


EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPLORATORY SEQUENTIAL MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 31 January 2023</p> <p>Accepted 04 April 2023</p>	<p>Purpose: The purpose of this study is to evaluate the empowerment of rural women in the context of sustainable tourism development, identify the factors that influence their empowerment, examine the impact of women's empowerment on sustainable tourism development, and explore innovative approaches to empower rural women.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Rural Tourism; Female Empowerment; Sustainable Development; Influencing Factors.</p>	<p>Theoretical Framework: This study combines four factors that influence women's empowerment, namely women's entrepreneurship, education, social capital, and human capital, to form a theoretical framework based on empowerment theory, and uses the empowerment of women as a mediator to explore the elements that impact the sustainable growth of rural tourism.</p>
	<p>Design/Methodology/Approach: A mixed research method was employed, starting with qualitative research, where 11 relevant interviews were conducted to gain a preliminary understanding of the factors affecting women's empowerment and the sustainability of rural tourism. Subsequently, a 68-item survey questionnaire was used in the quantitative research stage. A total of 340 responses were collected. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and validation factor analysis was used to assess its validity. Structural analysis and equation modeling (SEM) techniques were used to test the hypotheses of the study.</p>
	<p>Findings: The study shows that women's entrepreneurship, education, human and social capital have a positive impact on women's empowerment and sustainable growth of rural tourism. Women's empowerment mediates the relationship between these factors and sustainable development of rural tourism, which also positively impacts sustainable community, economic, environmental, and cultural development. Therefore, promoting women's empowerment and enhancing their access to education and resources are essential for achieving sustainable growth of rural tourism and community development.</p>
	<p>Research, Practical & Social implications: This study proposes a new theoretical framework that includes female entrepreneurship, education, social capital, and human capital to fill the gap in knowledge. The development of women in rural tourism is also crucial for society's progress towards civilization, and policies and incentives should be implemented to encourage their participation and ensure their effective involvement. This will contribute to the growth and sustainable development of China's rural tourism industry.</p>
	<p>Originality/value: This research provides valuable insights into the role of women's empowerment, education, human capital, and social capital in driving sustainable rural tourism development. Furthermore, this research has a significant impact on how</p>

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Chinese farmers participate in rural tourism in the future, providing insights into rural revitalization efforts. This study underscores the importance of innovative research in driving perspectives on rural tourism and empowering women, which are essential elements for the sustainable development of rural communities.

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EXPLORANDO O PAPEL DO EMPODERAMENTO FEMININO NO DESENVOLVIMENTO DO TURISMO RURAL SUSTENTÁVEL: UM ESTUDO EXPLORATÓRIO SEQUENCIAL DE MISTÉRIO MISTURADO

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é avaliar o empoderamento das mulheres rurais no contexto do desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável, identificar os fatores que influenciam seu empoderamento, examinar o impacto do empoderamento das mulheres no desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável e explorar abordagens inovadoras para capacitar as mulheres rurais.

Quadro Teórico: Este estudo combina quatro fatores que influenciam o empoderamento das mulheres, ou seja, empreendedorismo feminino, educação, capital social e capital humano, para formar um quadro teórico baseado na teoria do empoderamento e usa o empoderamento das mulheres como um mediador para explorar os elementos que impactam no crescimento sustentável do turismo rural.

Desenho/Metodologia/Abordagem: Um método misto de pesquisa foi empregado, começando com pesquisa qualitativa, onde 11 entrevistas relevantes foram conduzidas para obter uma compreensão preliminar dos fatores que afetam o empoderamento das mulheres e a sustentabilidade do turismo rural. Posteriormente, um questionário de pesquisa de 68 itens foi usado na etapa de pesquisa quantitativa. Um total de 340 respostas foram coletadas. A confiabilidade do questionário foi testada por meio do alfa de Cronbach, e a análise fatorial de validação foi usada para avaliar sua validade. Técnicas de análise estrutural e modelagem de equações (SEM) foram utilizadas para testar as hipóteses do estudo.

Resultados: O estudo mostra que o empreendedorismo, a educação, o capital humano e social das mulheres têm um impacto positivo no empoderamento das mulheres e no crescimento sustentável do turismo rural. O empoderamento das mulheres medeia a relação entre esses fatores e o desenvolvimento sustentável do turismo rural, que também impacta positivamente o desenvolvimento comunitário sustentável, econômico, ambiental e cultural. Portanto, promover o empoderamento das mulheres e melhorar seu acesso à educação e aos recursos são essenciais para alcançar o crescimento sustentável do turismo rural e o desenvolvimento comunitário.

Pesquisa, implicações práticas e sociais: Este estudo propõe uma nova estrutura teórica que inclui empreendedorismo feminino, educação, capital social e capital humano para preencher a lacuna no conhecimento. O desenvolvimento da mulher no turismo rural é também crucial para o progresso da sociedade rumo à civilização, devendo ser implementadas políticas e incentivos que estimulem a sua participação e garantam o seu efetivo envolvimento. Isso contribuirá para o crescimento e desenvolvimento sustentável da indústria de turismo rural da China.

Originalidade/valor: Esta pesquisa fornece informações valiosas sobre o papel do empoderamento, educação, capital humano e capital social das mulheres na condução do desenvolvimento sustentável do turismo rural. Além disso, esta pesquisa tem um impacto significativo sobre como os agricultores chineses participarão do turismo rural no futuro, fornecendo informações sobre os esforços de revitalização rural. Este estudo ressalta a importância de pesquisas inovadoras na condução de perspectivas sobre o turismo rural e empoderamento das mulheres, que são elementos essenciais para o desenvolvimento sustentável das comunidades rurais.

Palavras-chave: Turismo Rural, Empoderamento Feminino, Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Fatores de Influência.

EXPLORANDO EL PAPEL DEL EMPODERAMIENTO FEMENINO EN EL DESARROLLO DEL TURISMO RURAL SOSTENIBLE: UN ESTUDIO EXPLORATORIO SECUENCIAL DE MÉTODO MIXTO

RESUMEN

Propósito: El propósito de este estudio es evaluar el empoderamiento de las mujeres rurales en el contexto del desarrollo del turismo sostenible, identificar los factores que influyen en su empoderamiento, examinar el impacto del empoderamiento de las mujeres en el desarrollo del turismo sostenible y explorar enfoques innovadores para empoderar a las mujeres rurales.

Marco teórico: este estudio combina cuatro factores que influyen en el empoderamiento de las mujeres, a saber, el espíritu empresarial, la educación, el capital social y el capital humano de las mujeres, para formar un marco teórico basado en la teoría del empoderamiento, y utiliza el empoderamiento de las mujeres como mediador para explorar los elementos que repercutir en el crecimiento sostenible del turismo rural.

Diseño/ Metodología/ Enfoque: Se empleó un método de investigación mixto, comenzando con una investigación cualitativa, donde se realizaron 11 entrevistas relevantes para obtener una comprensión preliminar de los factores que afectan el empoderamiento de las mujeres y la sostenibilidad del turismo rural. Posteriormente, se utilizó un cuestionario tipo encuesta de 68 ítems en la etapa de investigación cuantitativa. Se recogieron un total de 340 respuestas. La fiabilidad del cuestionario se probó mediante el alfa de Cronbach y se utilizó el análisis factorial de validación para evaluar su validez. Se utilizaron técnicas de análisis estructural y modelado de ecuaciones (SEM) para probar las hipótesis del estudio.

Hallazgos: El estudio muestra que el emprendimiento, la educación, el capital humano y social de las mujeres tienen un impacto positivo en el empoderamiento de las mujeres y el crecimiento sostenible del turismo rural. El empoderamiento de las mujeres media la relación entre estos factores y el desarrollo sostenible del turismo rural, que también impacta positivamente en el desarrollo sostenible comunitario, económico, ambiental y cultural. Por lo tanto, promover el empoderamiento de las mujeres y mejorar su acceso a la educación y los recursos son esenciales para lograr un crecimiento sostenible del turismo rural y el desarrollo comunitario.

Implicaciones de investigación, prácticas y sociales: este estudio propone un nuevo marco teórico que incluye el espíritu empresarial femenino, la educación, el capital social y el capital humano para llenar el vacío en el conocimiento. El desarrollo de la mujer en el turismo rural también es crucial para el progreso de la sociedad hacia la civilización, y se deben implementar políticas e incentivos para alentar su participación y asegurar su participación efectiva. Esto contribuirá al crecimiento y desarrollo sostenible de la industria del turismo rural de China.

Originalidad/valor: esta investigación proporciona información valiosa sobre el papel del empoderamiento, la educación, el capital humano y el capital social de las mujeres para impulsar el desarrollo del turismo rural sostenible. Además, esta investigación tiene un impacto significativo en la forma en que los agricultores chinos participarán en el turismo rural en el futuro, proporcionando información sobre los esfuerzos de revitalización rural. Este estudio subraya la importancia de la investigación innovadora para impulsar perspectivas sobre el turismo rural y empoderar a las mujeres, que son elementos esenciales para el desarrollo sostenible de las comunidades rurales.

Palabras clave: Turismo Rural, Empoderamiento Femenino, Desarrollo Sostenible, Factores de Influencia.

INTRODUCTION

Many governments and international organizations worldwide consider poverty reduction to be a crucial economic and political objective due to its significant impact on the overall welfare of society (Azamat et al., 2023). In the face of the new poverty pattern with "relative poverty" as the core after 2020, the gender factor should be introduced in the process of establishing a long-term mechanism to address relative poverty, in order to respond to the reality that women are more vulnerable to relative poverty than men, and to unleash the power of poor women to reduce poverty (Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2002; Rodrigues et al., 2020; Lecoutere et al., 2023). According to the current agreement among worldwide scholars and organizations working to reduce poverty, empowering women has a beneficial impact on reducing relative poverty and encouraging economic growth (Adeola & Afenyo-Agbe, 2020; Vukovic et al., 2021). The practice of this model in China also illustrates its applicability, but how to incorporate gender factors in the design of poverty reduction policies and how to address intra-household inequalities in empowering women are still urgent issues to be addressed.

Tourism activities in rural locations where rustic-looking natural and human items are the main draw are referred to as rural tourism (Ertac & Tanova, 2020; Premovic, 2016). The literature (Sonia et al., 2015) suggests that to develop a new and modernized countryside, the first step is to gradually transform the management as well as the business model of the countryside starting from rural tourism. Inland destinations are preferred for rural tourism, which generates economic benefits for the local community through facilitating opportunities for tourists to engage with local residents (Agustina et al., 2023). The literature (Uduji et al., 2020) combines rural tourism with the local natural and humanistic environment, and drives the flow of population, knowledge, and resources by means of tourism, which has a great role in promoting the economic and cultural development of the countryside. The literature (Nair & Segura, 2021) did an in-depth research and analysis work on the community economy that rural tourism has and the factors that affect its sustainable development, and incorporated the influencing factors into the research model to analyze and summarize the model of sustainable development of community economy of rural tourism in a hierarchical manner.

Monitoring data in recent years suggest that rural women's lower income than men is partly due to the fact that more than 80% of the resident female labor force in rural areas is employed in the primary sector, and the share of female labor force employed in secondary and tertiary sectors is 22.2 percentage points lower than that of male labor force (Morgan & Winkler, 2019; Ming Ming Su et al, 2020; Yu Hong & Tao Xiao Long, 2021). According to the literature (Anuar & Asmalina, 2016), rural women lack sufficient decision-making power in the home and are much less outspoken than males when it comes to handling family business and allocating resources. As a result, they frequently find themselves in a position of relative deprivation. In conclusion, putting women at the forefront of social policy through a focus on their empowerment is the greatest strategy to reduce female poverty and promote their growth.

This paper first integrates the influencing factors of female empowerment and rural tourism into one study, and concludes that women's entrepreneurship, women's education, women's human capital and women's social capital are all four factors that influence women's empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism, filling the research gap of female empowerment and rural tourism development in rural China. Then, using an open coding, spindle coding, and selective coding sequence, a structural equation model was developed to qualitatively examine the elements influencing women's empowerment and the sustainable growth of rural tourism. Finally, an exploratory analysis based on empowerment theory and sustainable development theory was conducted to explore the influence path coefficients and

mediating values that affect women's empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Female Empowerment Theory

Empowerment can be understood as a multifaceted social process that enables individuals to take control of their own lives. An important component of empowerment is individuals' or groups' self-reliance, as well as the empowerment of women. Women's organizations and institutions play an important role as catalysts for women's empowerment. These organizations and institutions mobilize women, dispel myths surrounding female oppression, and make historic progress on women's issues by encouraging women to thrive both at home and in society.

According to empowerment theory, power is not a limited resource, and empowerment occurs when individuals are connected to one another. As a result, people become more empowered. At the individual level, people can make their problem-solving process more comfortable by working with others and can have an impact on how things are done and problems are solved based on their own sense of empowerment (Scheyvens & Watt, 2021).

In terms of the environment, advocating for changes in institutions and laws that hinder self-help can make it easier for individuals to help themselves. Social work focuses on helping people recognize that they are agents of change, that social workers are peers rather than problem solvers, and that clients are problem solvers. Clients are educated throughout the process about their needs, rights, and options for remediation in order to eventually become empowered.

Individual empowerment provides individuals with the confidence and strength to take action. A person's sense of self-efficacy, which is the development of personal power, strength, or mastery, affects their ability to act in situations where they lack authority. Individual self-efficacy is viewed as an "individualistic" concept as it is based on the idea that believing in one's ability to achieve a goal is a crucial aspect of self-empowerment. This means that a fundamental faith in oneself is all it takes to change one's life. However, a change in self-efficacy cannot be considered empowerment unless there is a corresponding practical change in one's life (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010).

Organizational empowerment refers to the business procedures and regulations that give subordinates the authority and power to perform their job-related duties. A key component of

organizational empowerment is the belief that supervisors provide their assistants with the opportunity to participate in decision-making and give them the authority, responsibility, and knowledge to make decisions. Under this particular view of organizational empowerment, senior managers begin the process and then cascade down the hierarchy by delegating official authority to lower-level employees to carry out their responsibilities (Alim et al., 2023). Organizational empowerment is often greatly influenced by macro-level factors related to the company as a whole. Corporate procedures, laws, organizational culture, and structure may be among these factors.

Therefore, governments can define organizational empowerment as administrative policies and procedures that allow and assign a higher level of authority and autonomy to perform duties, flexibility to accomplish these tasks, and expanded participation in decision-making. It is not enough for staff to be empowered; in order to use this authority to perform duties that would normally fall within the purview of their directors, staff need to be guided and trained by their supervisors.

Sustainable Tourism Development

In contrast to traditional development models, sustainable development uses social, economic, cultural, environmental, and living indicators to measure development holistically, not just GNP (Gross National Product). These concepts achieve healthy and sustainable economic growth by naturally integrating short- and long-term goals, regional and global concerns, and social and economic returns.

Sustainability theory typically focuses on three areas: the natural and built environment, the community and economy, and the social sphere (residents and visitors). The natural environment, farming environment, built environment, animals, and natural resources within the community are all components of environmental sustainability. Economic sustainability includes all the fresh money invested in the town and any income generated by tourism-related activities for local companies. The interaction and activities of tourism with the community are included in social sustainability (Alrwajfah et al., 2019).

The Interconnection of Female Entrepreneurship, Education, Social Capital, and Human Capital with Female Empowerment

Haya and Marlow (2013) clarified the relationship between female entrepreneurship and female empowerment by examining family business-based entrepreneurial activity. While

entrepreneurship is generally considered an individual-centered economic activity, there are certain contexts where marginalized and subordinate women can be empowered through family businesses.

Education is the most important determinant in determining whether or not women will achieve economic success, social progress, and overall well-being. It is common knowledge that women face discrimination from the time they are born until they die. Because women are subject to oppression in all areas of life and continue to face issues of inequality and vulnerability across all fields and society, it is imperative that women be given more agency in every arena. In order for women to combat the gender prejudices that have been built by society, they need to swim against the current system that demands more physical prowess (Shunmuga et al., 2014). This strength may be gained via empowerment, which can be gained through knowledge. The empowerment of women is also necessary for the development of rural areas.

In their research on Northern Ethiopia, Babulo et al.,(2009)defined empowerment as a household's ability to make decisions that affect the progress of its members. They calculated a household's level of social capital by counting the number of local organizations it belonged to. They concluded that the empowerment of males in households led by social capital was not reflected in the empowerment of women in these households. Instead, access to finance and education were the most important factors in women's empowerment in families where they were the primary breadwinners. Ali et al.,(2017) conducted research in Bangladesh and found that social networks boosted family income and control over income, credit, and savings. They also discovered that social networks encouraged involvement in income generation and decision-making.

There is a substantial amount of evidence that supports the assumption that increasing levels of education can promote women's empowerment (Gholipour et al., 2010). Mishra and Nayak (2010) have found that a person's level of education has a significant impact not only on their income but also on their overall health. Ahmad and Sultan (2004) also agree that education is a significant predictor of women's empowerment, mobility, and communication with their spouses. They report that the ability to accurately anticipate women's empowerment, mobility, and communication can be achieved through human capital. Formal and non-formal education were found to have a positive and significant impact on women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh according to two studies conducted in the region (Parveen and Leonhauser, 2005).

Overall, promoting women's entrepreneurship, education, and social capital can help to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, leading to improved economic, social, and health outcomes for women and their communities.

Female Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism Development

A significant amount of research literature emphasizes the importance of local advocacy for sustainable tourism development in various settings (Elbaz & Abou-Shouk, 2021). The value of tourism organizations in enhancing the sustainability of nearby communities is also highlighted in this body of research literature (Gannon et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015). This review of current research synthesizes the emphasis on empowerment as a crucial component of tourism development programs, particularly for women's empowerment (Strzelecka, Bole & Strzelecka, 2017). According to research conducted by Bhattacharya and Banerjee (2012), the key technique for development that boosts women's scores in autonomy, knowledge, and health dimensions is empowering women. The authors, Boley and McGehee (2014), state that the goal of achieving sustainable tourism development can be achieved through community empowerment. When citizens are involved in decision-making, resolving social concerns and making meaningful judgments becomes considerably simpler. Additionally, the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) asserts that empowering women leads to a reduction in individual poverty and an increase in the economic empowerment of communities. Furthermore, providing women with opportunities to participate in economic activities would enable them to start their own small tourism enterprises, which would stimulate the economy of the surrounding area.

The Interconnection of Female Entrepreneurship, Education, Social Capital, and Human Capital with Sustainable Rural Tourism Development

Tourism in rural areas has been acknowledged as a means of contributing to social and economic development. Entrepreneurship has been identified as a driving force behind the growth, innovation, and change experienced by rural tourism. Female entrepreneurs have been found to contribute to expanding sustainable tourism in underserved rural areas, particularly in the tourism, agricultural, and handicrafts industries. Women-owned companies have had a significant impact on the growth of the surrounding community and have encouraged other women and young people to remain in their communities, leading to a slower pace of population decline in mountainous regions (Nicolae, 2017).

The level of education achieved by women in rural areas has a direct influence on the expansion of the rural tourism business. Education opportunities for rural women have a significant bearing on the quantity and quality of women in the labor force, the expansion of rural tourism, the expansion of the national gross domestic product, and the expansion of the national income per capita (Gong Ronghua, 2020). The development of rural tourism will be facilitated by rural women's access to education (Wang Qimin, 2020).

Social capital also plays a crucial role in the growth of local tourism. Strong relationships in social capital can play a bigger role in the growth of sustainable tourism than weak relationships. The concept of strong links within social capital is particularly important for the sustained expansion of the tourism industry (Chen & Fang, 2016).

In terms of the link between women's human capital and the growth of sustainable tourism, firms in the tourism industry train and retrain their employees to make them more service-oriented and creative so they can give customers better services and goods (Ming, 2019).

In conclusion, rural tourism has the potential to generate revenue and create jobs, especially in rural areas where conventional agro-industries have been declining. Entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, education opportunities for rural women, and social capital all play significant roles in the expansion and sustainability of the rural tourism industry.

Based on the previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1 Women's entrepreneurship has a significant positive impact on women's empowerment.

H2 Women's entrepreneurship has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism.

H3 Women's education has a positive impact on women's empowerment.

H4 Women's education has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism.

H5 Women's social capital has a positive impact on women's empowerment.

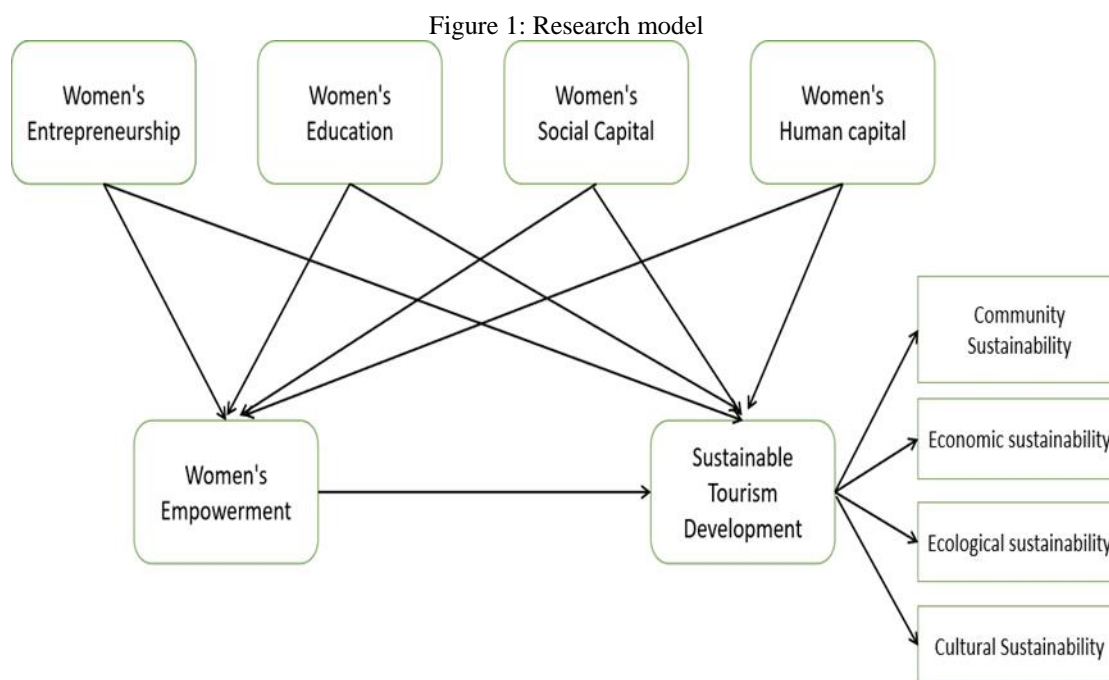
H6 Women's social capital has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism.

H7 Women's human capital has a positive impact on women's empowerment.

H8 Women's human capital has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism.

H9 Women's empowerment has a positive impact on the sustainable development of rural tourism.

This model uses women's empowerment as an intermediate variable and women's entrepreneurship, education, and social capital as independent variables. Rural tourism sustainability is identified as the dependent variable. The model also identifies the specific impact outcomes of rural tourism sustainability, including community, economic, ecological, and local cultural sustainability (as shown in Figure 1).



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used various means to gather information to ensure credibility and validity of the cases. Primary data was gathered through interviews with female entrepreneurs related to rural tourism. A 15-day field research project was conducted in July 2022, consisting of a simulated interview with 4 candidates followed by a formal interview with 20 individuals. The researcher obtained permission to record the interviews and compiled verbatim transcripts for subsequent analysis.

The researcher primarily combines the results of this paper's theoretical analysis and some previous studies, designs a questionnaire, uses SPSS 26.0 and SmartPLS 3.0 software to analyse the recovered data descriptively, and then extracts the influencing factors of women's empowerment and sustainable rural tourism development, conducts regression analysis, and provides a scientific basis for subsequent targeted suggestions for the improvement of sustainable development.

During the quantitative analysis phase, the researcher went on two trips to the field, each lasting 10 days. The first survey zeroed in on the tourism businesses in the Zaozhuang region that were considered to be the most representative of the sector. A preliminary survey was conducted with 100 locals in order to establish the reliability and accuracy of the data obtained from the main survey. After that, the researcher made some adjustments to the preliminary results, and they also rethought some of the questions. A total of 355 questionnaires were given out to villagers who were either involved in rural tourism businesses or were more advanced in the local rural tourism industry. These villagers included those who ran rural bed and breakfasts, tourist hotels, tourism handicraft enterprises, and any other villagers who were directly or indirectly connected to rural tourism.

During the formal research, 255 questionnaires were sent out using a mix of online and offline methods; 245 questionnaires were returned, for a return rate of 96.08%; of these, 240 questionnaires were valid, for an effective rate of 97.96%; overall, the return rate was 96.08%. This study's total number of participants was 340 after considering the prior 100 studies.

The questionnaire for this study has three parts: basic information, rural tourism development, and women's empowerment. A five-stage Likert scale was used to examine rural tourism sustainability assessment and women's empowerment. The questionnaire was operationalized and broken down into sub-concepts and colloquial expressions. Six primary variables were identified, with women's empowerment serving as the mediating variable and sustainable rural tourism development as the dependent variable. The questionnaire consists of seven sections and 73 questions in total, including questions on women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital, social capital, and environmentally responsible development of rural tourism.

RESULTS

Word Cloud Analysis

The number of times a specific word is mentioned in the transcript of the recorded interviews with female business owners working in rural tourism is referred to as its frequency. A higher frequency suggests that the women place emphasis on certain aspects of the topic. The researcher started by visualizing the word cloud in the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12.0 to identify the dominant characteristics of the women's perspectives on sustainable tourism development. The synonyms filter level was selected for the analysis and the minimum length of screened words was set to 2. The hundred most frequently mentioned words in the interview

as "equality between men and women in tourism entrepreneurship," "increased motivation," and "access to suitable work for women."

When starting a business, rural women possess unique qualities that distinguish them from urban women. They have a strong attachment to the countryside and a sense of belonging, as well as a deeper understanding of their local area and a more extensive network of resources. These factors make them more quickly able to integrate into the community and better suited for rural tourism-related business ventures. In terms of business strategies, most rural women rely on their handicrafts and run their businesses as family units, with smaller structures and more flexible operations. Some rural women also start businesses in collaboration with their husbands, with a clear division of labor between the two. Women are often responsible for reception and communication as well as front office work due to their diligence, patience, attention to detail, and good communication skills, while their husbands take on responsibilities such as purchasing materials and controlling costs, as these tasks are typically smaller in scale and allow for more free time.

② Women's education

Women gain a sense of social identity and equal opportunities through education. Participants in the interviews believe that the formation of women's social identities starts with the teaching of skills, such as those represented by needlework, and that access to education boosts women's self-confidence as a group. Education, to some extent, levels the playing field for opportunities between women and men.

③ Women's social capital

Regarding women's social capital, it should be noted that social capital gives women access to various forms of social support, most notably social and family support. Family license, especially from husbands, children, parents, and other family members, can be involved in the process of female entrepreneurship in tourism. On the one hand, they understand the need to balance women's family responsibilities, and on the other hand, family members can play a role in specific matters. According to rural women entrepreneurs in tourism, social support primarily comes from the female identity in the social, policy, and other aspects of accessing more resources. And, family support, especially from husbands, children, parents, and other family members, can be involved in the process of female tourism. For example, in a country

inn, children are welcome to assist with providing customer service by serving food and passing dishes around.

④ Women's human capital development

The interviewees identified three main categories of women's human capital, defined as the strengths that women possess. These categories are personality factors, occupational factors, and practical characteristics. The interviewees believe that qualities such as hard work, flexibility, patience, attentiveness, and focus are essential for starting a tourism business and are inherent advantages for women. This is due to the fact that the female personality factor plays a role. With regards to professional considerations, the interviewees think that working from home provides women with more flexibility in their schedules. On the other hand, they believe that the lower costs associated with working in the tourism industry, such as the cost of switching jobs, make it more attractive to women. In particular, women's willingness to put their knowledge into practice, their sensitivity, and their natural affinity for the tourism industry are the practical characteristics that set them apart.

⑤ Sustainable rural tourism development

The central tenets of the rural tourism entrepreneurial women's conception of sustainable tourism development are: "Rational distribution of tourism benefits," "Equal development philosophy," "Promoting employment for the poor," "Economic and social harmony," and "Removing political and institutional barriers." Two of the goals include "Economic and social harmony" and "Removing political and institutional impediments." One factor contributing to sustainable tourism's development is the rational distribution of its effects; sustainable development is based on the principle of equality, and sustainable tourism development drives local employment. The purpose of sustainable tourism development is to promote economic and social harmony and removing political and institutional barriers is key to its development. Women entrepreneurs in rural tourism place a high importance on equity and fairness, which are essential for sustainable development. However, they face limitations and unfair treatment due to traditional gender norms, and these constraints are even greater for rural women than for their urban counterparts. As a result, rural women entrepreneurs tend to be more concerned about fair and equal participation and the fair distribution of benefits in the sustainable development of the rural tourism industry.

⑥ Difficulty for Women in Starting a Tourism Business

There are three main factors that contribute to the difficulties women face in starting a tourism business: gender, individual, and industry-related factors.

Firstly, in terms of gender, traditional gender discrimination limits women's ability to start a tourism business. The interviewees believe that their female gender identity makes it difficult to balance their career and family responsibilities, resulting in significant conflict between the two. Additionally, when facing difficulties in starting a business, they often rely on their husbands for support. Traditional gender discrimination also greatly limits their entrepreneurial development.

Secondly, in terms of individual factors, factors such as education level, professional knowledge, and personality can influence the success of rural women in starting a tourism business. Many rural women have a lower level of education and limited exposure to the tourism industry, resulting in a lack of professional knowledge, skills, and training. They also tend to adhere to traditional norms and may miss out on opportunities as a result of being overly cautious.

Lastly, in terms of industry-related factors, the development of the rural tourism industry impacts women's ability to start a tourism business. The interviewees identified a lack of funding, poor infrastructure, extensive development of tourism resources, and a limited range of services as the main industry-related challenges facing rural tourism development.

Analysis Model

Three main categories of "women's empowerment," "sustainable development of rural tourism," and "difficulties in women's tourism entrepreneurship," as well as eight subcategories, were extracted through three-level coding in this study. The core category factor of this study was summarized as "women's empowerment influencing sustainable tourism." Based on the specific content of the categories and the related logic, the analysis model of this study was developed, as shown in Figure 3.

① Women's entrepreneurship focuses on promoting women's economic independence, which is in line with the factors of sustainable development such as "reasonable distribution of benefits," "equality of development concept," "promoting local employment," and "economic and social harmony."

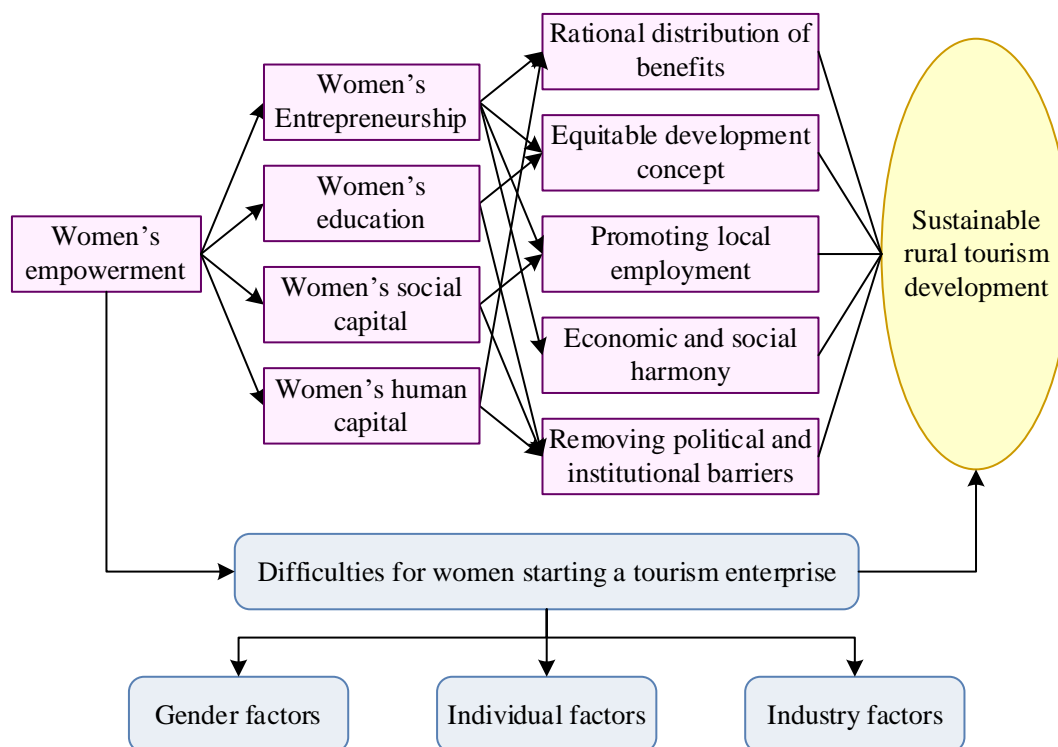
② Women's education focuses on cultivating women's self-awareness, which is conducive to the formation of sustainable development concepts of "equality of development" and enables women to "eliminate political and institutional barriers" through education.

③ Social capital emphasizes women's social support. Through social networks in various aspects such as family and society, women's social capital is conducive to promoting local employment of women's groups through social networks. Additionally, social policies, social media, and other forms of social support for women help eliminate political and institutional barriers for women in developing rural tourism industries.

④ Human capital is focused on developing women's own advantages. By exploring human capital, women can actively participate in the creation and operation of rural tourism industry, thereby gaining corresponding benefits. Additionally, in the process of developing tourism industry, it can also promote local residents' employment.

⑤ Women's empowerment is beneficial to eliminating the difficulties in women's tourism entrepreneurship, thereby promoting the sustainable development of rural tourism industry.

Figure 3: Research Model Analysis Chart



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

Testing of Structural Equation Models (SEM)

The researcher conducted a quantitative data analysis to validate the findings of the qualitative analysis. After designing the initial version of the questionnaire, 102 questionnaires were gathered from 24 interviewees and 78 rural tourism practitioners. Out of these 102, 100 were considered valid, resulting in an efficiency rate of 98.04%. After compiling and collecting the pre-study data, the researcher conducted a factor analysis to assess the questionnaire's layout's practicality. Before starting the factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's spherical tests were conducted. The result of the KMO test was 0.944, which indicated that it was higher than 0.9 and showed that there was no significant difference in the degree of correlation between the variables, making the principal component analysis work effectively.

According to the test results for commonality, all the commonality scores were higher than 0.5, indicating a high capacity for the factors to explain the variables. Nine factors were extracted, and the cumulative variance was 68.831%, which was higher than 60%. As a result, a formal questionnaire was used to conduct the appropriate research for this study.

Table 1: Rotation matrix

Title	Factors								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8.1							0.727		
8.2							0.650		
8.3							0.663		
8.4							0.753		
8.5							0.800		
8.6							0.760		
8.7							0.735		
8.8			0.685						
8.9			0.734						
8.10			0.736						
8.11			0.755						
8.12			0.727						
8.13			0.717						
8.14			0.750						
8.15			0.704						
8.16				0.716					
8.17				0.682					
8.18				0.726					
8.19				0.612					
8.20				0.698					
8.21				0.760					
8.22				0.679					
8.23				0.553					
8.24					0.588				
8.25					0.548				
8.26					0.772				
8.27					0.776				
8.28					0.833				
8.29					0.775				
8.30					0.622				

8.31					0.538				
10.1	0.763								
10.2	0.664								
10.3	0.747								
10.4	0.749								
10.5	0.730								
10.6	0.765								
10.7	0.773								
10.8	0.735								
10.9						0.509			
10.1						0.676			
10.11						0.609			
10.12						0.626			
10.13						0.656			
10.14						0.690			
10.15						0.655			
10.16						0.613			
10.17	0.724								
10.18	0.790								
10.19	0.819								
10.2	0.778								
10.21	0.631								
10.22	0.718								
10.23	0.819								
10.24	0.779								
10.25								0.691	
10.26								0.745	
10.27								0.726	
10.28								0.601	
10.29								0.690	
10.3								0.726	
10.31									0.594
10.32									0.630
10.33									0.688
10.34									0.665
10.35									0.710
10.36									0.718
KMO					0.944				
P					0.000				
% of Variance	37.110	6.998	5.346	4.727	4.173	3.222	2.837	2.411	2.008
Cumulative % of Variance	37.110	44.108	49.454	54.181	58.353	61.575	64.412	66.823	68.831

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

Multicollinearity Test

The VIF values were used to test for multicollinearity between the variables. The results are shown in Table 2 below, from which it can be found that the VIF values between the variables are all less than 3, indicating that there is no significant multicollinearity between the variables in this study's model, and the results are reliable.

Table 2: Multicollinearity test

Variables	Women empowerment VIF	Sustainable rural tourism development VIF
women entrepreneurship	1.873	1.955
women education	1.786	1.972
women human capital	1.203	1.247
women social capital	2.428	2.518
women empowerment		1.944

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

SEM Model Fitting Analysis

In this investigation, the predictive ability and goodness of fit of the model were evaluated using three metrics: GoF, R^2 , and Q^2 scores. There are three levels of GoF indicators: the lowest level is equal to 0.1, the medium level is equal to 0.25, and the highest level is equal to 0.36. The GoF is an important indicator of the goodness of fit of the PLS model, meaning that the value of GoF should be greater than 0.1 when the model structure is simple or the sample size is small; greater than 0.25 when the model complexity is medium or the sample size is medium; and greater than 0.36 when the model is complex or the sample size is large. This model has a GoF of 0.625, which indicates a satisfactory fit to the data. On the other hand, the R^2 value represents the capacity of the exogenous latent variables to explain the changes in the endogenous latent variables. The Q^2 value, which is the primary indicator of the model's ability to predict the future, should be greater than 0 to indicate good predictive power. This value represents the ability of the structural model to predict each of the endogenous latent variables. The predictive ability requirement was satisfied as the results from the blindfolding algorithm's calculation of Q^2 showed that the Q^2 values of all endogenous variables were significantly higher than 0 in terms of their predictive power.

Table 3: Degree of model fitting

Variables	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2
Women's empowerment	0.486	0.479	0.313
Sustainable rural tourism development	0.756	0.753	0.291
Local community sustainability	0.427	0.425	0.286
Economic sustainability	0.606	0.604	0.395
Ecological sustainability	0.696	0.695	0.432
Cultural sustainability	0.650	0.649	0.422

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

Hypothesis Testing Analysis

In this study, the Bootstrapping algorithm found in the SmartPLS 3.0 software was utilised to test a resampled sample of the original 5,000 data to analyse the model's path test results. The results of the hypothesis test are displayed in the table below.

Table 4: Standard regression coefficient test results

Hypothesis	Path relationships	Path coefficient	SE	T	P
H1	women entrepreneurship -> women empowerment	0.206	0.079	2.617	0.009
H2	women entrepreneurship -> Sustainable rural tourism development	0.264	0.033	8.047	0.000
H3	women education->women empowerment	0.309	0.076	4.084	0.000
H4	women education-> Sustainable rural tourism development	0.245	0.038	6.370	0.000
H5	Women social capital -> women empowerment	0.215	0.072	3.011	0.003
H6	Women social capital ->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.159	0.043	3.703	0.000
H7	women human capital->women empowerment	0.151	0.048	3.167	0.002
H8	women human capital->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.327	0.042	7.746	0.000
H9	women empowerment -> Sustainable rural tourism development	0.151	0.044	3.455	0.001
	Sustainable rural tourism development -> Community Sustainability	0.653	0.042	15.558	0.000
	Sustainable rural tourism developmen -> Economic sustainability	0.778	0.039	20.116	0.000
	Sustainable rural tourism developmen -> Ecological sustainability	0.834	0.027	30.460	0.000
	Sustainable rural tourism developmen -> Cultural Sustainability	0.806	0.024	33.550	0.000

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

The results of the comprehensive model test are shown in the table above. From Table 4, we can find that the path coefficient of women's entrepreneurship on women's empowerment is 0.206 ($t=2.617$, $p<0.01$), indicating that women's entrepreneurship has a significant, positive impact on women's empowerment, thus supporting Hypothesis 1 (H1). The path coefficient of women's entrepreneurship on sustainable development of rural tourism is 0.264 ($t=8.047$, $p<0.01$), indicating that the positive impact of women's entrepreneurship on the sustainable development of rural tourism is significant, thus supporting Hypothesis 2 (H2).

The path coefficient of women's education on women's empowerment is 0.309 ($t=4.084$, $p<0.01$), indicating that women's education has a significant positive impact on women's empowerment, thus supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). The path coefficient of women's education

on sustainable development of rural tourism is 0.245 ($t=6.370$, $p<0.01$), indicating that women's education has a significant positive impact on sustainable development of rural tourism, thus supporting Hypothesis 4 (H4).

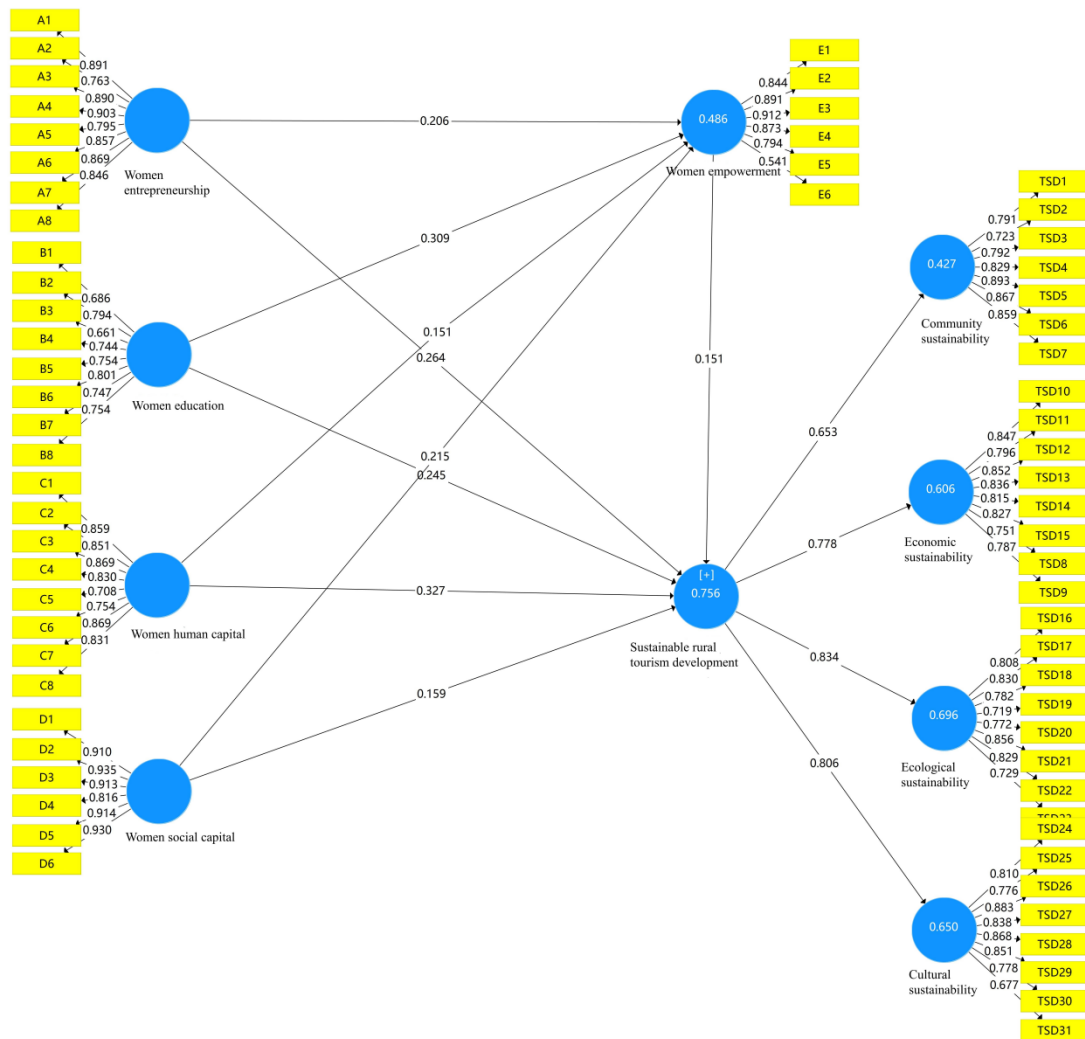
The path coefficient of women's social capital on women's empowerment is 0.215 ($t=3.01$, $p<0.01$), indicating that women's social capital has a significant positive effect on women's empowerment, thus supporting Hypothesis 5 (H5). The path coefficient of women's social capital on sustainable development of rural tourism is 0.215 ($t=3.011$, $p<0.01$), also indicating that women's social capital has a significant positive effect on sustainable development of rural tourism, thus supporting Hypothesis 5 (H5).

The path coefficient of 0.653 ($t=15.558$, $p<0.01$) between the sustainable development of rural tourism and the sustainable development of the community demonstrates that sustainable rural tourism has a significant and positive influence on the sustainable development of the community. The path coefficient of sustainable rural tourism development on sustainable economic development is 0.778 ($t=20.116$, $p<0.01$), indicating that sustainable rural tourism development has a significant positive impact on sustainable economic development.

The sustainable development of rural tourism has a path coefficient of 0.834 ($t=30.460$, $p<0.01$), indicating that it has a significant positive impact on the sustainable development of the environment. It can be deduced that the path coefficient between the sustainable development of rural tourism and the sustainable development of culture is 0.806 ($t=33.550$, $p<0.01$), indicating that sustainable rural tourism has a significant and positive influence on the sustainable development of culture.

The model path diagram is shown below(Figure 4).

Figure 4: Model path diagram



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

SEM Model Mediation Effect Test

This study verifies the mediating effect of women's empowerment on the relationship between various factors (women's entrepreneurship, women's education, women's human capital, and women's social capital) and the sustainable development of rural tourism. The results are presented in the table below. The table shows that women's empowerment has a significant indirect effect on the sustainable development of rural tourism through its impact on women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital, and social capital. The indirect effect of women's entrepreneurship on sustainable development of rural tourism through women's empowerment is 0.031, with a 97.5% confidence level. The indirect effect of women's education on sustainable development of rural tourism, as mediated by women's empowerment, is 0.047 with a 97.5% confidence interval of [0.014, 0.087], indicating a significant mediating

effect. The indirect effect of women's human capital on sustainable development of rural tourism, as mediated by women's empowerment, is 0.023 with a 97.5% confidence interval of [0.006, 0.040], also indicating a significant mediating effect. Finally, the indirect effect of women's social capital on sustainable development of rural tourism, as mediated by women's empowerment, is 0.033 with a 97.5% confidence interval of [0.008, 0.061], showing a significant mediating effect.

Table 5: Testing the Mediating Effects Result

Indirect Relationship	Effect size	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
women entrepreneurship ->women empowerment ->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.031	0.016	1.990	0.047	0.008	0.065
women education ->women empowerment ->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.047	0.019	2.442	0.015	0.014	0.087
women human capital->women empowerment ->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.023	0.009	2.633	0.009	0.006	0.040
women social capital->women empowerment ->Sustainable rural tourism development	0.033	0.014	2.341	0.020	0.008	0.061

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

DISCUSSION

This paper takes female empowerment and rural tourism as the research object, factors affecting female empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism as the research content, and theories such as empowerment theory and sustainable tourism development theory as the guidance for relevant research. A structural equation (SEM) model is proposed to qualitatively analyze the factors affecting female empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism through an open coding-fusiform coding-selective coding sequence. The findings of this paper are shown below:

(1) The indirect effect of female entrepreneurship through female empowerment on rural tourism sustainability is 0.031, indicating that female empowerment plays a significant mediating role between female entrepreneurship and rural tourism sustainability. The indirect effect of female education through female empowerment on rural tourism sustainable development is 0.047, indicating that female empowerment has a significant positive effect between female education and female social capital and rural tourism sustainable development.

(2) Female empowerment is a key mediator between female education and the long-term sustainability of rural tourism. The indirect impact of female human capital on rural tourism's

sustainable growth is 0.023, which shows that female empowerment is a key mediator between female human capital and the industry's long-term growth. Female empowerment appears to play a substantial mediating role between female social capital and sustainable development of rural tourism, as indicated by the indirect effect of female social capital on sustainable development of rural tourism being 0.033.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the four factors of women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital, and social capital are all influencing factors for women's empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism. These four factors have a significant promoting effect on women's empowerment and sustainable development of rural tourism, and women's empowerment, as an intermediary factor, plays a strong promoting role in sustainable development of rural tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to actively promote women's entrepreneurship, increase women's access to education, and enhance women's human and social capital. Therefore, promoting women's empowerment and enhancing their access to education and resources are essential for achieving sustainable growth of rural tourism and community development.

This study examines Chinese rural women's groups from a feminist perspective with the goal of creating a fair, equal, and harmonious environment for the survival of rural female groups in China. The investigation uses the theories of empowerment and sustainable development and focuses on women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital, and social capital. The research aims to uncover how these factors affect the sustainable development of rural tourism and the empowerment of women. The study's results provide a new reference for future research. However, the study has limitations due to personal capacity, objective material conditions, and the epidemic. The criteria for measuring women's empowerment and factors influencing rural tourism are not entirely consistent, leading to errors in the measurement process. Future research will broaden the survey's scope, increase the sample size, and take a more holistic approach to the variables to arrive at more comprehensive conclusions.

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