studies have indicated that women's engagement in tourism not only contributes to the sustainability objectives of tourism but also contributes to community-level socio-economic development. For example, it has been found that women's engagement is useful in the development of community-led tourism programs that result in increased local economic opportunities and heritage conservation (Vukovic et al., 2023). These local efforts empower women by engaging them in entrepreneurship and decision-making opportunities, hence boosting their social power and economic independence. Empowerment of women through sustainable tourism plays a twofold function: it increases gender equity at the very moment that it assists in propelling economic development. Folet et al. (2018) observe that participation by women in sustainable tourism results in better livelihoods, poverty alleviation, and increased prosperity for communities. This economic empowerment is coupled with greater self-esteem, greater social status, and greater control of individual and community resources. In addition, women's empowerment can lead to more sustainable and more equitable systems of tourism better suited to adapt to change. A key outcome of integrating women into tourism is shifting community attitudes toward tourism activity. Doudman et al. (2020) observe that as women become engaged with tourism, host residents will embrace tourism in a positive way. This greater acceptance can usually be traced to the material gains of tourism like job creation, infrastructure development, and

cultural revitalization, which women are most likely to spearhead. Women act as prime agents of bridges between tourism projects and society at large, promoting engagement and creating sustainable approaches. Additionally, women are instrumental in curbing the adverse effects of tourism. Their involvement often ensures that tourism development respects cultural values and environmental limitations, thereby mitigating harm and maximizing community benefit (Scheyvens, 2000). As tourism has evolved, it has increasingly relied on the roles played by women, making their inclusion a strategic necessity for sustainable management (Sebele, 2010). Their involvement is not only beneficial but essential for tourism planning and implementation that is genuinely sustainable and inclusive. However, there is a growing recognition that superficial integration of gender considerations into tourism policy is insufficient. Alarcon and Cole (2019, p. 905) argue 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.” This perspective underscores the necessity for transformative change, where gender equity becomes a fundamental principle rather than an optional addition. Empirical evidence supports this call for deeper gender integration. A comparative study conducted by Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, and Elbaz (2021) in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman have confirmed that women's empowerment aspects, which are economic, social, and political, have a direct and positive influence on tourism development. The findings pinpoint the central role that women play in ensuring that tourism is equitable and sustainable. Due to these facts, the following proposition might be brought forward:

P2: Women empowerment through tourism contributes to positive sustainable development of tourism.

The debate revolves around how the active involvement of women in tourism is connected with their empowerment and their central position in driving sustainable tourism development across the globe. The research adds to these debates through the provision of a conceptual model based on propositions that were developed to consolidate the interface between the involvement of women in tourism, their empowerment, and sustainable tourism development.

Methodology: Literature review is critically performed to analyze women's participation in the tourism industry and its impact on their empowerment and their contribution towards sustainable development.

Data sources: To identify pertinent citations related to our research issue, we examined key information sources. Use online general databases like Taylor & Francis, Research Gate, EMERALD, SAGE, ScienceDirect, SCOPUS, Google Scholar, and others. The research papers' reference lists served as the second source of information.

Inclusion Criteria: Specific criteria were established to select the primary research articles for this review. The studies included met the following conditions: (1) published in English; (2) released between the years 2016 and 2024; (3) employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs; (4) focused exclusively on female participants involved in tourism; and (5) examined outcomes related to how tourism influences women's empowerment and their contributions to sustainable tourism development.

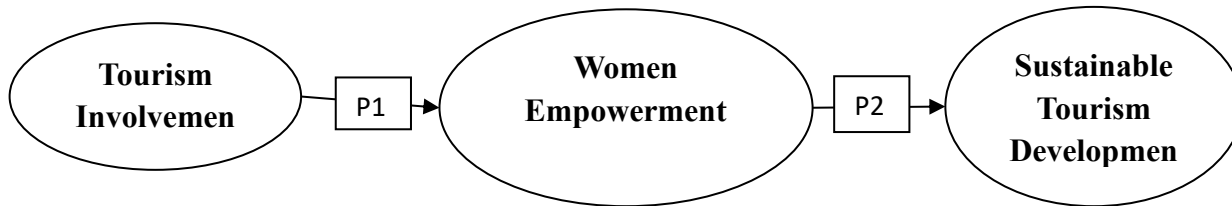
Exclusion Criteria: The following types of studies were excluded from the review: (1) conference proceedings, master's or doctoral dissertations, duplicate entries, and unpublished working papers; (2) case studies, along with research focusing on outcomes unrelated to women's participation in tourism, empowerment through tourism, or the promotion of sustainable tourism development.

Study Selection Process

The screening exercise placed greater emphasis on the research that made analytical contributions to the topics of "women and tourism," "tourism empowerment," "gender and tourism," and "sustainable tourism development." Twenty-eight articles were gathered through this exercise. Four articles were screened out after a proper scrutiny since they addressed the main variables of tourism participation and sustainable tourism development, but not so much on women's empowerment. In research on women's role in tourism and sustainable tourism development, the researcher established criteria for selecting studies that investigate issues such as their involvement in tourism, women's empowerment in the tourism industry, and developing sustainable tourism approaches. By following these steps, the researcher read all the

abstracts and conclusions of the articles manually and used 31 as a point of departure for this follow-up study. Five articles must be excluded after thorough screening since women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development were not major variables in them. Second, debates in the respective studies resulted in suggesting the study.

Figure 2: Women's Involvement, Empowerment, and Sustainable Tourism Development Model



The relationship between the focus variables under study in this study is schematically presented in Figure 1. Within this theoretical framework, the position of "tourism involvement" has been assigned as the independent variable, "sustainable tourism development" has been made the dependent variable, and "women empowerment" has been assigned as the mediating variable.

For purposes of this research, these variables have the following operational definitions:

- **Tourism participation:** All the work done by women as employees, independent operators, and entrepreneurs falls under the tourism sector.
- **Empowerment:** Empowerment is a complex and multifaceted concept, argues Cole (2018). Scheyvens (1999) argued that it possessed four broad dimensions: psychological, social, political, and economic achievements.
- **Sustainable Tourism Development:** It is the continuous process which decides the economic, social, and environmental effects of tourism in the current and future time frames (UNWTO, 2020b).

Grounded in a comprehensive literature review, the study acknowledges that women's involvement in tourism produces empowerment. The literature also reveals that empowerment plays a critical role in determining the nature and extent of women's participation in tourism activities, and their active participation can lead to sustainable tourism development. To validate the propositions outlined in the research, a review of relevant empirical studies was conducted. These studies were assessed to determine their alignment with the theoretical framework and their applicability to the father research. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2, illustrating the empirical grounding for the conceptual relationships proposed in this study.

Table 2. Supporting Literature on Women's involvement in tourism: its impact on their Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism Development.

No	Hypotheses	Author	Finding	Supported/ not supported
1. H1	<i>Women's tourism involvement has a positive influence on their overall empowerment.</i>	Visiana	The important role that women play in boosting local communities' economic empowerment through micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the tourism sector. The results suggest that women-led MSMEs contribute to the sustainability of tourism and have a positive impact on community economic empowerment. Additionally, women's empowerment	Supported H1 & H2

			and cultural preservation are directly facilitated by their involvement in MSMEs in the tourism industry.	
H H2	<i>Women's empowerment through tourism has a positive influence on sustainable tourism development.</i>	Rizky et al. (2025)	The research examined how the involvement of women influenced their economic well-being within the blue economy. Based on research, women's involvement in the tourism sector greatly boosts their engagement in sectors such as sustainable tourism, marine conservation, and fisheries and adds to their economic welfare. Women's participation in the relationship between these sectors and economic welfare also boosts gender equality.	Supported H1 & H2
		Hidayat and Saskara.	The participation of women in the tour industry supports environmental sustainability to a greater extent. Their direct promotion of an environmentally friendly approach and management of resources is a useful addition to the tourist sustainability of the region as a whole.	Supported H1 & H2
		Vujko et al., 2024	The study emphasises how rural tourism may improve women's lives and support the growth of sustainable tourism. By encouraging women to take an active role in tourism-related activities, Serbia can acknowledge the important contributions they make and use their expertise to carry out long-term projects that help communities.	Supported H1 & H2
		EI-Manhaly and Taha.	The socio-economic benefit of the participation of women in community-based tourism is highlighted by the study, which also underscores the significant contribution by women's participation towards sustainable development. According to the findings of the study, women participation in community-based tourism in the Nuba Valley improved their economic well-being and bestowed the region with sustainable development.	Supported H1 & H2
		Guo et al.	The research examines the impact of tourist involvement on Chinese ethnic minority women. It demonstrates the role that tourist cooperatives can play in traveling and empowering rural community women as a means of enhancing sustainable tourism. The research findings are that ethnic minority women employed in the tourism industry have increased empowerment.	Supported H1
		Quang et al.	There has been research evidence presented that women involvement in homestay tourism can empower women and help foster the adoption of sustainable practices. Women's tendency to be more sustainable in their environments as well as be more community-oriented can initiate more sustainable	Supported H1 & H2

			tourism practices to the advantage of the environment as well as local communities.	
		Rahman & Trisha.	The research investigated the role of women in travel activities and the degree of empowerment. The research suggests that the active engagement of women in the travel industry would boost their self-confidence and contribute positively to rural sustainable tourism development.	Supported H1 not supported H2
		Dong & Khan,	This research is beneficial in communicating to us the information on the role played by women empowerment in rural sustainable tourism development. It offers an alternative theoretical framework that takes into account the four pillars of women's empowerment: human capital, social capital, education, and entrepreneurship. The research is stated to have established that women's empowerment has favorable effects on the development of rural tourism sustainably in relation to economic, cultural, environmental, and social sustainability. The research suggests that women's empowerment is likely to have long-lasting positive effects on rural society.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Abou-Shouk et al.	The study took into account the impacts of women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development on their involvement in the industry. Overall, women's involvement in the tourism sector is a link between sustainable tourism development and women's empowerment.	Supported H1 & H2--
		Diaz-Carrion & Vizcaino.	According to the findings, women still experience irregularities in their connections with their families and communities even after working in the tourism sector.	Not Supported both H1 & H2
		Elshaer et al.	The research focused on the impact of women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development on women's involvement in the sector. Women's participation in the tourism sector is a bridge between women's empowerment and sustainable tourism development, as per research evidence.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Vukovic et al.	The research examined the resources that enable women who are members of tourist self-help groups to empower themselves and help promote sustainable tourism development. From the findings, the tourist self-help groups play an important role towards promoting the cause of women's empowerment.	Supported H1 & H2--
		Shantika et al.	This research seeks to establish how the Balinese women are the leading pillars of cultural and environmental conservation in the region through their contribution and role towards sustainable tourism	Not supported both H1 & H2

			achievement in Bali. It highlights how crucial such women are, particularly in the protection of cultural heritage, promoting economic independence, and facilitating sustainable tourism growth. The research also points out the difficulties they encounter because of the patriarchal expectations prevalent in their cultures.	
		Alshareef & AlGassim	This study examines the impact of socioeconomic and gender equality attitudes on women's empowerment in the tourism sector. Women still believe that the industry offers roles that are inappropriate for their gender, even though the number of women working in this field is rising. In addition, women are seen as having fewer economic, social, political, and psychological characteristics than men.	Not supported H1 & H2--
		McCall and Mearns.	The paper analyses the role that community-based tourism (CBT) has on women empowerment. The results show that tourism and specifically community-based tourism have a major influence on women empowerment. Not only in terms of economic recovery but also women are involved in 'tourism' in ways that reimagine kinship feeling. This twin impact is essential for the promotion of responsible tourism.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Martini et al.	This essay tries to investigate how women entrepreneurs have contributed towards sustainable tourism development in a poor context, e.g., mountain rural areas. Implications—The research discovers that FWEs contribute to the development of sustainable mountain tourism.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Nara and Irawan.	The study examines the contribution of tourism towards women's empowerment and their contribution towards sustainable tourist development. The study found that tourism has played a very significant role in the economy of the area, especially the women at the economic, social, psychological and political level. The study reveals the excellence of women's contribution towards achieving sustainable tourist development.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Doudman et al.	The study took into consideration whether the participation of women moderates women's perception of sustainable tourism growth. This implies that empowering women's connections may imply favorable perceptions concerning tourism projects. The study emphasizes the necessity of including women in the reasons why the growth of the tourism sector needs to provide that women are not only being brought onboard but are also taking charge for the sector to be sustainable.	Supported both H1 & H2

		Ertac and Tanova.	Investigated the impacts of psychological empowerment, growth mindset, and women ecotourism ventures' success. As indicated by the study, women's lives can be enhanced and sustainable tourism can thrive if they are empowered through ecotourism.	Supported both H1 & H2
		Vizcaino Suarez.	The findings serve as an example of how women can challenge a society that limits their potential by redefining and renegotiating their positions and identities.	Supported H1 & H2--
		Foley et al.	In particular, the study looks at how women run their microbusiness ventures in this sector and how they contributed to the growth of eco-tracking along the Kokoda Track. The current trekking industry was examined for microbusiness prospects through surveys and interviews with community residents and tour operators. According to the study's findings, women's involvement in tourism may boost local economies, empower communities, and promote the growth of sustainable tourism.	Supported H1 & H2
		Movono & Dahles.	The study aims to investigate the relationships among business, tourism, and women's empowerment in the Fijian community. According to the findings, women who worked in tourism-related professions and businesses were more empowered, first economically and then socially, psychologically, and last politically.	Supported H1 & H2
		Panta & Thapa.	The study explores how ecotourism empowers women in Nepal's buffer zone areas and finds that working in the tourism industry gives women a sense of empowerment. Women who are entrepreneurs have been proven to be more self-assured, earn more money, and be better equipped to make decisions for their families, but they still encounter certain social challenges.	Supported H1 & H2--
		Lee et al.	In the context of developing sustainable tourism, the study looks into the relationship between women's empowerment, women's entrepreneurship, and opinions on women's labour. The results show that cultural identity and sustainable tourist development are positively and significantly correlated. Moreover, the connection between women's participation and the growth of sustainable tourism is mediated by cultural identity.	Not supported both H1 & H2

- Both H1 & H2 were supported: Paper supported both H1 and H2.
- Supported H1 & H2--: Paper supports H1 but doesn't mention H2.
- Not supported both H1 & H2: Paper does not support H1 or H2.

Having done the literature review on the research hypothesis, some emerging themes have been identified. The research hypothesis being investigated in the current study is that women's contribution to the tourism sector contributes to their involvement in sustainable tourism development and empowerment. Proposition one, that the empowerment of women is achieved through their involvement in the tourism business, is supported by a large body of existing literature. (Nara & Irawan, 2020; Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021; Guo et al., 2023; Vujko et al., 2024; Hidayat & Saskara, 2024). Other studies also argued in favor of the idea that women's participation in the tourism industry leads to sustainable tourist development, as described in proposition second (Ertac & Tanova, 2020; Doudman et al., 2020). Despite this, some studies claim that women are discriminated against and do not become empowered by laboring in the field (Lee et al., 2024). Several obstacles exist to the empowerment of women in the tourism sector, including a lack of sufficient funds to start their businesses, constrained earning potential, and cultural limitations on women's participation in meetings and decision-making (Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Scheyvens, 2000). The problems continue to haunt, such as unequal pay, curtailed abilities of participation in decision making and insufficient representation in top management.

Challenges and Barriers

As the current review indicates that the tourism sector plays a significant role in empowering women, several authors have noted that women encounter numerous challenges within this sector. Despite their significant accomplishments, women employed in the tourism industry continue to encounter numerous challenges. These challenges predominantly encompass inadequate financial resources and insufficient training opportunities. (Visiana, 2025). Moswete & Lacey (2015) and Scheyvens (2000) identified societal stereotypes and unequal pay as persistent obstacles to women's empowerment. Women have delivered valuable results in tourism, but they face difficulties due to structural problems and sociocultural barriers. Women workers in tourism earn less than men because they face gender biases about wages and promotion opportunities. Male employees benefit from approximately 14.7% higher pay than female employees. Broader societal inequalities manifest as persistent pay gaps in the industry (UNWTO, 2019). The study also acknowledges persistent challenges, such as the double burden of balancing family care and income generation (Quang et al., 2023). There are still issues, such as disparities in pay, decision-making power, and respect when compared to male coworkers, suggesting that organisational and cultural adjustments may be necessary to achieve real empowerment (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). The hospitality sector, travel agency sector, and homestay industry present women with multiple barriers and opportunities to gain empowerment. The research suggests that empowerment for women involves accessing physical and social resources to achieve autonomy in decision-making in their personal lives (Porth et al., 2021). Gender disparities, along with economic and socio-cultural barriers, prevented numerous individuals from engaging in sustainable tourism activities (Cave & Kilic, 2010). Although tourism has a female majority within its workforce, it lacks a structured method to promote women's growth, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2022). The industry continues to face challenges with gender wage disparity, mainly due to two main factors: the predominance of men in positions of power and the gender-based horizontal segregation (Bakas et al, 2018). Creating an environment that empowers women to participate in and assume leadership roles in tourism is essential for achieving sustainable benefits and fostering inclusivity within communities. Future research should investigate the extended effects of sustainable tourism growth on women's empowerment across multiple locations (Elshaer et al., 2021). Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing support for women's empowerment and the development of sustainable tourism.

Conclusion

Evidence assessment irrefutably proves that women's direct engagement in the tourism sector yields quantifiable economic, social, psychological, and political empowerment. Women's involvement in tourism goes beyond economic participation; it facilitates empowerment through increased autonomy, leadership, and social visibility. As entrepreneurs, their people leaders, and custodians of culture, women bring sustainability practice to operation, facilitating growth to be inclusive and sustainable. Women have both direct and indirect involvement in the tourism industry's workforce. Women who are employees in the travel agency, operating a homestay, operating a food stall, producing handicrafts, and directly engaging

in activities related to tourism. These advantages spill over to women to directly impact sustainable tourism destination management. Women empowerment in tourism is beneficial in two ways under current review. They can make decisions for themselves, first. Secondly, their green consciousness and high intensity participation in community tourism lead to sustainable tourism development through facilitation of community development activities and cultural conservation (Ferguson, 2011). Women's involvement has been found through research to be most advantageous to sustainable tourism development in that it is positively impacting the economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainability at the same time. Economically, tourism with women's involvement has benefits such as household incomes, employment, and poverty reduction. By entrepreneurship in homestays, handicraft production, farming, or accommodation services, women conserve houses and recycle money in communities, and it is inclusive economic growth and a source of resilience. Socially, tourism emancipates women by unveiling their roles and functions beyond the confines of the household. It enhances participation in leadership, decision-making, and self-confidence, all of which are essential in guaranteeing gender balance and more integrated, more resilient societies. Women culturally are heritage custodians who safeguard customary practices, traditional handicrafts, traditional foods, and oral traditions that enhance the tourist experience. They thereby render tourism development heritage-sensitive and respectful but retain local identity. Environmentally, women's leadership is trending towards green responses such as ecotourism at the community level, waste management, and conservation initiatives, thereby combining the protection of the environment with generation of livelihoods. Collectively, all these inputs prove that not only are women sustainers but also change agents driving tourism towards more inclusiveness, flexibility, and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

From the literature review, it was seen that while there were studies that had quantitatively examined the direct and indirect effects of women empowerment through tourism, it has been short of its analysis in the participation of women and their role towards sustainable development in tourism. It is necessary to construct gender-sensitive policy so that tourism can be promoted. Policies need to be formulated in a way that women are given chances of finance, leadership, and training so that the tourism industry becomes sustainable and inclusive. Future research needs to be in a position to be able to inform best practices of incorporating gender-sensitive thinking into tourism planning so that participation of women in tourism will become a core pillar of sustainable development. While gendering women in tourism presents a matter of social justice, it is equally a mechanism for long-term sustainability of the world's tourism economy. (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). The findings have policy implications that are relevant to policymakers, tourism managers, and community leaders who are willing to craft sustainable tourism policies that involve women and use cultural identity (Lee et al., 2024). Intriguingly, women empowerment within ethnic tourism is an area of significant concern that offers valuable insights for researchers, tourism managers, and policymakers operating in this space (Gu et al., 2023). Very little research has been conducted on this subject, emphasizing the need for research in this area. The research also identified gender equality at the leadership level in the tourism industry as one of the methods to improve the performance as well as economic impact of the industry (Shantika et al., 2021). Policymakers and other stakeholders can foster cultural sustainability, create new economic opportunities, and help build stronger and more prosperous communities by empowering women entrepreneurs. Empowering them is an investment in a more dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable economy, not a gender equality question.

Suggestion

A multifaceted approach involving the government, employers, and society at large is required to achieve the goals of women's empowerment in the sector, according to the research, which also highlights the need for more training programs, regulations to protect women in the workplace, and efforts to change societal perceptions (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). Building policies that promote greater access to education, finance, and mentorship opportunities will help women assume leadership and decision-making roles. Future research should identify evidence-based interventions that elevate engagement of women throughout the tourism industry at all levels of leadership. Programs that address regional tourism issues within the Sustainable Development Goals must produce gender responsive, applicable policies that are contextualised within

regional environments to promote gender equitable tourism development. Gender equal and empowered tourism businesses will become exemplars of sustainable global development. Tourism represents an enormous opportunity to enhance women's socio-economic enhancement through employment and skills development, providing economic freedom and new leaders (Scheyvens, 2020; UNWTO, 2019). Involvement of women in tourism generates economic and social life in the regional economy and national economies. Tourism provides opportunities for personal growth, workforce engagement, and exercising independent economic choices (Vukovic et al., 2023). Likewise, this study suggested that women's participation in tourism significantly added to sustainable tourism development. When women feel empowered, they are more likely to think about sustainable development and be able to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

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