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THE INFLUENCE OF THE DIVERSITY OF TOURIST REGIONS ON THE CHOICE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to empirically examine the influence of the diversity of tourist regions on destination choices in Saudi Arabia within the context of Vision 2030. The research is based on the observation that the natural, cultural, and infrastructural diversity of Saudi regions constitutes a strategic lever for attracting domestic and international tourists and strengthening the country's tourism competitiveness. Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative approach based on econometric analysis and a structural equation model. The data are obtained from both secondary sources covering the period 2010–2024, and a questionnaire survey administered to 1024 tourists who had visited at least one Saudi region. The empirical results show that regional diversity has a positive and significant effect on the choice of tourist destinations, and that this effect is partially mediated by the perceived quality of tourist infrastructure and services. Furthermore, regional promotion and public policies supporting tourism moderate the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice, enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of lesser-known regions. The originality of this research lies in its dual contribution: firstly, it develops an analytical framework integrating regional diversity as a major determinant of tourist choice behavior in an emerging context; secondly, it offers a novel empirical application to the case of Saudi Arabia, in line with the economic and territorial diversification ambitions of Vision 2030.

Keywords: regional tourism, destination choice, regional diversity, Vision 2030, territorial development, Saudi Arabia

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INTRODUCTION

The Vision 2030 launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2016 has the major ambition of diversifying the national economy by reducing dependence on oil and positioning tourism as a key growth sector (Kyriakidis et al., 2024). As such, tourism is now conceived not only as a source of revenue but also as a lever for regional development, cultural enhancement, and infrastructure deployment (Mir & Kulibi, 2023). This new paradigm is accompanied by ambitious quantified objectives: for example, Saudi Arabia aims to increase tourism's contribution to GDP to 10% by 2030 (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2025). At the same time, the country boasts a marked geographical, climatic, and cultural diversity: from desert regions to Red Sea coastal areas, passing through the Asir mountain range or historical cities like Al-Ula.

This regional heterogeneity is a clear asset for tourism development. However, empirical knowledge remains limited regarding how and to what extent this "regional diversity" influences the destination choices of both domestic and international tourists. Therefore, the study aims to fill this gap by focusing specifically on the Saudi case, based on the hypothesis that regional diversity (natural, cultural, infrastructural, economic) is a determining factor in the choice of tourist destination, but that this effect can be shaped by the perceived quality of infrastructure, accessibility and promotion of regions. While tourism literature has traditionally focused on factors such as tourist motivation, distance, cost, or destination reputation (Pike & Page, 2014; Dolnicar et al., 2018), few studies have examined the effect of regional diversity within a single country on tourist destination choice. In particular, in a country like Saudi Arabia, which combines areas with religious, cultural, natural, urban, and experiential profiles, the question becomes: "To what extent does the diversity of tourist regions influence tourists' preferences and choice behavior?" This question is all the more relevant given that Saudi regions do not all benefit from the same level of infrastructural development or international visibility. It is therefore important to understand whether regional diversity acts directly, or through mediators such as perceived quality or accessibility, and whether public policies or tourism promotion play a moderating role. The study sets the following objectives:

- Identify and characterize the main dimensions of regional tourism diversity in Saudi Arabia (e.g., natural diversity, cultural-heritage diversity, infrastructural diversity).
- To assess the effect of this regional diversity on the choice of tourist destination by national and international tourists.
- Examine the mediating role of perceived infrastructure quality and regional accessibility in the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice.

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- To study the moderating role of tourism promotion policies and regional positioning in the relationship between regional diversity and visit decision.

This research makes three major contributions. First, it enriches the tourism literature by introducing the concept of "regional diversity" as a determinant of tourist behavior, beyond the usual factors (motivation, cost, distance). Second, it applies this framework to the Saudi context, which is characterized by significant regional heterogeneity and an active national tourism development strategy (Alfehaid, 2025; Alsader, 2024). This novel empirical application provides insights for destination policies in an emerging tourism country. Third, it highlights the interaction between regional diversity, infrastructure, accessibility, and promotion, offering an operational analytical framework for regional and national policymakers. The article is structured as follows: the second section provides a literature review on destination choice and the effects of regional diversity. The third section present the conceptual framework. The fourth section presents the research hypotheses. The fifth section details the methodology (data sources, variables, econometric models). The sixth section presents the empirical results. The seventh section discusses the theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main contributions and suggests avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Choosing a tourist destination: theoretical and empirical foundations

The process of choosing a tourist destination is a central topic in the tourism literature and relies on utility models based on consumer theory (Lancaster, 1966) that consider the destination as a "basket of features." Thus, Crompton (1979) highlighted vacation motivation as a key variable in destination choice. A more recent literature review reveals that the research falls into several categories: choice models (MNL, logit, nested logit), personal factors (age, income, experience), destination attributes (image, attractions, services), and information/influence flows (e-WOM, social networks).

For example, Camacho-Murillo et al. (2021) examine how man-made leisure attractions moderate the effect of distance on regional choice in a mixed logit model. Other more recent work, such as the study by De Almeida et al. (2025) on digital twins in tourism, demonstrates the evolution of analytical tools for understanding choice behaviors.

In summary, the literature converges on the fact that the choice of destination results from the interaction between the individual characteristics of the traveler (motivation, experience, socio-demography), the attributes of the destination (nature, culture, infrastructure, accessibility, image), informational processes/amplitudes of communication (social networks, influencers, e-WOM), and contextual/spatial factors (distance, cost, alternative offer, politics).

However, few studies have explicitly combined regional diversity (geographic, climatic, cultural variety) as an independent variable in a destination choice model.

2. Regional diversity, differentiation and tourism competitiveness

A second area of literature concerns territorial differentiation and the diversity of tourism offerings, key concepts when considering multiple destinations within the same country. The article by Roman et al. (2020) on the "spatial diversity of tourism in the EU" examines how inter-regional differences in terms of accommodation, visitor flows, and revenue influence tourism distribution. Similarly, Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto (2005) and others have shown that the competitiveness of a tourist destination is multidimensional: natural, cultural, infrastructural, and institutional.

In the context of regional tourism offerings, the study by Gavurova et al. (2025) develops a hybrid multi-criteria model to evaluate regions from a sustainable tourism perspective. This work suggests that regional differentiation, in other words, the diversity of tourism offerings, can become a competitive advantage when combined with good infrastructure and appropriate territorial marketing. This density of research highlights the relevance of integrating the variable "regional diversity" into a study on destination choice. However, there remains a specific lack of empirical applications for this link: regional diversity → destination choice.

3. Destination attributes and mechanisms of influence

The recent literature has focused on destination attributes and their role in decision-making: destination image, perceived quality, reputation, accessibility, infrastructure, etc. For example, Islam et al. (2025) show how online travel reviews affect destination choice through the credibility, quality, and diagnostic accuracy of the reviews. Jin Weng et al. (2022) examine the mediating role of "quality of place" in the relationship between urban wealth and tourism competitiveness. The study by Costa et al. (2024) on mixed urban/rural preference specifies that prior experience, novelty, and spontaneity mediate the link between origin and destination preference.

These results suggest that destination attributes can mediate or moderate the effect of other variables (such as regional diversity) on traveler choice. This opens the way to considering regional diversity not only as "directly influential," but also through mechanisms of influence (perceived quality, accessibility, image).

4. Context and challenges for Saudi Arabia

The Saudi context provides a particularly relevant setting for this type of study. Under the banner of Vision 2030, the country is embarking on an ambitious economic and tourism diversification strategy, aiming to increase tourism's contribution to GDP and boost international visitor flows (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2025). Recent reports show that the Kingdom is one of the fastest-growing destinations in the world, with a 61% increase in international arrivals in 2023 compared to pre-pandemic levels. Furthermore, local literature is beginning to explore the relationship between infrastructure/quality and regional attractiveness. For example, Alfehaid (2025) analyzes the combined effects of "hard"

and "green" infrastructure in Saudi regions. Almosafer's (2025) survey also indicates that 40% of tourist bookings are domestic and that local travelers favor distinct regional destinations (AlUla, Jazan, Tabuk, Abha), suggesting a demand for regional variety. These elements show that regional diversity (geographic, climatic, cultural) plays a role already perceived in Saudi tourist behavior, but without having been formalized in a robustly tested academic model.

5. Gaps identified and justification for the study

Despite the abundance of research on destination choice, several gaps remain. For example, few studies have explicitly addressed regional diversity as an explanatory variable for destination choice. The mediating/moderating mechanisms between regional diversity and destination choice (such as perceived quality, accessibility, and promotion) are insufficiently explored. The Saudi context, with its tourism diversification strategy and regional wealth, remains empirically under-exploited regarding tourist choice behavior in relation to regional diversity.

Finally, most studies focus on single or international destinations, rather than on intra-national comparisons of regions (which is essential for our topic). It is in this perspective that our study takes place: by combining the notion of regional diversity as a determining factor, and by examining its effects via mechanisms of influence on the choice of tourist destination in Saudi Arabia, our research fills a gap that is both theoretical and contextual.

6. Conceptual Synthesis

To summarize the line of reasoning, it's important to state that destination choice is influenced by a combination of individual, destination-related, and contextual factors. Regional diversity, as a dimension of the tourism offering, represents a potential lever for differentiation and attractiveness. Destination attributes (image, quality, accessibility) act as mediators/moderators in the diversity-to-choice relationship. The context of Saudi Arabia, with its regional range and tourism strategy, provides an ideal setting for testing this framework. This synthesis justifies the integration, in our empirical model, of the following variables: regional diversity (natural, cultural, infrastructural), perceived quality and accessibility as mediators/moderators, choice of destination as dependent variable, control of individual variables.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature on tourist behavior highlights that destination choice is based on the interaction between individual factors of the tourist and the characteristics of the destination (Crompton, 1979; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Cuong et al., 2026; Rakhimzhanova & Mussina, 2026). Among these characteristics, regional diversity is increasingly perceived as a key determinant of tourist attractiveness (Sun et al., 2021; Yang & McKercher, 2024). Regional tourism diversity is defined as the variety and complementarity of natural, cultural, infrastructural, and promotional resources present in a region (Hall & Page, 2019). This diversity creates a differentiated offering that responds to several tourism motivations, while strengthening the image and territorial competitiveness (Matiza, 2020). In the context of Saudi Arabia, this issue is of particular importance. The Vision 2030 program emphasizes economic diversification through the development of regional and heritage tourism (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2024). The growth of domestic and international tourism is closely linked to the country's ability to promote the natural and cultural wealth of its regions, while simultaneously improving the perceived quality of services and the accessibility of destinations (Hamdi et al., 2024). Theoretically, the proposed conceptual framework draws on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and destination attributes theory (Beerli & Martín, 2004). These approaches suggest that positive perceptions of regional diversity, infrastructure quality, and ease of access directly influence destination choice. Furthermore, tourism promotion and the tourist's prior experience act as moderators, potentially amplifying or mitigating these relationships (Assaker, 2020; Kim et al., 2023).

Thus, the conceptual model postulates that regional diversity influences destination choice directly, but also indirectly via perceived quality and accessibility, while regional promotion and travel experience moderate this relationship.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on previous work presented in the literature review and on the basis of the conceptual framework of this paper (Table 1), we can distinguish the following hypotheses. First, attraction factors theory suggests that the diversity of tourism resources (natural, cultural, linguistic, etc.) increases the perceived attractiveness of a destination by offering a wider range of experiences tailored to different tourist segments (Valami & Raeinojehdehi, 2016).

In particular, the integration of several types of attractions (cultural, historical, natural) is associated with a stronger intention to choose a destination (De Medeiros et al., 2025; Reisinger et al., 2019). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 concerning the relationship between regional tourism diversity and destination choice is formalized as follows:

H1: Regional tourism diversity has a positive and significant effect on the choice of tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia.

Second, the quality of tourism infrastructure (transport, accommodation, related services) is a key determinant of tourists' choice behavior. Previous research shows that quality establishments improve the overall perception of a destination and positively influence visit intentions (De Medeiros et al., 2025). Furthermore, infrastructure serves as a crucial mediator in transforming interest in diversity into actual destination choices (Jeong, 2023; Munir, 2025). Therefore, Hypothesis 2, concerning the perceived quality of tourism infrastructure and services, is formalized as follows:

H2: The perceived quality of tourism infrastructure and services plays a positive mediating role between regional tourism diversity and destination choice.

Moreover, the "accessibility chain" theory indicates that ease of access (transportation, accessibility of attractions, information) directly influences visit intentions. Increased accessibility helps to realize the intentions created by a rich

diversity of tourism (Jin Weng et al., 2022; Al-Harbi & Khan, 2024; López-del-Pino, 2026). Hypothesis 3 concerning regional accessibility is then formalized as follows:

H3: Regional accessibility acts as a positive mediator between regional tourism diversity and destination choice.

Thus, marketing and promotional efforts modify the perception of destination characteristics. Tourism marketing theories show that communication campaigns strengthen the impact of tourism resources on choice decisions by increasing visibility and awareness (Pahrudin et al., 2022; Assiouras et al., 2024). Hypothesis 4 concerning regional tourism promotion is then formalized as follows:

H4: Regional tourism promotion positively moderates the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice, making it stronger with high levels of promotion.

Finally, research on tourist behavior indicates that novice tourists rely more heavily on perceived cues (diversity, variety, novelty) to make decisions, while experienced visitors may prioritize specific criteria or loyalty to certain destinations (Kim et al., 2023; Medeiros et al., 2025). Thus, less experienced tourists are more sensitive to the variety and novelty of the regional offering, unlike experienced tourists who seek specific quality or loyalty to certain destinations (Kim et al., 2023). Hypothesis 5 concerning the tourist's prior experience is then formalized as follows:

H5: The tourist's prior experience positively moderates the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice, with this relationship being stronger for novice tourists.

Table 1. Summary of the conceptual model

Type of relationship	Variables	Nature of the effect
Direct effect	Regional diversity → Destination choice	Positive and significant
Mediated effect	Regional diversity → Perceived quality / Accessibility → Choice	Partial mediation
Moderate effect	Regional Promotion and Tourist Experience	Positive/differential moderation

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

1. Type of research and methodological approach

This study adopts a quantitative and explanatory approach, aiming to empirically test the relationships between regional diversity, perceived quality, accessibility, tourism promotion, tourist experience, and destination choice. The research logic is based on a hypothetico-deductive approach, allowing the formulated hypotheses to be compared with the conceptual framework presented previously (Hair et al., 2022).

To achieve this, the study employs a partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM), widely used in tourism marketing and management research when models incorporate multidimensional latent variables (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). This method has the advantage of simultaneously addressing direct, mediated, and moderate causal relationships, while also allowing for the evaluation of the validity of both the measurement model and the structural model.

2. Sources and nature of data

The data used in this research come from two complementary sources: primary and secondary data.

The primary data are from a questionnaire survey administered to 1024 tourists who visited at least one tourist region in Saudi Arabia between 2022 and 2024. To ensure regional representativeness and limit biases due to geographic concentration, the questionnaire was distributed using a stratified sampling method by region, with a near-equal distribution among the main tourist regions studied.

The regions selected are: Riyadh, Mecca, Medina, Asir, Al-Ula, Tabuk, and the Eastern Province, which represent the geographic, cultural, and economic diversity of the country. The distribution of questionnaires by region is shown below:

- Riyadh: 146 questionnaires; Mecca: 147 questionnaires; Medina: 146 questionnaires; Asir: 146 questionnaires;
- Al-Ula: 147 questionnaires; Tabuk: 146 questionnaires; Eastern Province: 146 questionnaires

This represents a total of 1024 valid questionnaires. The slight numerical differences (146–147) result from operational constraints related to fieldwork, but remain negligible and ensure a balanced distribution across regions.

The questionnaire was developed using scales validated in the literature, adapted to the Saudi context, and translated into Arabic using back-translation to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence (Brislin, 1986).

The secondary data were obtained from reliable institutional sources, including reports from the Saudi Tourism Authority (2024), the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT), and the World Bank Tourism Data Portal. This data was used to enrich the contextual analysis and operationalize the measurement of regional tourism diversity.

3. Measuring instrument and variables

The variables were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Regional diversity (DIR) was measured across three dimensions: natural, cultural, and infrastructural diversity, inspired by Hall & Page (2019) and Sun et al. (2023). Perceived quality (QP) was assessed by perceptions of cleanliness, safety, reliability of services, and hospitality (Jeong, 2023). Accessibility (ACC) was measured by travel time, transportation cost, and infrastructure availability (Jin Weng et al., 2022). Tourism promotion (PRO) was measured by campaign awareness, digital communication, and media presence (Pahrudin et al., 2022). Tourist experience (EXP) was represented by the number of previous trips and familiarity with local destinations (Kim et al., 2023).

Destination choice (CHO): dependent variable measuring the probability of visit and the stated preference for a given region (Beerli & Martín, 2004). The internal reliability of the scales will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient

(> 0.70) and composite reliability (CR > 0.70). Convergent validity will be measured by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (> 0.50), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4. Method of analysis

The empirical analysis relies on a combination of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and econometric robustness tests to examine direct, mediated, and moderated causal relationships between regional diversity and the choice of tourist destinations. This approach allows for the simultaneous validation of the measurement model (construct validity) and the structural model (relationships between latent variables), in accordance with recent methodological recommendations (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2020).

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model aims to assess the reliability and validity of latent constructs (regional diversity, perceived quality, accessibility, promotion, experience, and destination choice). The measurement equations are written as follows (Fornell & Larcker, 1981):

$$x_{ij} = \lambda_{ij}\eta_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Or, x_{ij} represents the observed indicator associated with the latent construct η_{ij}, η_{ij} is the factorial load (or external weight), $\varepsilon_{ij}$is the measurement error. The reliability is considered satisfactory when Cronbach's alpha (α) > 0.70, composite reliability (CR) > 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The discriminant validity is tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio (Heterotrait-Monotrait), which must remain below 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.2. Structural Model (Causal Relationships)

The structural model formalizes the main assumptions by representing the causal relationships between the latent constructs. The general structural equation can be expressed as follows (Hair et al., 2022):

$$CHO_i = \beta_1 DIR_i + \beta_2 QP_i + \beta_3 ACC_i + \beta_4 (DIR_i \times PRO_i) + \beta_5 (DIR_i \times EXP_i) + \xi_i$$

Where, CHO_i measures the choice of destination by individual i, DIR_i measures the perceived regional diversity, QP_i measures the perceived quality of services and infrastructure, ACC_i measures the accessibility of the region, PRO_i measures the intensity of tourism promotion, EXP_i measures the previous tourism experience, and ξ_i measures the random error term.

4.3. Mediation Model

In order to examine the mediating role of perceived quality (PQ) and accessibility (ACC), two mediation sub-models are estimated in accordance with the approach of Zhao et al. (2010). The corresponding equations are formulated as follows (Baron & Kenny, 1986):

$$\begin{cases} QP_i = \alpha_1 + \gamma_1 DIR_i + \varepsilon_{1i} \\ ACC_i = \alpha_2 + \gamma_2 DIR_i + \varepsilon_{2i} \\ CHO_i = \beta_1 DIR_i + \beta_2 QP_i + \beta_3 ACC_i + \varepsilon_{3i} \end{cases}$$

The mediation effect is established when γ_1, γ_2, β_2, and β_3 are significant and the indirect effect (DIR→QP/ACC→CHO) is significant at the 5% threshold (Sobel test or bootstrapping at 5,000 resampling's).

4.4. Moderation Model

Two moderation effects are tested, such as the effect of tourist promotion (PRO) on the DIR→CHODIR relationship and the effect of tourist experience (EXP) on the same relationship. The model takes the following form (Cohen et al., 2003):

$$CHO_i = \beta_1 DIR_i + \beta_2 MOD_i + \beta_3 (DIR_i \times MOD_i) + \xi_i$$

Where, MOD_i denotes the moderating variable (PRO or EXP). The presence of a moderating effect is confirmed if the coefficient$\beta_3$is significant. The analysis uses the centered interaction product (mean-centering) to limit collinearity (Aiken & West, 1991).

4.5. Overall evaluation of the model

The overall performance of the structural model is evaluated according to several criteria (Hair et al., 2022), such as the coefficient of determination (R^2) which explains the variance of destination choice, the predictive relevance (Q^2) which is measured by the blindfolding procedure, the effect size (f^2) which assesses the relative importance of each structural relationship, and the GoF (Goodness-of-Fit) which is a synthetic indicator of the overall fit of the model (> 0.36 = strong). Finally, a bootstrapping robustness analysis (5,000 subsamples) is used to estimate confidence intervals and the significance of structural coefficients.

5. Justification of the method

The use of PLS-SEM is particularly suited to this research for three reasons; the exploratory and confirmatory nature of the proposed model, the presence of composite latent variables measuring perceptions, and the moderate sample size, in accordance with the recommended statistical power criteria (Cohen, 1992).

Moreover, the context of Saudi tourism is still poorly documented empirically, which justifies a flexible method allowing both the validation of an emerging theoretical model and the analysis of complex relationships (Hamdi et al., 2024).

RESULTS

1. Descriptive Statistics

The sample comprises 1024 respondents from various regions of Saudi Arabia (Riyadh, Mecca, Medina, Al-Ula, Tabuk, and Asir). Participants were asked about their perceptions of regional diversity, the quality of tourist infrastructure, accessibility, promotion, their previous experiences, and their destination choices.

The descriptive results reveal an overall positive perception of Saudi Arabia's tourist regions (Table 2). Regional diversity (M = 4.18) and tourism promotion (M = 4.21) recorded the highest average scores, indicating that cultural variety and institutional communication are key drivers of the attractiveness of local destinations. These results confirm the observations of Al-Hazmi & Alsharif (2023), who highlight the rise of domestic tourism following Vision 2030.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Average	Standard deviation	Min	Max	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Regional Diversity (DIR)	4.18	0.62	2.5	5.0	0.87	0.90	0.68
Perceived Quality (PQ)	4.05	0.71	2.0	5.0	0.88	0.91	0.70
Accessibility (ACC)	3.97	0.74	1.8	5.0	0.85	0.89	0.66
Tourism promotion (PRO)	4.21	0.67	2.7	5.0	0.86	0.90	0.69
Previous Experience (EXP)	3.88	0.78	1.9	5.0	0.84	0.88	0.64
Destination Choice (CHO)	4.26	0.59	2.8	5.0	0.89	0.92	0.71

2. Evaluation of the measurement model

The evaluation of the measurement model aims to examine the reliability and validity of the latent constructs included in the PLS-SEM model. This step precedes the analysis of the structural model and ensures that the indicators correctly measure the underlying theoretical concepts (Hair et al., 2022).

2.1. Internal reliability and convergent validity

The results presented in Table 3 show that all the latent constructs used in this study exhibit high levels of internal reliability and convergent validity, confirming the robustness of the measurement model. The Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs significantly exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating satisfactory to high internal consistency of the scales used. In particular, key constructs such as regional diversity (DIR) (α = 0.87; CR = 0.90) and destination choice (CHO) (α = 0.89; CR = 0.92) display high levels of reliability, suggesting that the items homogeneously measure the underlying theoretical concepts.

These results are consistent with previous studies in the field of tourism, which have also reported similar levels of reliability for constructs related to destination attractiveness, perceived quality, and tourism choice decisions (Chen & Rahman, 2024; Jin Weng et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023). They also confirm recent methodological recommendations by Hair et al. (2022), according to which composite reliability is a more robust indicator than Cronbach's alpha in structural equation models. Convergent validity was assessed using Extracted Mean Variance (AVE). The results indicate that all AVE values are above the threshold of 0.50 recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981), meaning that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators. For example, perceived quality (PQ) has an AVE of 0.70, suggesting strong convergence among the items measuring this construct. This result is consistent with previous work showing that the quality of tourist infrastructure and services is a conceptually coherent and empirically stable construct across different national contexts (Jeong, 2023). Similarly, the high AVE of the accessibility construct (ACC) (0.66) confirms the relevance of its indicators, as observed in studies on regional accessibility and tourist choice behavior (Jin Weng et al., 2022). Overall, these results confirm that the scales adapted to the Saudi context retain their psychometric properties, despite the cultural and linguistic adjustments made using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1986).

They thus support the validity of the theoretical constructs used in the conceptual framework of this research and allow for a confident interpretation of the results of the structural model.

Consistent with previous studies, the robustness of the measurement model strengthens the credibility of the hypothetical relationships examined between regional diversity, mediating mechanisms (perceived quality and accessibility), and moderating effects (tourism promotion and prior experience). Thus, the empirical results obtained clearly align with existing research while offering an original contribution to the context of regional tourism in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3. Internal reliability and convergent validity

Latent construct	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Interpretation
Regional Diversity (DIR)	0.87	0.90	0.68	High reliability, convergent validity achieved
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.88	0.91	0.70	High reliability, convergent validity achieved
Accessibility (ACC)	0.85	0.89	0.66	High reliability, convergent validity achieved
Tourism promotion (PRO)	0.86	0.90	0.69	High reliability, convergent validity achieved
Previous Experience (EXP)	0.84	0.88	0.64	High reliability, convergent validity achieved
Destination Choice (CHO)	0.89	0.92	0.71	High reliability, convergent validity achieved

2.2. Discriminant validity

The discriminant validity verifies that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another. It was evaluated using two complementary approaches, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

A. Fornell-Larcker criterion

According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE of a construct must be greater than its correlations with other constructs. According to Table 4, the diagonals (square roots of the AVE) are greater than the inter-construct correlations, which confirms discriminant validity. Regional diversity and perceived quality are strongly correlated (r = 0.61), but remain statistically distinct.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker criterion

Built	DIRECTOR	QP	ACC	PRO	EXP	CHO
DIRECTOR	0.82					
QP	0.61	0.84				
ACC	0.54	0.57	0.81			
PRO	0.49	0.52	0.47	0.83		
EXP	0.43	0.46	0.41	0.45	0.80	
CHO	0.63	0.58	0.55	0.51	0.47	0.84

B. HTMT Index (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)

The recommended threshold for the HTMT ratio is less than 0.85 (strict value) or 0.90 (liberal value) (Henseler et al., 2015). According to Table 5, all HTMT values are less than 0.85, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct and that there is no redundancy issue between the measured dimensions.

Table 5. HTMT Index

Pairs of constructs	**HTML**	**Interpretation**
DIR – QP	0.74	Acceptable
DIRECTOR – ACC	0.68	Acceptable
QP – CHO	0.79	Acceptable
ACC – CHO	0.72	Acceptable
PRO – CHO	0.65	Acceptable
EXP – CHO	0.61	Acceptable

2.3. Summary of measurement model results

The analyses show that the indicators have factor loads greater than 0.70, the constructs display strong internal reliability (α and CR > 0.70), and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50) and discriminant validity are confirmed.

Thus, the measurement model is deemed robust, allowing us to proceed to the analysis of the structural model. These results support the conceptual coherence of the theoretical dimensions of regional diversity and tourism behavior, in accordance with the work of Sarstedt et al. (2020).

3. Evaluation of the structural model

The structural model evaluation aims to examine the hypothesized causal relationships between the diversity of tourist regions, mediating variables (perceived quality and accessibility), moderating variables (promotion and experience), and the final destination choice. This step relies on standardized regression coefficients (β), t- and p-values, and the model's overall quality indices (Hair et al., 2022).

3.1. Structural coefficients and significance

The structural model estimation was performed using partial least squares sequencing (PLS-SEM) with bootstrapping of 5,000 resamples, in accordance with the methodological recommendations of Hair et al. (2022). The results presented in Table 6 indicate that all structural coefficients are statistically significant at the 1% level, confirming the robustness of the proposed hypothetical relationships.

Table 6. Structural coefficients and significance

Hypotheses	**Structural relationships**	**Coefficient β**	**Value t**	**p-value**	**Result**
H1	Regional Diversity (DIR) → Destination Choice (CHO)	0.342	6.51	0.000	**Accepted**
H2	Perceived Quality (PQ) → Destination Choice (DCHO)	0.286	5.97	0.000	**Accepted**
H3	Accessibility (ACC) → Destination Choice (CHO)	0.193	4.12	0.000	**Accepted**
H4	DIRECTOR × Promotion (PRO) → CHO (moderation)	0.162	3.54	0.001	**Accepted**
H5	DIR × Experience (EXP) → CHO (moderation)	0.129	2.83	0.005	**Accepted**

The results show that regional diversity (DIR) has a direct, positive, and relatively strong effect on destination choice (CHO) (β = 0.342, p < 0.001), confirming hypothesis H1. This result highlights that the geographic, cultural, and

experiential richness of Saudi tourist regions is a major determinant of travel decisions. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that a variety of attractions and experiences enhances a destination's perceived attractiveness and positively influences travel intentions (Reisinger et al., 2019; Chen & Rahman, 2024). In the Saudi context, this result highlights the effectiveness of territorial diversification strategies aligned with Vision 2030. The perceived quality of tourism infrastructure and services (PQ) also has a significant positive effect on destination choice ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), validating hypothesis H2. This result confirms that diversity alone is insufficient to trigger destination choice if it is not accompanied by a quality experience. It aligns with the findings of Chen & Rahman (2024), who emphasize that perceived value and anticipated satisfaction play a central role in transforming tourist interest into actual travel decisions.

Similarly, regional accessibility (RAC) has a positive and significant effect on destination choice ($\beta = 0.193$, $p < 0.001$), confirming hypothesis H3. Although its effect is more moderate than that of diversity or perceived quality, accessibility remains a determining factor, particularly in a large country like Saudi Arabia.

This result is consistent with the work of Jin Weng et al. (2022) and Al-Hazmi & Alsharif (2023), which shows that ease of access, transportation costs, and regional connectivity significantly influence tourists' choice behavior. The results also reveal significant moderating effects of tourism promotion (PRO) and prior tourist experience (EXP) on the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice. The interaction between regional diversity and tourism promotion is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.001$), confirming hypothesis H4.

This result indicates that the effect of regional diversity on destination choice is amplified when promotional efforts are high. It confirms the arguments of Pahrudin et al. (2022) and Kiani (2026), according to which territorial marketing acts as a catalyst by making a destination's strengths visible and understandable.

Thus, a rich but poorly promoted region risks not reaching its full tourism potential.

Finally, the tourist's prior experience positively moderates the relationship between regional diversity and destination choice ($\beta = 0.129$, $p = 0.005$), validating hypothesis H5. This result suggests that the impact of regional diversity is more pronounced among novice tourists than among experienced tourists. This observation is consistent with the work of Kim et al. (2023), which shows that less experienced tourists are more attracted to variety and novelty, while experienced tourists tend to favor more specific criteria such as targeted quality or loyalty to certain destinations.

Overall, these results clearly align with existing literature while offering an original contextual contribution specific to the case of Saudi Arabia. They demonstrate that regional diversity is a key driver of destination choice, an effect partially mediated by quality and accessibility, and influenced by tourism promotion and tourists' prior experiences. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying tourist behavior in emerging destinations.

3.2. Coefficients of determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) allows us to assess the proportion of variance in endogenous variables explained by the exogenous variables in the structural model. The results presented in Table 7 show that the proposed model has a generally high explanatory power, particularly for the key variable of destination choice (CHO).

The R^2 value of 0.64 for destination choice indicates that 64% of the variance in this variable is explained jointly by regional diversity, perceived quality, accessibility, and the moderating effects of tourism promotion and prior experience. According to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2022), an R^2 value greater than 0.50 in complex behavioral models reflects strong predictive power. This result suggests that the selected determinants substantially capture the mechanisms underlying tourists' choice behavior.

Table 7. Structural coefficients and significance

Endogenous variable	R^2	Interpretation
Destination Choice (CHO)	0.64	Good explanatory skills
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.34	Moderate explanatory capacity
Accessibility (ACC)	0.29	Moderate explanatory capacity

This level of explanation is comparable to, or even greater than, that reported in previous studies on tourist destination choice, which generally show R^2 values between 0.40 and 0.60 (Jin Weng et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023). In this respect, the present model stands out for its ability to simultaneously integrate structural (regional diversity), perceptual (quality and accessibility), and contextual (promotion and experience) factors, thus strengthening its theoretical and empirical relevance.

Regarding the mediating variables, perceived quality (PQ) has an R^2 value of 0.34, while accessibility (ACC) has an R^2 value of 0.29, indicating moderate explanatory power. These results are consistent with the thresholds suggested by Hair et al. (2022), which considers values between 0.25 and 0.50 acceptable in models exploring perceptual constructs.

These R^2 levels indicate that regional diversity is an important, but not exclusive, determinant of perceived quality and accessibility. This observation is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes that these constructs are also influenced by other factors such as public investment, tourism governance, the digitalization of services, and the individual characteristics of tourists (Jeong, 2023; Al-Hazmi & Alsharif, 2023). Thus, the moderate R^2 values do not indicate a weakness in the model, but rather reflect the multifactorial nature of these perceptions.

Overall, the coefficients of determination confirm the robustness of the proposed conceptual framework. The high R^2 value for destination choice supports the hypothesis that regional diversity, when combined with mediating mechanisms and moderating conditions, is a key driver of tourist behavior. Compared to previous studies, the proposed model offers improved explanatory power, particularly in the emerging context of tourism in Saudi Arabia. These results strengthen the

validity of subsequent structural analyses and justify the integration of mediating and moderating variables into the study of destination choice, thus enriching the literature on regional tourism and territorial marketing.

3.3. Predictive relevance (Q^2)

Predictive accuracy (Q^2) was assessed using the blindfolding procedure, in accordance with methodological recommendations for estimating PLS-SEM models. A strictly positive Q^2 value indicates that the model has higher predictive power than a naive model lacking structural relationships.

The results presented in Table 8 show that all endogenous variables exhibit positive Q^2 values greater than 0.20, confirming the robustness of the proposed model's predictive power. According to Hair et al. (2022), Q^2 values greater than 0.15 indicate moderate predictive accuracy, while values greater than 0.35 reflect high predictive power.

The model's central variable, destination choice (CHO), has a Q^2 value of 0.41, indicating high predictive accuracy. This result suggests that the model is able to reliably predict tourists' choice behavior based on the selected explanatory variables. This high Q^2 value is consistent with the previously observed high R^2 value ($R^2 = 0.64$), confirming that the model not only demonstrates good in-sample explanatory power but also strong out-of-sample predictive power.

These results are comparable to, or even superior to, those reported in previous studies using PLS-SEM in the tourism sector, where Q^2 values for destination choice generally range between 0.20 and 0.35 (Jin Weng et al., 2022). Thus, the present model demonstrates enhanced predictive performance, particularly in the context of emerging tourist destinations. The mediating variables exhibit moderate but substantial levels of predictive relevance, with a Q^2 of 0.27 for perceived quality (PQ) and a Q^2 of 0.23 for accessibility (ACC).

These values indicate that the model satisfactorily predicts perceptions of quality and accessibility based on regional diversity, while acknowledging the presence of other explanatory factors not included in the model.

These results are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes that perceived quality and accessibility are multidimensional constructs influenced by contextual, institutional, and individual factors (Jeong, 2023). Thus, moderate Q^2 values reflect the intrinsic complexity of these perceptions rather than a limitation of the model.

Overall, the Q^2 values confirm the predictive validity of the proposed conceptual framework and support the relevance of the tested causal structure. Consistent with previous studies, these results show that integrating mediating mechanisms (perceived quality, accessibility) and moderating conditions (tourism promotion, prior experience) significantly improves the predictive power of destination choice models.Thus, the proposed PLS-SEM model makes a methodological and empirical contribution to the literature by demonstrating that regional diversity is not only an explanatory factor but also a robust predictor of tourist behavior, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Table 8. Predictive relevance (Q^2)

Variable	Q^2	Interpretation
Destination Choice (CHO)	0.41	High predictive accuracy
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.27	Moderate relevance
Accessibility (ACC)	0.23	Moderate relevance

3.4. Effect size (f^2)

The effect size (f^2) allows us to assess the individual contribution of each exogenous variable to explaining the endogenous variable, independently of statistical significance. According to the thresholds proposed by Cohen (1988), f^2 values between 0.02 and 0.15 indicate a small effect, between 0.15 and 0.35 a medium effect, and above 0.35 a large effect.

The results presented in Table 9 show that regional diversity (DIR) and perceived quality (QP) have the largest effect sizes on destination choice (CHO), confirming their central role in tourists' decision-making process.

The DIR → CHO relationship has an f^2 value of 0.14, corresponding to a medium effect, which indicates that regional diversity contributes substantially to explaining destination choice. This result corroborates previous studies highlighting that the diversity of natural, cultural, and experiential resources is a key determinant of destination attractiveness (Reisinger et al., 2019; Chen & Rahman, 2024). In the Saudi context, this finding reinforces the idea that the territorial diversification strategies implemented within the framework of Vision 2030 have a real impact on travel decisions.

Similarly, the perceived quality of tourism infrastructure and services (PQ) has a moderate effect on destination choice ($f^2 = 0.10$). Although slightly less than that of regional diversity, this effect confirms that perceived quality is a crucial lever in converting potential attractiveness into actual choice. This finding is consistent with the work of Jeong (2023), which shows that perceived quality directly influences perceived value and anticipated tourist satisfaction.

Regional accessibility (RAC) has an f^2 value of 0.08, corresponding to a small to medium effect. This result suggests that, while accessibility plays a significant role in destination choice, its individual impact is relatively more limited compared to diversity and perceived quality. This observation is consistent with the existing literature, which considers accessibility as a hygiene factor: necessary to facilitate travel, but rarely sufficient on its own to differentiate a destination (Jin Weng et al., 2022; Al-Hazmi & Alsharif, 2023).

The interaction effects related to tourism promotion (DIR × PRO → CHO) and prior experience (DIR × EXP → CHO) have f^2 values of 0.05 and 0.04, respectively, indicating small but not negligible effects. Although their magnitude is limited, these effects remain theoretically significant and empirically relevant, particularly in complex behavioral models. These results are consistent with previous studies on moderating effects in tourism marketing, which show that contextual and individual variables tend to have modest but strategically important effects (Pahrudin et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023).

In particular, tourism promotion acts as an amplifier of the diversity effect, while prior experience modulates tourists' sensitivity to regional variety. Overall, the effect size analysis usefully complements the significance and predictive power results. It shows that regional diversity and perceived quality are the most influential drivers in destination choice, while accessibility and moderating effects play a supporting role. This hierarchy of effects is consistent with the existing literature and strengthens the validity of the proposed conceptual framework.

Table 9. Size of the effect (f^2)

Structural relationships	f^2	Interpretation
DIRECT → CHO	0.14	Average effect
QP → CHO	0.10	Average effect
ACC → CHO	0.08	Weak to medium effect
DIR × PRO → CHO	0.05	Weak effect
DIR × EXP → CHO	0.04	Weak effect

3.5. Overall Model Quality (GoF)

The Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index assesses the overall fit of the PLS model. It is calculated using the following formula (Hair et al., 2022):

$$GoF = \sqrt{Moyenne(AVE) \times MoyenneR^2}$$

In the case of this paper, the model is presented as follows:

$$GoF = \sqrt{0.68 \times 0.42} = 0.53$$

According to the model presented above, a GoF greater than 0.36 indicates an excellent overall fit (Wetzels et al., 2009). Therefore, the model exhibits robust goodness of fit and strong empirical consistency.

3.6. Discussion of structural results

The analysis confirms that regional diversity positively influences the choice of tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia, both directly and indirectly through perceived quality and accessibility. These results demonstrate that territorial differentiation, when accompanied by effective infrastructure and promotional initiatives, boosts tourist appeal.

The importance of promotion and the visitor experience as moderators suggests that communication policies and visitor loyalty programs must be integrated into regional development strategies. This observation aligns with the guidelines of the Saudi Tourism Authority (2024) and the work of Rahman & Chen (2023), which emphasize the importance of valuing cultural diversity in post-Vision 2030 tourism policies.

4. Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis aims to determine whether perceived quality (PQ) and accessibility (ACC) act as mediating variables in the relationship between regional diversity (DIR) and tourist destination choice (CHO). This step helps to understand the underlying mechanisms by which regional diversity influences tourists' decisions, in accordance with the methodological recommendations of Hair et al. (2022).

The approach adopted is based on the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resampling's), allowing us to estimate the significance of indirect, direct and total effects without assuming the normality of the data (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

According to Table 10, the results show that regional diversity (DIR) has a direct positive and significant effect on destination choice (CHO) (β=0.342, $p<0.001$; β=0.342, $p<0.001$; β=0.342, $p<0.001$), while also generating indirect effects via perceived quality (β=0.085, $p<0.001$; β=0.085, $p<0.001$; β=0.085, $p<0.001$) and accessibility (β=0.061, $p<0.001$; β=0.061, $p<0.001$; β=0.061, $p<0.001$). These mediating effects are significant, confirming partial mediation, meaning that the mediating variables amplify, but do not totally replace, the direct influence of regional diversity on tourist choice.

Table 10. Test of direct, indirect, and total effects

Structural relationships	**Direct effect (β)**	**Indirect effect (β)**	**Total effect (β)**	**Value t**	**p-value**	**Type of mediation**
DIR → QP → CHO	0.342	0.085	0.427	6.93	0.000	**Partial**
DIR → ACC → CHO	0.342	0.061	0.403	6.47	0.000	**Partial**

The importance of perceived quality as a mediating factor indicates that tourists value regional diversity through the perception of authenticity, quality services, and unique experiences. Thus, a region perceived as culturally and naturally rich enhances satisfaction and the likelihood of choice, as also observed by Chen & Rahman (2024).

Similarly, mediation through accessibility reveals that diversity is only effective if supported by appropriate infrastructure (roads, accommodation, signage). These results are consistent with the findings of Al-Hazmi & Alsharif (2023), who emphasize that regional connectivity strengthens the conversion of tourist interest into actual travel decisions.

By combining these two mediating effects, it appears that regional diversity stimulates the choice of destinations through a dual cognitive and logistical channel: cognitive, via the symbolic and aesthetic appreciation of diversity, and logistical, via ease of access and movement.This dual process corresponds to the hierarchical models of tourist behavior

proposed by Prayag et al. (2017), according to which the perception of the quality of the offer and the ease of access play a pivotal role between the initial perception and the final decision.

To confirm the robustness of the results, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) test was used to measure the proportion of the total effect explained by mediation.

$$VAF = \frac{Effet\ indirect}{Effet\ total} \times 100$$

According to Table 11, VAF values between 20% and 80% indicate partial mediation, while a value above 80% reflects complete mediation (Hair et al., 2022). In this case, the values obtained (≈ 20% and 15%) confirm that regional diversity directly influences destination choice, but that part of this effect is mediated by perceived quality and accessibility.

Table 11. Validation of the mediation

Relationship	Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF (%)	Interpretation
DIR → QP → CHO	0.085	0.427	19.9%	Partial mediation
DIR → ACC → CHO	0.061	0.403	15.1%	Partial mediation

These results highlight that tourism development policies must simultaneously invest in showcasing cultural and natural diversity and improving access infrastructure. Simply promoting regional assets is insufficient if tourists perceive access barriers or a lack of quality in services (Kiani, 2026).

The identified mediation also suggests that communication strategies must highlight not only the diversity of available experiences, but also their accessibility and comfort, in order to transform perception into an actual decision to visit. These results corroborate the cognitive mediation models proposed in experiential tourism (Rahman et al., 2023) and enrich the literature on the mediating role of perceived quality in the context of emerging markets.

The analyses confirm the empirical validity of the proposed model. The diversity of Saudi Arabia's tourist regions is a key determinant of destination choice, supported by service quality and accessibility.

Tourism promotion acts as a catalyst, particularly in developing regions such as Al-Ula and Asir, where public policies aim to diversify tourist flows (Saudi Tourism Authority, 2024). The results highlight the importance of a differentiated regional approach in tourism marketing strategies in Saudi Arabia. This orientation strengthens national competitiveness within the context of post-oil economic diversification (Vision 2030).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine how the diversity of tourist regions influences destination choice in Saudi Arabia, incorporating perceived quality, accessibility, tourism promotion, and prior experience as mediating and moderating variables. The results confirm that regional diversity is a key driver of tourist behavior, both cognitively and emotionally, and that it operates through mechanisms of perceived value and ease of access.

1. Interpretation of the main results

PLS-SEM analyses have demonstrated that regional diversity has a direct and significant positive effect on destination choice, as well as indirect effects through perceived quality and accessibility. This result validates the mediation hypotheses and aligns with the work of Chen & Rahman (2024), who argue that the perceived quality of a place depends largely on the variety and authenticity of its natural and cultural resources. The mediating influence of perceived quality suggests that tourists evaluate regions based on criteria of credibility, comfort, and the uniqueness of the experiences offered.

This supports the findings of Al-Hazmi & Alsharif (2023), according to which tourist satisfaction is shaped by the consistency between the projected image and the lived experience. Furthermore, the mediating influence of accessibility confirms that a wealth of attractions is not enough: a diverse region must also be easily accessible, both in terms of transportation and infrastructure (Kiani, 2026). The moderating effects of tourism promotion and prior experience reinforce this logic. Promotion acts as a cognitive amplifier, increasing the visibility and desirability of destinations, while accumulated experience develops an emotional attachment that fosters loyalty and recommendation (Rahman et al., 2023). These observations support the theory of experiential learning applied to tourism (Prayag et al., 2017; Hosany et al., 2023), according to which cumulative satisfaction positively influences future behavioral intentions.

2. Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the literature on tourist behavior in the Gulf countries by highlighting the multidimensional role of regional diversity. Unlike most studies that approach tourism from a unidimensional perspective (natural or cultural), this work adopts an integrative approach based on geographical, cultural, and infrastructural diversity. Furthermore, the study enriches the theoretical framework of the cognitive-affective-conative model (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hosany et al., 2023) by demonstrating that perceived quality and accessibility function as cognitive and logistical mediators, translating diversity into concrete behavioral intentions. It thus reinforces the relevance of the PLS-SEM model in analyzing complex tourism behaviors in emerging contexts such as Saudi Arabia.

3. Managerial and strategic implications

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest several implications for public policymakers and tourism stakeholders. For the balanced development of regional diversity, policies must promote the specific cultural and natural

assets of each region (e.g., Al-Ula, Asir, Tabuk) to avoid homogenizing the tourism offering. To improve perceived quality, operators must invest in standards of service, hospitality, and environmental sustainability to increase the perceived value for tourists. To enhance accessibility, transport, accommodation, and digital connectivity infrastructure must be modernized to reduce the psychological and material costs of travel. For experiential communication, promotional campaigns must emphasize the lived experience and authentic cultural diversity, going beyond purely economic or religious arguments.

These guidelines are in line with the recommendations of the Saudi Tourism Authority (2024), which encourages a differentiated approach to tourism development based on local specificities and sustainability.

4. Perspective with Vision 2030

The results are fully aligned with the objectives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims to make the country a diverse and sustainable global tourism destination. The study shows that the success of this strategy will depend on the ability to integrate the diversity of regional offerings with effective quality and accessibility policies. Diversity should not only be seen as an aesthetic asset, but also as a driver of economic and identity-based attractiveness. This interpretation reinforces the perspective of differentiated territorial development advocated by Kiani (2026) and supported by the Saudi Vision 2030 and Tourism Development Plan (2024).

5. Limitations and research perspectives

Despite the methodological robustness of the PLS-SEM model, some limitations must be highlighted. First, the sample is limited to domestic tourists and does not yet capture the diversity of international tourists, which has been growing since 2021. Second, the measurement of regional diversity remains subjective, relying on individual perceptions. Future research could adopt longitudinal data or objective diversity indices (number of sites, natural heritage, cultural diversity) to strengthen the external validity of the results. Furthermore, the integration of psychological variables (motivation, emotional involvement, cultural orientation) and contextual factors (geopolitical risk, environmental sustainability) could enrich the understanding of the link between diversity and tourist behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to empirically analyze the influence of the diversity of tourist regions on destination choice in Saudi Arabia, incorporating perceived quality and accessibility as mediating variables, and tourism promotion and prior experience as moderating variables. Using a structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, the results confirmed the relevance of the proposed conceptual model and highlighted robust relationships between the different variables studied.

Analyses have shown that regional diversity has a significant direct effect on the choice of tourist destinations, as well as indirect effects through perceived quality and accessibility. These results demonstrate that territorial diversity does not act solely as an aesthetic or cultural factor, but also translates into an improved perception of service quality and greater logistical appeal. Tourists therefore choose regions that combine authenticity, diversity, and accessibility, which supports recent observations. From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to enriching the literature on tourism behavior in emerging economies. It demonstrates that regional diversity can be conceptualized as a multidimensional strategic asset combining cultural, natural, and infrastructural components.

By simultaneously integrating mediation and moderation mechanisms, the proposed model provides a holistic view of the tourism decision-making process. From a managerial perspective, the results offer concrete implications for public and private decision-makers in the Saudi tourism sector. First, they suggest the need to value regional diversity as a central element of the national tourism development strategy within the framework of Vision 2030. Authorities must promote a differentiated offering tailored to the specific characteristics of each region (for example, ecotourism in Asir, cultural heritage in Al-Ula, or coastal tourism in Tabuk). Second, policies must invest in improving the quality of services and access infrastructure to strengthen regional competitiveness. Finally, tourism promotion stakeholders must adopt an experiential approach focused on diversity, authenticity, and sustainability.

Despite its methodological rigor, this study has certain limitations. It relies on cross-sectional data and a sample primarily composed of domestic tourists, which limits the generalizability of the results internationally. Furthermore, the measurement of regional diversity remains subjective, dependent on individual perceptions. Future research could utilize objective indicators of diversity (number of sites, types of attractions, cultural and ecological diversity) or adopt longitudinal analyses to examine the evolution of tourist behavior as sector reforms progress.

Furthermore, integrating new dimensions, such as environmental sustainability, the digitalization of the tourism experience, and the impact of regional public policies, would deepen our understanding of the mechanisms of tourism attraction. Extending the model to other Gulf countries with similar socioeconomic and cultural characteristics would also offer valuable comparisons regarding the role of diversity in sustainable tourism development strategies.

In conclusion, the results confirm that regional diversity is a key factor in differentiation and tourism competitiveness in Saudi Arabia. It acts as a cognitive, experiential, and infrastructural lever, increasing the attractiveness of local destinations and supporting the Kingdom's strategic vision for economic diversification and sustainability. This study thus contributes to the understanding of tourism dynamics in emerging markets and provides a relevant analytical framework for guiding public policies and regional development strategies up to 2030.

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