

BRIDGING EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: HOW NGOS FOSTER WOMEN'S SUCCESS IN EGYPT'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract: The study investigates the role of NGOs in empowering women by mediating women's entrepreneurship. The study adopted a quantitative approach with a total of 125 females involved in the United Nations Women (UNW) program in Egypt. The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed conceptual framework. The results show that NGO programs have a positive and significant impact on empowering women psychologically, socially, politically, and economically through the mediating role of entrepreneurship. The study suggests practical ways for policymakers and tourism scholars to assist women in their tourism entrepreneurship.

Keywords: NGOs, women's entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, tourism, Egypt

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, women's empowerment has changed and progressed drastically. Every development has important benchmarks that enable environmentally friendly advancement (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Pandey and Kumar, 2019). Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations is one aiming for "gender equality and empowering women." Women's empowerment has several different meanings and is a complex and linked subject.

Li et al. (2024) argues that women's empowerment helps them to express their rights and make use of their knowledge and skills for financial advantage. Grounded in a strength-based idea, empowerment is a complex disciplinary reflection that embodies hope and inspiration (Dardis et al., 2018). Filep and Laing (2019) show that non-Western nations have a knowledge vacuum in gender-related research. Psychological, socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges subjugate women in the tourism sector, potentially hindering their performance in the field (Sobaih and Abu Elnasr, 2024). Moreover, women in the tourism sector face underpayment and workplace discrimination (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). It is conspicuous that men monopolise the tourism sector, creating a sex-based preference (Liu et al., 2020). However, the world has realized the significance of entrepreneurship in the ecosystem, as it can lead to women's empowerment and alter the gender bias in the tourism sector (Gupta, 2021).

Multiple NGO projects support the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. In other words, these projects support women in starting their entrepreneurial ventures. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research papers examining the role of NGOs, their development tactics, and their goals in advancing female entrepreneurship and women's empowerment in Egypt. This article examines how NGOs might advance feminism by providing training programs that enhance female entrepreneurship in the travel sector, so empowering women psychologically, financially, and socially. This study addresses the identified knowledge gaps and enhances the field of tourism research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Role

NGOs are organisations with authority, political agendas, and development goals. NGOs must balance these multiple agendas for their own survival and the survival of their providers (Elbaz and Abou-Shouk, 2016). NGOs have paid

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attention to women's economic contribution through self-employment (Rinaldi and Salerno, 2020). When the UN hosted its fourth World conference on women in Beijing in 1995, NGOs gained global attention as a means of empowering women (Elbaz and Abou-Shouk, 2016). The United Nations Women (UNW) has initiated a women's empowerment program in various regions of Egypt. To expedite women's empowerment initiatives, UNW has employed innovations and collaboration (Pandey and Kumar, 2019). The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) at the American University in Cairo conducts a project in Cairo, Egypt, in collaboration with the National Council for Women (NCW), the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI), and Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The Women Economic Empowerment Program—Entrepreneurship Support (WEE-ES) project seeks to bridge the gender disparity in Egyptian entrepreneurship. The "Women Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth" program, initiated in 2019, is set to continue until 2024 (UNIDO, 2022).

2. NGOs and Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship studies have perceived wide progress over the last 30 years (Yadav and Unni, 2016). Through those studies, women have played a significant role in developing entrepreneurship and economic sectors (Nassani, 2018; Movono and Dahles, 2017). According to Hashim et al. (2024), the Middle East has a diverse entrepreneurial landscape for women. The limited job market and low start-up costs have motivated women to start their businesses. According to the OECD (2017), around 12% of adult women in the Middle East are entrepreneurs, compared with 31% of adult men. Moreover, the International Labour Organisation has stated that 36.1% of women are self-employed in Egypt. Numerous research has shown that women who engage in entrepreneurship aid reach psychological, economic, political, and social empowerment (Elshaer, 2021; Abou-Shouk et al., 2021). Likewise, additional research (Vujko et al., 2018; Yadav and Unni, 2016) have shown that encouraging entrepreneurship for women empowered them, increased their position, promoted their development in their families, and offered a better living quality. Tourism is one of the fast-growing industries that can offer women entrepreneurs opportunities. In this vein, entrepreneurs have contributed to the development of the tourism sector through their projects (handicrafts, mobile applications, and services, etc.). In addition, entrepreneurship is considered one of the main drivers of the tourism sector's development (Kallmuenzer et al., 2019). In this regard, governments and non-governmental organizations have implemented several programs and initiatives to support female entrepreneurs. Their mission is to enhance management and leadership skills so that these enterprises can run their projects properly. According to the regional report on women in tourism in the Middle East (2020), Egypt has developed a strategy to strengthen women's roles and empower their development contribution. For example, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and NCW provide market outlets in airports and museums in different governorates to brand and sell their products and services. Moreover, the same report has indicated that women own 70% of small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, the current study examines women's empowerment through an entrepreneurial lens. The previously referenced activities of non-governmental organisations in Egypt will support this study. Consequently, we developed and evaluated the following theory:

H1: NGOs significantly affect women's entrepreneurship

3. Women's Entrepreneurship and Psychological Empowerment

Llorente-Alonso et al. (2024) define psychological empowerment theory as an individual's proactive approach in a motivation-oriented workplace. Employees need a proactive approach to increase psychological empowerment if they are to achieve better development in their work performance (Ghalavi and Nastezaie, 2020). Moreover Jena et al., 2019 argue that psychological empowerment plays a critical role in determining the effectiveness of an organization. It can also be described as a basic incentive reflecting self-regulation during a task or in the workplace (Seibert et al., 2011), which refers to the employee's participation and proficiency at work for major organizational results. The company or workplace shapes its employees such that they become transformational leaders to encourage creative activity (Rashwan and Ghaly, 2022). Therefore, the psychological empowerment of women will enable them to exercise autonomy in commercial activities, thereby promoting independence (Movono and Dahles, 2017). Not only can tourism-related projects empower female entrepreneurs economically, but also psychologically and socially, enhancing their skills and consciousness (Morgan and Winkler, 2020). Koc (2020) argues that females working in the tourism sector do have a higher stage of conscientiousness than their male peers, which allows them to perform better at self-discipline and be more careful. They can also adapt easily to different environments and tasks. Besides, female employees are better at reading people's emotions, being patient, relaxed, and easier to talk to. Females tend to smile, show empathy and helpfulness, and be more people-orientated than men, which increases positive word of mouth (Koc, 2020). Therefore, in order to psychologically empower women, we must enable them to recognize and confront the oppression they face (Movono and Dahles, 2017). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Women's entrepreneurship significantly affects psychological empowerment.

4. Women's Entrepreneurship and Social Empowerment

Gender norms are crucial for empowering women. There are certain stereotypes profoundly embedded in society that cause gender inequality (Liu et al., 2020; Koc, 2020; Croce, 2020). Cultural and social constraints expect women to be the primary carers of their families. Hence, their commitment to work, especially in the tourism area, is considered low (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2024). It is believed that men control women's decisions and time regarding their outside home activity (Morgan and Winkler, 2020). Hentschel et al. (2019) contend that the emphasis on gender identity socially constructs these beliefs. Women are clearly under-represented in senior managerial roles within the tourism sector (Liu et al., 2020) and face exploitation, sexual harassment, and stereotyping (Koc, 2020; Croce, 2020). Conversely, we may empower women by assigning them decision-making positions, offering them opportunities, and affording them agency

over their lives. All these modes of social emancipation are available to women (Perekrestova, 2022). In the tourist sector, female workers show higher social sensitivity in understanding relationships, nonverbal cues, and interactions, which results in a more sympathetic reaction in the communication process. This might, however, potentially provide more difficulties for their business paths (Hallak et al., 2015). Egypt moved towards closing the economic gender gap in 2019 when Egypt's previous Minister of Tourism, Rania El Mashat, signed a Letter of the Intent Sustainable Development Impact Summit 2019. Egypt was the first country in the Middle East and Africa to launch this public-private collaboration model (Othman and Khallaf, 2023). We have formulated the following hypothesis based on the aforementioned claims.

H3: Women’s entrepreneurship significantly affects social empowerment

5. Women’s Entrepreneurship and Political Empowerment

The field of gender and empowerment studies has grown greatly and now includes the political viewpoint of sustainable tourism (Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012). Women's political participation comes with several requirements that help them to participate at all governmental levels and inside the decision-making process (Raman et al., 2022). A division of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities dedicated to closing gender disparity in the field and increasing women's participation in top management has been established. Ghada Shalaby, the Vice Minister for Tourism in Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, explains that the purpose of this unit is to empower women, establish equitable opportunities within the ministry, and combat gender-based discrimination (Espanol, 2022). This unit therefore generates an environment that enables women to communicate their political needs and interests. Egypt ranks 78th out of 146 nations in terms of political empowerment according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 of the World Economic Forum. Underlining Egypt's efforts in the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptians 2030, the "European Training Foundation" examined political strengthening and gender empowerment in 2021. In addition, the 2030 strategy aims to enhance the chances of employability for women, increase their “participation in the workforce, support their entrepreneurship, and achieve equal opportunities in terms of employment across all sectors” (Antczak et al., 2021). In other words, all of the above help women defy gendered power in society and increase women's chances of political and economic participation through entrepreneurship or equal representation in the field (Elshaer et al., 2021). Given this context, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Women’s entrepreneurship significantly affects political empowerment

6. Women’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment

Empowering women presents financial difficulties as well. Still, this empowerment can help to reduce poverty and advance economic development (Alsawafi, 2016). Through their entrepreneurial activities, women greatly boost the national economy and help to lower gender inequalities (Raman et al., 2024) and thus contribute to national development. There are multiple factors that ensure women's economic empowerment: access to education and economic resources, no threats of violence, childcare, equitability, and political participation (Sutrisno et al., 2024). According to the World Economic Forum’s Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report (2019), Egypt is in the top 25% of countries mentioned in the report. It ranked 65th among 136 other countries and 6th between the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Egypt is to be considered the most improved country among the chosen ones. In the 2017 report, Egypt ranked 74th, indicating a 7% increase in economic growth since the last reported index. However, Egypt has achieved the highest score, ranking 4th worldwide in terms of digital demand for culture and entertainment. Egypt's low exchange rates and taxes can be considered economic leverage, attracting tourists due to its competitive prices. It has ranked third in price competitiveness worldwide. We have enhanced the tourism strategy, moving it from 60th to 5th place. Entrepreneurship is crucial for achieving socio-economic development and empowering women (Croce, 2020). We have formulated the following hypothesis based on the previously mentioned facts:

H5: Women’s entrepreneurship significantly affects economic empowerment

Using women's entrepreneurship as a mediator, the study developed an integrative conceptual framework to explore how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) might empower women (Figure 1). There are five main opinions about how non-governmental organizations (NGRs) support women entrepreneurs and how these projects benefit women in underdeveloped countries, as Egypt.

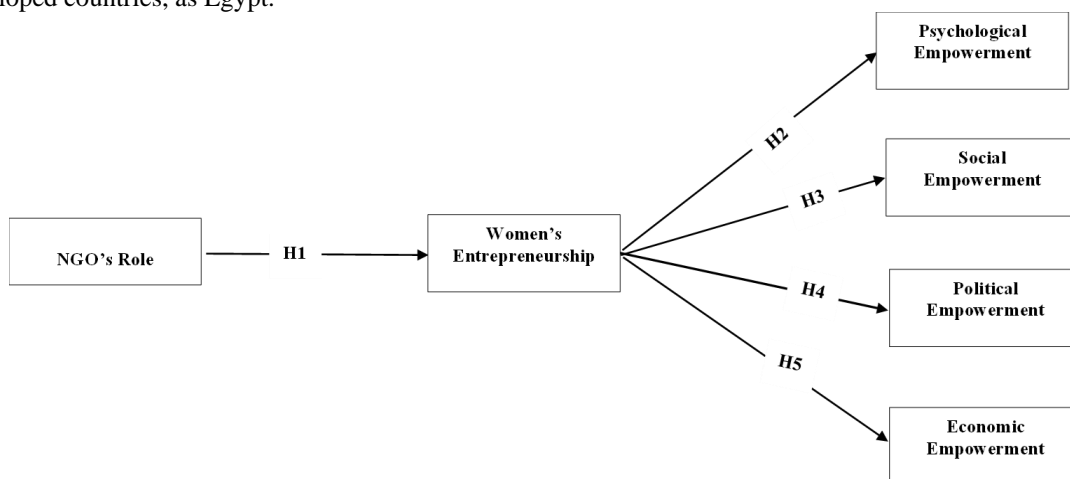


Figure 1. The Research Proposed Model

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Participants and Procedures

This research utilised a quantitative methodology, utilising a questionnaire to collect information from women who had participated in the United Nations Programme and successfully finished their training to launch their projects in Egypt. The research was conducted in Egypt. The objective of this study is to assess the impact that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have on the empowerment of women via the encouragement of entrepreneurial endeavours. More specifically, the focus of this investigation will be on a well-known program that offers aid to female entrepreneurs in Egypt. This led to the acquisition of information through the distribution of questionnaires to participants in the 'Women Economic Empowerment Program - Entrepreneurship Support (WEE-ES)' course.

We gathered the information in a single phase from September 2021 to December 2021. The preliminary testing of tWe conducted preliminary testing of the questionnaire with seven Additionally, they served on an expert panel and analyzed the questionnaire in order to improve its clarity and make it easier to understand. The current study introduced the surveys to the program manager for approval before reaching out to the course participants. Once we received authorization, we reached out to the attendees via the internet, as we discovered it was the most efficient method to engage with individuals spread across various governorates in Egypt. We distributed questionnaires to participants during our training sessions and gave them time to complete them. This research made use of methodologies that involved random sampling. We conducted an online survey to collect data and sent a link to the survey to female entrepreneurs. According to Sim et al. (2018), a sample size of ten percent would be sufficient to accurately reflect the population. We enrolled 540 people in the program and received 125 responses from female participants. Not only did the findings of the study surpass the 10% threshold, but they also accounted for roughly 25% of the total population.

2. Measures

We used established and validated indicators from earlier research. Our analysis of the function of NGOs was based on research by Elbaz and Abou-Shouk (2016). To assess women's entrepreneurship, we employed tools created by Abou-Shouk et al. (2021), and we took the women's empowerment statements from Elshaer et al. (2021). Several Likert scale indications on a five-point continuum were used to measure participant agreement levels from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" when we used split-half testing to give the questionnaire.

3. Data analysis

The current study used SPSS vs. 19 to conduct a descriptive analysis of the respondents. We tested the reliability of both the independent sample t-test and Cronbach's alpha values. We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modeling (SEM), and hypothesis testing using PLS-SEM to scrutinize the structural properties of the conceptual model. We tested and met all requirements to run CFA and SEM, including dealing with missing data, outliers, and normality. We analysed the 18 items using their means, standard deviations, and factor loading, as presented in Table 2. All items have reached the acceptable level of 0.7, confirming their validity for analysis (Sahin, 2017). The mean scores are between 3.1 and 4.4, and the values of the standard deviation range from 1.011 to 680 (Table 1).

Table 1. The Demographics characteristics

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
Age (years)		
18–25	14	11.2
26–35	38	30.4
36–45	44	35.2
46–55	21	16.8
Older than 55	8	6.4
Education		
Bachelor's degree	77	61.6
Diploma	17	13.6
Master's degree	23	18.4
PhD	7	5.6
Other	1	.8
Marital Status		
Single	45	36.0
Married	61	48.8
Widowed	4	3.2
Divorced	15	12.0

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The profile of the respondents

The findings showed that the study sample included diverse participants. More than one-third of the samples (35.2%) were between 36 and 45 years of age, and 30.4% were between 26 and 35 years of age. The majority (61.6%) of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, while 18.4% had a master's degree.

Regarding marital statuses, 48.8% were married and 36% were single (Table 2).

2. Measurement Model

We evaluated the study measurement model's validity and reliability using Smart PLS. As presented in Table 2 and

Figure 2, the model shows a satisfactory data fit. We examined the reliability and validity of all constructs using Composite Cronbach's alpha, factor loading, and average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity.

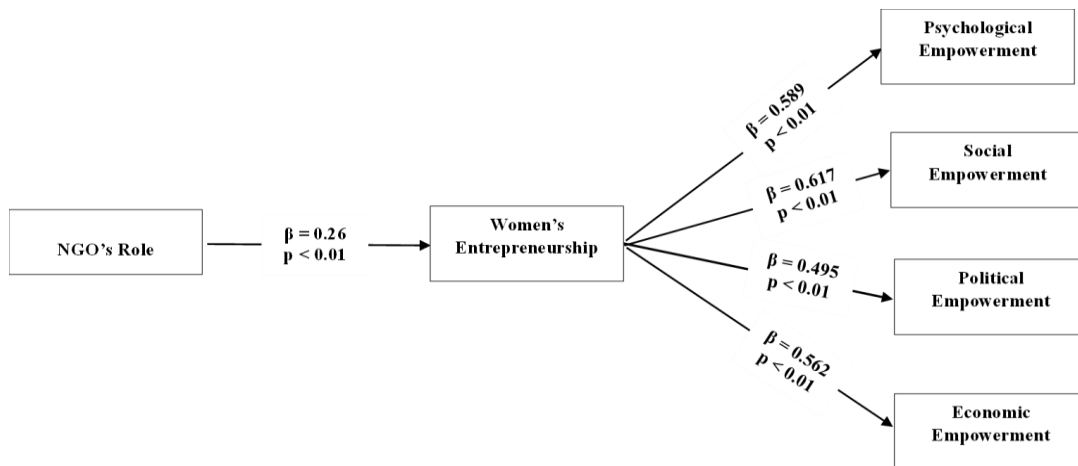


Figure 2. The Structural Model

We tested the square roots of AVE for discriminant validity; refer to Table 4. Table 2 shows that all the factors meet the minimum value of 0.7, which indicates excellent reliability (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Finally, Table 3 shows the discriminant validity and square root of AVE of all variables, above any other correlations involving that construct (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014).

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis

Items	Factor loading	Mean	St. deviation	T-value
NGO's Role				
The NGOs have funded my project/idea	0.763	2.80	1.070	4.116
The NGOs have provided me with the training/materials needed to keep my project/ idea ongoing	0.884	3.36	1.081	6.643
The NGOs keep following up on my project/ Idea progress	0.870	3.06	1.045	5.777
Women's Entrepreneurship				
My community encourages women's entrepreneurship	0.704	3.82	.928	9.993
Women entrepreneurs in my community support the empowerment of women	0.896	4.26	.720	35.221
Women entrepreneurs in my community give other women an opportunity to access the market for local products/services	0.884	4.32	.643	43.737
Psychological Empowerment				
I am pleased to be a resident of a tourist destination country	0.879	4.19	.790	24.449
I am proud to have a unique historical culture	0.837	4.45	.689	15.126
I want to work more to keep the business sector progressive	0.884	4.38	.705	26.029
Social Empowerment				
Being an entrepreneur or having a business idea allows me to be thoroughly connected to my community	0.867	4.08	.809	19.763
Being an entrepreneur or having a business idea fosters a sense of 'community spirit' within me	0.925	4.19	.704	72.452
Being an entrepreneur or having a business idea increases the chances of community involvement	0.911	4.25	.680	41.223
Political Empowerment				
I have a voice in the business development field	0.874	3.18	8.99	34.773
I have access to the business decision-making process	0.884	3.18	1.011	51.519
I share my concerns regarding business development issues	0.870	3.54	.921	27.427
Economic Empowerment				
My project or idea provides job opportunities for women in Egypt	0.831	3.97	.861	14.821
My project or idea secures a reasonable income for women in Egypt.	0.867	3.92	.809	16.116
My project or idea allows me to be financially independent	0.838	4.13	.861	23.680

Table 3. Latent variable correlations

Latent Variable correlation		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	NGO's Role	0.841					
2	Women's Entrepreneurship	0.260	0.833				
3	Psychological Empowerment	0.099	0.589	0.867			
4	Social Empowerment	0.106	0.617	0.659	0.901		
5	Political Empowerment	0.290	0.495	0.409	0.462	0.885	
6	Economic Empowerment	0.091	0.562	0.464	0.537	0.441	0.845

3. Structural model

Table 4 and Figure 2 provide evidence that all of the assumptions that were proposed are supported, since non-governmental organisations (NGOs) actively encourage and assist female entrepreneurs. In addition, women's

entrepreneurship helps to promote and strengthen women's psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment when it comes to economic empowerment.

Table 4. Research hypothesis Results

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-value	P-value	Results
H1	NGOs Role → Women Entrepreneurship	0.260	0.084	3.112	0.002	Supported
H2	Women Entrepreneurship → Psychological Empowerment	0.589	0.089	6.600	0.000	Supported
H3	Women Entrepreneurship → Social Empowerment	0.617	0.079	7.711	0.000	Supported
H4	Women Entrepreneurship → Political Empowerment	0.495	0.075	6.639	0.000	Supported
H5	Women Entrepreneurship → Economic Empowerment	0.562	0.069	8.106	0.000	Supported

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

1. Discussion

This study aimed to comprehend the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGO) programs on the development of entrepreneurship and the empowerment of women across psychological, social, political, and financial dimensions. The study's findings indicated that these initiatives substantially enhanced the economic standing of women involved in entrepreneurial activities. The data shown also confirm the fundamental idea underlying the suggested structure: NGOs' great and instantaneous impact on the expansion of female entrepreneurship.

These findings complement other studies, notably the 2020 Rinaldi and Salerno research, which also validates the influence of NGO solutions on business development. This research establishes that, in line with the work of Irawan et al. (2024), Mulyadi et al. (2024), Elshaer (2021), and Abou-Shouk et al. (2021), female entrepreneurship modernizes women's progress. Furthermore, the study shows that increased female involvement in the creation and operation of enterprises promotes women's development in developing countries. Hence, empowering women in developing countries encompasses psychological, social, political, and financial domains.

For example, the NGO interventions evaluated provided women entrepreneurs with essential business resources, such as support and training, which facilitated the creation of profitable enterprises. Egypt exemplifies the practical application of NGO perspectives. The funding of women's companies has highlighted the importance of NGOs in promoting gender equality and women's employment in Egypt's tourism sector. Egypt's initiatives in entrepreneurship and gender equality will underscore these empowering principles; the correlation between NGO operations and significant advancements in this framework is evident, particularly in male-dominated industries.

2. Implications

The current study theoretically contributes to understanding how initiatives by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at enhancing entrepreneurship can facilitate women's empowerment, particularly within the travel industry of developing countries like Egypt. In this vein, we integrated several important dimensions of empowerment, encompassing psychological, social, political, and economic issues, into a cohesive framework. This emphasizes the contributions of the present collection of studies on gender equality and entrepreneurship. This shows that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) not only offer necessary tools for entrepreneurial activity but also operate as special facilitators, therefore empowering women in many spheres. Aiming to empower women in fields traditionally occupied by men, they provide creative ideas at the junction of non-governmental activities, feminism, and development theory.

Especially in relation to the Egyptian tourist sector, this study adds to the body of knowledge already in publication on NGOs and women's progress. Not a drawback often observed in other comparable studies by ignoring this feature, this research offers a fresh and unique view on the function of NGOs in company management for women entrepreneurs by using these elements and entailing them all into a theoretical framework. Emphasising the specifics of NGO's projects, the paper underlines the significance of such kinds of projects for female entrepreneurs and their successes. These projects provide women with key tools and education, thus preparing them to venture and sustain their businesses. The results presented above clearly demonstrate that the government's funding of women's training schemes and funding is necessary for the enhancement of these opportunities. As highlighted by this research, the tourism industry reproduces traditional gender stereotypes despite the fact that women are more conscientious, emotionally intelligent, and effective in customer interactions. Furthermore, the cooperation between the public and private sectors has led to the establishment of a unit within the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt that focuses on gender-based discrimination, highlighting the need for policy shifts to address these issues. The country's participation in the COP 27 event demonstrates additional micro-level programs aimed at enhancing sustainability and gender equality for empowered women in the travel sector. Regarding the community of relations between the empowerment dimensions—psychological, social, political, and financial—this paper focuses on the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting female entrepreneurship. Sustaining engagement between the NGOs and the women entrepreneurs will ensure that such endeavors bring about social change and a general development agenda in the longer term.

Limitations and further research

This study recognises its limitations and offers recommendations for further research. This research has examined the ways in which the UNW program helps female entrepreneurs. Consequently, more research should concentrate on alternative initiatives, especially those implemented by governments. Additionally, we may categorise socio-demographics according to variables such as education, age, marital status, and income. Furthermore, this study's focus

on the Egyptian tourism industry is a major drawback that might limit the generalisability of its findings to other industries or geographical areas. Additionally, the study relies on participant data collected through questionnaires, a method that might add bias and compromise the findings' impartiality. The cross-sectional approach complicates the comprehension of the effects of NGO operations on the established long-term objectives of women's empowerment. Subsequent studies may investigate longitudinal methods to evaluate enduring levels of empowerment and entrepreneurship across time. Furthermore, the discourse might expand the analysis to include several sectors and cultural contexts, therefore substantiating the findings across varied situations.

CONCLUSION

The study concentrated on enhancing women's empowerment and entrepreneurship, particularly within the Egyptian tourism sector. The findings revealed the extent to which NGO operations assist women and businesses; hence, they illustrate the proposed paradigm. The present analysis highlights, consistent with prior research, the direct impact of NGOs on enterprises. This also helped to clarify the special link between female-owned companies and the psychological, social, political, and financial emancipation of women. The report supports Egypt's commitment to gender equality by providing practical suggestions for the implementation of projects involving NGOs, therefore strengthening their influence. This study significantly enhances the current information base by examining the impact of NGOs in empowering women entrepreneurs and elevating their status within the tourist industry. The document emphasised the imperative for governmental financial support of women's training programs and stressed the importance of NGO activities in inspiring and aiding female entrepreneurs, with practical consequences.

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