



THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SHAPING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS AMONG TUNISIAN WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Mohamed Amin Bardaa^a 

^a University of Sfax (Sfax, Tunisia), Faculty of Economics and Management of Sfax; <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9956-7692>;
e-mail: mohamedamin.bardaa@fsegs.usf.tn

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship is an essential component of economic progress, and women entrepreneurs are key actors. However, various factors, including entrepreneurial motivation, emotional intelligence, and their perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts, have influenced their engagement in specific sectors like sustainable tourism. The study used a quantitative research methodology, gathering information from 220 Tunisian women entrepreneurs using a structured questionnaire. To evaluate the proposed associations, the investigation used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), correlation analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that their inclination to start firms in this industry is significantly influenced by entrepreneurial motivation and emotional intelligence. Moreover, perception of anti-corruption efforts plays a moderating role, reinforcing their positive effects.

KEYWORDS

sustainable tourism, entrepreneurial motivation, emotional intelligence, governance and anti-corruption, women entrepreneurs

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1. INTRODUCTION

A significant shift in a company's attitude to development was brought about by the United Nations' 2015 adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Since then, there has been an increasing awakening to the importance of sustainability, not only on the environmental level, but also from economic and sociocultural points of view. Efforts aiming at reaching a triple environmental, economic and sociocultural result have become a central objective in many fields, including tourism (Amin, 2024, p. 256).

Certain recent research has considered other kinds of destination tourism like coastal/insular (Grilli et al., 2021), educational (Alipour et al., 2020), community (Olya et al., 2018), spiritual (Saxena et al., 2020) and patrimonial (Zhang & McDowell, 2020). Since tourism was shown to facilitate the propagation of coronavirus (Sharma et al., 2021), research has started to concentrate on the aspect of the sustainability of tourist activities since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourism is a required development strategy because of its many advantages for well-being. According to Moscardo et al. (2017), it contributes directly or indirectly



to an increase in the well-being of populations. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2013) underlines its potential to stimulate the economy, to promote environmental sustainability and to support inclusive progress. Several tourist initiatives have been adopted as development alternatives, mainly in rural areas (Park et al., 2015). However, more work on sustainable tourism has been conducted because of concerns about tourism's negative consequences (Dredge & Jamal, 2015).

Sustainable tourism, as defined by Streimikiene et al. (2021), has a favourable ecological effect while boosting economic as well as social sustainability. It incorporates social, cultural, economic and environmental protection. This idea has come forward in response to issues related to tourism's growth, namely environmental destruction and the extinction of traditional culture. According to Hashemkhani Zolfani et al. (2015), sustainable tourism is seen as a good idea that offers substantial advantages while protecting the environment for coming generations.

Entrepreneurship is an important factor in economic development and in society, offering appropriate innovation, job creation and economic growth. Women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in this process by bringing a single perspective as well as innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges. However, their engagement in specific sectors, like sustainable tourism, can be influenced by various factors, particularly their entrepreneurial motivation, emotional intelligence and perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts.

Women's entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism can be a key factor in determining their intention to become entrepreneurs. In the same way, their emotional intelligence can play a big role in their capacity to manage the challenges and the pressures associated with the creation and management of a company in a sustainable context. Moreover, their perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts can influence their confidence in the sector and their willingness to start up a business.

Thus, in this context, we are interested in answering the following problems: to what point do entrepreneurial motivation and emotional intelligence influence women entrepreneurs' intention to engage in sustainable tourism? How does their perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts influence these relations?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Passafaro (2020), the definitions of sustainable tourism have led to a comprehensive view which defines it as tourism which takes care of and respects the environment, meets needs for human leisure,

protects and preserves reception areas, while ensuring the economic and social objectives of all its actors. Its development aims at preserving the sustainability of natural resources (water, air, ground, biological diversity, etc). The objective is to prevent impacts, which could call into question the bases of development, such as the destruction of ecosystems, attacks on cultural heritage, modifications to traditions and lifestyles, as well as competition for access to utility services and infrastructure. Several works, such as Tendeng and Diombera (2022), have presented divergent prospects for sustainable tourism. According to them, it is defined as tourism which ensures, in the long run, economic, social and environmental equilibrium to satisfy all tourist requirements while offering opportunities for sustainable development for the future.

Sgroi (2020) defines sustainable tourism as encouraging efficient management of natural resources for both current and future generations while the research conducted by Grilli et al. (2021) aims at examining the significance of tourist development for the economic advancement of developing nations. The ecosystemic interchange of natural, social and cultural services is implied by its implementation while the practical features of natural settings and local resources in developing nations draw many tourists. This is tourism that meets the expectations of present tourists while providing opportunities for local communities to act as hosts (da Costa Cristiano et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism is not only defined as (a) various economic activities but also (b) as an integral part of sustainable growth. Together with the concept of sustainable tourism, it involves the safeguarding of the environment and ecosystems, the participation of communities, along with equality and prosperity.

It offers vast possibilities for development in the future to satisfy local communities and tourists. Various opinions suggest that the application of the sustainability principle is extremely complex, and that also applies to tourism, because it must consider the balance between resource exploitation and the safeguarding of the environment and socio-culture (Nguyen et al., 2019). The sustainable tourism concept is encouraged by problems involved in tourism, such as ecological harm, and harm to traditional culture as well as the economy. The concept's basic principles include understanding planning and policies coming from economic, environmental and social fields. These objectives preserve productivity, the natural environment and cultural heritage as well as balance and justice. At the beginning, priority was given to safeguarding the environment but, in addition, economic and social conditions play a quite crucial part in its realization. Thus, the notion of sustainability is understood as a design made up of three essential components, the social, the environmental and the

economic, each of which plays a pivotal role in a total system. The latter includes all the aspects of life in terms of sustainable development. It is essential to regard this development as an environmental system which preserves living resources, a social system which aims at promoting equity and an economic system which aims at improving the effectiveness of the use of resources (An & Alarcón, 2020). While being based on theoretical projections, sustainable tourism is viewed as a solution to support positive change. According to Hashemkhani Zolfani et al. (2015), sustainable tourism can play a crucial role in the search for new ways of profiting from and optimizing the positive effects of tourism. According to Radwan et al. (2019), the description of sustainable tourism can be analysed by considering elements such as resource safeguarding, economic planning, community resources, cultural sensitizing, environmental education and local inclusion.

According to Bird (2015), intentions help entrepreneurs direct a new company's development and guide them in the definition of objectives, effective communication, organization of work and engagement towards various types of related areas like a model for action. Indeed, he believes that entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism is "a frame of mind directing the person's attention (experiment and action) towards a specific objective (goal) or a way to carry out something" (Bird, 2015, p. 142). According to Gatewood et al. (2002), even though it is a troubling concept, the emphasis placed on a leader's traits in the literature on leadership may be a good reason to link the decision-making process (deciding whether to launch a business) with psychological aspects in entrepreneurship. This intention works by individual attitudes and perceptions, such as environmental and cultural factors.

Entrepreneurial intention is essential to initiate and maintain entrepreneurial projects and is influenced by personal, environmental and sociocultural variables guiding an individual's action towards the creation of a company. Early studies, Shukla and Kumar (2024), based on this intention examined factors of personality (self-confidence, risk-taking capacity, need for success and control), cognition and perception. Liao et al. (2022) consider that personal attitudes are essential to entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism. In the literature, entrepreneurial knowledge significantly boosts effectiveness, which is crucial for building self-confidence in the early stages of a company. Factors like family entrepreneurial background, personality traits such as risk-taking propensity, optimism, innovation, self-confidence and competitiveness, as well as prior entrepreneurial activity, freelance work and past achievements, all have a substantial impact. Additionally, gender differences play a notable role. Entrepreneurial motivation transcends the simple

will to start a company with political support playing a crucial role by offering financial support, training, the reinforcement of commercial competences, assistance with the realization of market research and the preparation of business plans. Moreover, the use of data from information centres in the decision-making process is essential. These forms of support are key elements that help entrepreneurs make enlightened decisions and succeed in their companies.

Entrepreneurship or company spirit can be defined or studied in a more thorough way, because there exists a strong tendency to delimit the entrepreneurial spirit with a very definite and independent organisational personality which creates, proposes, discovers and exploits frequent opportunities to make strategic decisions in the company (Matricano, 2024).

For these reasons, Amofah and Saladrighes (2022) propose to carry out activities such as training, conferences, workshops and courses to promote and reinforce the entrepreneurial spirit among men and women, by defining the creation of an organization based on search and exploitation for opportunity and thus generate social and economic transformations, taking into account the positive relation between the entrepreneurial spirit and the future creation of companies. In addition to undertaking work on their role, as largely documented in the literature, it is obligatory to recognize differences between the entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism of men and women (Amofah & Saladrighes, 2022).

This scenario has led to the analysis of a series of factors which can act like either engines or limiters of entrepreneurial spirit, among which certain psychological qualities are distinguished such as risk-taking, creativity, internal control, self-sufficiency, the motivation for progress, sensitizing and the identification of opportunities in the immediate environment, and confidence.

Entrepreneurial motivation can be classified into three generic subcategories: motivations of the push type, motivations of the pull type and mixed motivations. The push motivation, or entrepreneurship of need, corresponds to the creation of a company by constraint, where the only choice is to become an entrepreneur resulting from a conflict in the current position of an individual (Gauthier, 2020). It is often the result of situations such as bankruptcies, dismissals, or long-term unemployment.

According to Gauthier (2020), the pull motivation, or entrepreneurship of opportunity, regards the creation of a company as the result of an entrepreneurial culture. It is justified by research into independence, autonomy and by the identification of business appropriateness. The entrepreneurship of opportunity is generally perceived in a positive way because it results from a true will.

Moreover, entrepreneurial motivations can be of a mixed type, combining at the same time push and pull factors, and can be considered as economic and/or noneconomic.

Entrepreneurial motivations can also be analysed through the prism of economic and noneconomic factors. The latter can be considered in four categories: the need for a means of subsistence or creation of one's own job, the desire to improve income or the possibility of exploiting a highly profitable business, the search for a satisfactory work allowing the expression of all one's capacities and the realization of professional dreams, and the desire for independence and autonomy (Gauthier, 2020). Autonomy refers to perceiving that entrepreneurs are responsible for their actions. For Al Maalouf et al. (2023), competence enables individuals to feel confident to undertake a task and to achieve it in a responsible way. Moreover, they are often motivated by problem solving. Schlepphorst et al. (2020, p. 1265) defined entrepreneurial motivation as an "objective influenced by factors of given motivation, which in their turn influence actions or behaviours". Several former studies have confirmed that entrepreneurial motivation is a critical factor (Liu, 2021).

The idea of emotional intelligence blends intelligence with emotions. Using Thorndike and Stein's (1937) social intelligence as a foundation, emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to recognize, regulate and utilize one's own emotions as well as those of others. This intelligence has been associated with the evaluation, regulation and adaptive use of emotions, in parallel with personal intelligence. Concentration is on social and personal abilities, whereas Brett (2025) views it as a collection of emotional and social skills. Abdullah and Gull (2024) consider it to be a personality characteristic, linking behaviors and perceptions to emotional abilities. Although it is capable of recognizing, understanding, managing and using emotions, it is interpreted according to different models. The diversity of these models shows emotional intelligence as a simple mental skill with a combination of other such skills and personality characteristics.

Performance models and capacities for evaluation measuring the emotional intelligence quotient are conceptually similar; however, they differ in their mode of evaluation. Park and Kim (2021) have said that in the performance model, emotional intelligence quotient is evaluated through tests measuring correct and incorrect answers, such as the *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test*. On the other hand, the capacity model rests on the subjective evaluation of the individual concerning the emotional intelligence quotient compared to these dimensions. Measurements of evaluation include scales such as the emotional rating scale developed by Schutte et al. (2009).

Conceptual disparities between the models in which emotional intelligence exists are defined and conceptualized. According to the capacity model, emotional intelligence is considered a separate aspect from intellect, which can be developed and adjusted in a variety of emotional settings (Longobardi et al., 2020). However, mixed models consider emotional intelligence as a set of emotional and relational competences integrated in the personality (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

This study adopts the model of capacity because of its more efficient and definite conceptualization of emotional intelligence, which is measurable in a less strict but more correct way (García-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Moreover, it rests on the principle according to which an individual consciously develops emotional intelligence, which corresponds better to the capacity model. In comparison, the mixed model is regarded as less precise in its conceptualization and cannot be adapted to empirical studies on its applicability in the entrepreneurship field.

Emotional intelligence's predictive potential on entrepreneurial behaviour draws the researchers' attention. Ingram et al. (2019) noted that emotional intelligence's interpersonal dimensions – their perception and management – directly influence the performance of the owners of small companies in the United States. In the same way, Ngah and Salleh (2015) observed a positive influence on Malaysian entrepreneurs' innovation spirit, thus contributing to their companies' success. According to Senathiraja et al. (2019), female entrepreneurs possess a high degree of emotional intelligence; likewise for Kovid et al. (2025), emotional intelligence and women's success as entrepreneurs are positively and significantly correlated. They also note that while entrepreneurial experience increases the connection, the spirit of invention somewhat modifies it. However, age does not seem to be a moderating influence.

These findings fit into a larger framework that suggests emotional intelligence may have a significant role in women's success as entrepreneurs, as suggested by Jaziri and Miralam (2024). Similarly, women are more likely to operate successful enterprises because they are more resilient, have better emotional intelligence, and can balance work and life, according to Ramya et al. (2024), while Amin (2024) suggests that women entrepreneurs who possess emotional intelligence can transform hurdles into opportunities and conquer the challenges of the entrepreneurial environment because they are able to comprehend and control both their own and other people's emotions. According to Nassif and Garçon (2024), emotional intelligence is crucial to women entrepreneurs' resilience because it helps them overcome obstacles, modify their leadership style, and fortify their business ties. Owing to this skill, they

can transform obstacles into opportunities and hence, promote their business's long-term future and success.

Decision-making in entrepreneurship is a complex process requiring the transformation of emotional stimuli into usable information. Competences in emotional intelligence are thus essential to make effective and logical decisions. Moreover, entrepreneurial success requires not only well-conceived plans but also interpersonal competences to concretize sophisticated projects. Lastly, to handle the inherent physical, mental and emotional stressors in an entrepreneur's everyday work, emotional management skills are essential (Bibi et al., 2020).

Emotional intelligence is an essential lever for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to overcome financial and social obstacles by boosting their self-confidence and resilience in the face of the business world's challenges. As Peris-Delcampo et al. (2023) point out, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are key determinants of female entrepreneurial success. Moreover, according to Chen and Cheng (2023), this skill is crucial for women's leadership, providing them with enhanced decision-making abilities and strong interpersonal skills. For example, careful management of emotions promotes effective decision-making and greater resistance to stress (Liyanagamage et al., 2024).

In former studies concerning the relationship between governance and entrepreneurship, the relationship was not clear. In their research, Nistotskaya and Cingolani (2016) confirmed that because of the higher quality of regulations, bureaucratic structure indirectly affects entrepreneurship rates. According to Jalilian et al. (2006), improving regulation quality improves business performance and the overall state of the economy.

The effectiveness of the government and the rule of law are other agents that are considered determinants of a country's entrepreneurial activities. Those which have an effective government and a strong rule of law recorded a high number of new company entries and economic growth. Şaşmaz and Sağdıç (2020) discovered that the single factor influencing the degree of company start-ups in transitional nations is governmental efficacy. Zhou et al. (2020) found that by speeding up economic growth, efficiency and legal regulations significantly impact business growth.

Historically, the first research on female entrepreneurship goes back to the 1970s, mainly in the United States and the UK, but this field remains largely understudied (Carrier et al., 2006). In the African context, particular research has examined this question, highlighting the fact that Malian women entrepreneurs generally begin their business at a young age, with financing mainly coming from personal or family sources (Kante, 2020). Moreover, these studies show a positive relationship between women's level of

education and the profitability of their companies, the stability of funding sources and an increase in turnover.

A nation's institutional structure is essential for encouraging entrepreneurship, as it fuels economic expansion. In uncertain situations, when taking risks is common, it gives a minimum significant level of assurance. Given its significance, the impact of institutional determinants on entrepreneurship growth was examined, carefully examining the simplicity of creating a new business, government efficacy, the quality of regulations, the strong rule of law, political stability and the convenience of obtaining loans (Sendra-Pons et al., 2022). The necessity of strong government policies for "institutions" to encourage and support entrepreneurship has been well illustrated in earlier research. The aim of this work is to investigate how political stability, exemplified by one such institution, contributes to entrepreneurial endeavors.

Politically stable countries will have more transparent, predictable and accountable governments, as well as lower risk and transaction costs. Accordingly, the research anticipates that more entrepreneurial activity should be enabled as political stability increases. Additionally, this study aims to analyze the impact of governance variables on entrepreneurship. Linear regression models and multiple Pearson correlations were used in the explanatory approach; 126 nations with varying degrees of economic growth were utilized using a five-year World Bank series (2014–2018). Accountability, political stability, government efficacy, regulatory quality, law enforcement and corruption control are the global governance indicators that are taken into consideration (Abegaz et al., 2023).

Dau and Cuervo-Cazurra (2014) claimed that unambiguous property rights, an efficient regulatory framework, an open and easy-to-understand recording process, and the creation of new businesses could all encourage entrepreneurial activity. They also took political stability into account. The current disparities in economic development can operate as a mediator between the respective effects of indirect governance variables on entrepreneurship.

The governance framework of countries which have a high level of economic development stimulates entry into entrepreneurship that is more formal than abstract (Thai & Turkina, 2014). That implies that many entrepreneurs who enter low-income countries belong to abstract categories. Dau and Cuervo-Cazurra (2014) shared this idea, adding that they noted that good institutional arrangements influence entrepreneurship positively. As far as the economic development level is concerned, owing to better governance, interference in entrepreneurship development is not always present. Nyarku and Oduro (2017) affirmed that bureaucracy, an incoherent political climate, unfavourable customs and regulations, monetary and restrictive credit policies,

tax corruption and practices, excessive regulation on labour and work were noted to have a negative impact on new companies.

It is widely considered that female entrepreneurship plays an increasingly important part in economic and social development, particularly among developing countries where women entrepreneurs tend to support companies adapted to regional characteristics (Dolo et al., 2022). International research, like Döngül et al. (2025), states that women in Africa highlight this, and female entrepreneurship has a crucial role in employment, an increase in productivity, and the struggle against poverty.

Regarding political stability in Tunisia, up to 2010, it was regarded as a model to follow by other developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, following the revolution, the Tunisian model was shown to have serious failures, and research exists which analyses the impact of the instability of political institutions on economic growth. Since the revolution (2011), twelve different governments have ruled Tunisia. Institutions have little legitimacy and little ability to implement policies amid such chronic political instability. Several factors contribute to the weakness of environmental policymaking. After 2011, the political system depended on ever-shifting arrays of coalitions, power-sharing pacts, and different consensus-building activities between parties and political factions. The ruling system was constantly tottering as no governments could rule for a longer period.

For female entrepreneurship in Tunisia, a report from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization Tunis (UNIDO Tunis, 2022) concentrates on it in relation to women's autonomy within the framework of the Mashrou3i project, taking into account the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis (UNIDO Tunis, n.d.). The results show that during recent years, it is undeniable that there has been a transformation in the entrepreneurial fabric in Tunisia. Despite economic difficulties and the political instability of the last ten years, young people increasingly regard entrepreneurship as an alternative to improve their living conditions or to avoid unemployment. Women do not make an exception to this rule. It is obvious that the new generation feels a need for emancipation and financial independence. While calling into question the patriarchal system and certain prejudices which remain, many women have decided to launch out or want to launch out in an entrepreneurial adventure, even if the sociocultural or economic context can be less favourable in certain areas. It is also noted that, according to national estimates, 23.6% of the companies in Tunisia are directed by women. These studies provide an invaluable outline of the challenges and opportunities associated with political

stability and female entrepreneurship. Thus, they offer a base for thorough discussions and future research in these fields.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Emotional intelligence actively contributes to the development of entrepreneurial intention in the sustainable tourism sector. It fosters entrepreneurs' ability to manage their emotions, cope with stress, and strengthen their motivation to launch and manage projects, particularly in a context marked by political uncertainty. As illustrated in Figure 1, the interplay between emotional intelligence, entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism, and the perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts helps explain why some entrepreneurs are more resolutely committed to sustainable tourism. This model highlights the importance of emotional support and adaptability in stimulating entrepreneurial ambition and success in this sector.

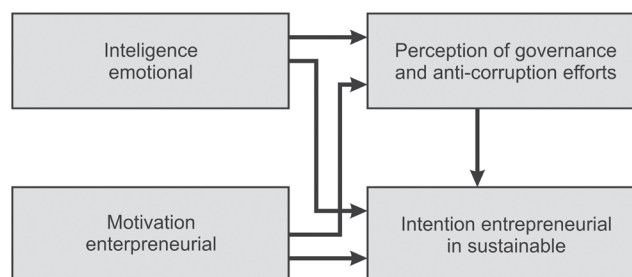


Figure 1. Conceptual model
Source: author

As shown in Table 1, the factors which influence women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial intentions in sustainable tourism are examined. To understand these influences, several key variables which constitute the conceptual model are studied. By combining these variables, we hope to better understand their relations and effects on women's entrepreneurial intentions in this specific sector. The principal variables are entrepreneurial motivation measures, the reasons and the motivations which push women to undertake in sustainable tourism.

Emotional intelligence represents women entrepreneurs' capacity to involve and manage their emotions. Perceptions of governance and anti-corruption efforts evaluate the way in which women entrepreneurs perceive the effectiveness of these efforts in their professional environment. The relations between these variables are examined within this work's framework to include how they interact with the

Table 1. Variables of the conceptual model

Variables	Entitled	Author and dates
Intentions in sustainable tourism	Entrepreneurial intentions in sustainable tourism	Fayolle (2004)
Emotional intelligence	Perception of oneself Expression of oneself Interpersonal interactions	Bru-Luna et al. (2021)
Entrepreneurial motivation	Tourism training for an entrepreneur	Tounés (2006), Boissin et al. (2008)
	Structures of accompaniment in place	Salhi and Boujelbene (2013)
	Public policies of entrepreneurship and lawful infrastructure in place	Covin and Slevin (1990)
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts	Effectiveness of the government in corruption control	World Bank Group (2021a, 2021b)

Source: author.

women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism and the mediation effect of the perceptions of governance and anti-corruption efforts.

3.2. THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

As indicated in Figure 1, the hypotheses are as follows:

H₁: There exists a positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism and their entrepreneurial intention.

H₂: Women entrepreneurs' emotional intelligence is positively related to their entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism.

H₃: The relationship between women entrepreneurs' emotional intelligence and their entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism is mediated by perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts.

H₄: Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts is mediated by the relationship between women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism and their willingness to succeed in this field.

3.3. TECHNIQUES OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis of this research was carried out using the technique of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Thus, the SmartPLS 3 software was used. It is a flexible tool making it possible to examine the causal relations between multiple items (Kline, 2023).

Partial least squares structural equation modelling is an analytical multivariate method, which has the advantage of treating data, which is not in a normal distribution, to analyse samples of relatively low size and is exclusive in being able to test the effect of latent variables not allowed in other techniques. Partial least squares (PLS) makes it possible to study relations and to examine the predictive capacity of the target.

Consequently, PLS-SEM proves to be adequate to achieve our study's goals.

3.4. VARIABLE OPERATIONALISATION

To do this, an adaptation of the existing and validated measurement elements, identified in the literature, on theoretical behaviour to plan tourism bases and sustainable development, emotional intelligence and political stability.

The measurement elements were formulated in the form of a five-point Likert scale, going from 1 (*completely in agreement*) to 5 (*no agreement at all*). To elaborate this, a questionnaire was tested by distributing it to 220 women entrepreneurs whose educational level varied. We noted that many women who answered our questionnaires were aged between 20 and 40. A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 250 Tunisian women in 2024, with an 88% response rate. Data collection utilized social networks, including WhatsApp, Facebook and email.

Table 2. Respondents' demographic information

Characteristics	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Women	220	100.00
Age	18–30	80	36.37
	31–50	100	45.45
	51 and more	40	18.18
Level of education	Secondary level	100	45.45
	Higher	120	54.55
Distribution according to area	Sfax	90	45.00
	Gabes and south	60	30.00
	The large Sahel	70	35.00

Source: author.

To ensure a representative sample and considering that the study is based on an analysis using PLS-SEM, the minimum sample size was decided based on a recommendation advanced by Hair et al. (2017). According to the latter, the use of modelling by structural equations requires a sample size ranging between 200 and 400 to obtain precise results. Moreover, Kline (2023) suggested that the sample size for structural equation modelling (SEM) should be higher than 200. However, 250 answers were collected, thus exceeding the necessary minimum size shown in Table 2 (see p. 177).

Q₁: Have you had any previous experience in the field of tourism (academic course, professional training, work in the sector, or with one of your family members...)?

The results in Table 3 show that the questioned women have various experiences in the field of tourism, but the greatest proportion of them (31.82%) do not have preliminary experience. That could indicate an interest in tourism despite a lack of direct experience, or an opening to new professional opportunities.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by training, work experience and family involvement

Profile of respondents	Answers	Percentage
Academic training	50	22.72
Professional training	30	13.64
Work in the sector	40	18.18
With one of your family	30	13.64
None	70	31.82

Source: author.

Q₂: Have you taken part in training on governance and the struggle against corruption?

Table 4 indicates that more than two-thirds of the questioned women did not take part in training on governance and the struggle against corruption. However, it is important to note that the fact that nearly a third of the women took this training can be related to the seriousness of the subject in Tunisia and the increasing importance attached to it in civil society.

Table 4. Respondents' participation in training on governance and anti-corruption

Response	No. of answers	Percentage
Yes	70	31.82
No	150	68.18

Source: author.

The results suggest that, although a notable proportion of women were sensitized with these questions, many did not have access to this type of

training. That could indicate an appropriateness for additional initiatives aiming at offering more training and sensitizing to governance and the struggle against corruption, especially considering the importance of this subject in Tunisia.

4. RESULTS

4.1. EVALUATION OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

The measurement model's evaluation consists of checking its internal reliability, and convergent and discriminating validity.

4.1.1. INTERNAL RELIABILITY

In this article, we used the alpha coefficient of Cronbach and composite reliability to examine internal reliability. According to Hair et al. (2017), the values of Cronbach's alpha as well as composite reliability must be higher than 0.70 to guarantee reliability.

Table 5 presents Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability calculated to evaluate internal reliability. We note that all calculations for Cronbach's alpha were between 0.822 and 0.914, which is higher than the recommended value of 0.7.

Table 5. Internal reliability

Variables	Items	Valeus	Cronbach's alpha	Rho-A
Entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism	EIST1	0.884	0.868	0.877
	EIST2	0.780		
	EIST3	0.826		
	EIST4	0.892		
Entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism	EMST1	0.794	0.822	0.825
	EMST2	0.775		
	EMST3	0.825		
	EMST4	0.836		
Emotional intelligence	EI1	0.903	0.914	0.918
	EI2	0.912		
	EI3	0.867		
	EI4	0.882		
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts	PGACE1	0.838	0.841	0.862
	PGACE2	0.843		
	PGACE3	0.751		
	PGACE4	0.854		

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

4.1.2. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF CONSTRUCTS

For Hair et al. (2017), convergent validity refers to the degree to which a measurement element has a strong positive correlation with other elements. Firstly, to measure the convergent validity, the significance of each item's factorial contribution to the measurement of constructs was examined. Then, it was evaluated through the average variance extracted (AVE). Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that each item's factor loading and the acceptable AVE values should be at least 0.50 to ensure convergent validity.

Table 6 shows that the factor loading values of each item of all constructs range from 0.751 to 0.912, and that the AVE values vary from 0.653 to 0.795. This is higher than the thresholds recommended. Consequently, the convergent validity condition of our research model is satisfied.

Table 6. Results of reliability and convergent validity

Variables	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism (EIST)	0.910	0.717
Entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism (EMST)	0.883	0.653
Emotional intelligence (EI)	0.939	0.795
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts (PGACE)	0.893	0.676

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

4.1.3. DISCRIMINATING VALIDITY

We assessed discriminating validity by taking the square root of the AVE for each latent variable and comparing it to the square of the correlations between the latent variables. This means that each latent variable's AVE must exceed the correlation's square between this variable and the model's latent variables. In the matrix of latent variable correlations, the values on the diagonal represent the AVE square roots. All these values exceed those located in the diagonal's lower part, which indicates that the relations between the latent variables are less strong than those between constructs and their manifest variables.

Thus, the discriminating validity of our constructs is confirmed. This suggests that the measurement's indicators explain only the latent variables allotted. The analysis results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 reveals that the AVE's square root for each variable is higher than the correlation's square between this variable and the model's latent variables. Then, the criterion results of Fornell-Larcker show that each

variable is distinct from the others, thus they have discriminating validity. Average variance extracted square roots for each variable are larger than the other variables' correlations. Hence, it was concluded that the requirements to ensure the discriminating validity of all the constructs of the model are fulfilled.

Table 7. Discriminating validity measured by the average variance extracted (AVE) squared: criterion of Fornell-Larcker

Variables	EIST	EI	EMST	PGACE
Entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism (EIST)	0.847	–	–	–
Emotional intelligence (EI)	0.563	0.891	–	–
Entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism (EMST)	0.636	0.507	0.808	–
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts (PGACE)	0.777	0.390	0.566	0.846

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

4.2. VALIDATION OF THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

The results (Table 8) show that it is the same for the variable's mediation. Consequently, the suggested hypotheses were accepted.

Table 8. Results of hypothesis checking

Hypothesis	Initial sample (O)	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value	p-values	Results
H ₁	0.324	0.099	3.273	0.001	Accepted
H ₂	0.474	0.088	5.356	0.000	Accepted
H ₃	0.154	0.067	2.297	0.022	Accepted
H ₄	0.390	0.077	5.034	0.000	Accepted

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

H₁: The relationship between women entrepreneurs' motivation in sustainable tourism and their intention to enter this sector is significant. The estimated coefficient (0.324) is positive, with a *t*-value of 3.273 and a *p*-value of 0.001, which means that the relationship is statistically significant at a degree of confidence of 95% ($p < 0.05$). That confirms that the entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism of women has a positive influence on their entrepreneurial intention.

H₂: The emotional intelligence of women entrepreneurs is positively related to their entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism. The estimated

coefficient (0.474) is positive, with a t -value of 5.356 and a p -value of 0.000. This hypothesis is thus strongly accepted and indicates a strong statistically significant relationship between emotional intelligence and the entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism.

H₃: The relationship between the entrepreneurial motivation of women entrepreneurs for sustainable tourism and their intention to enter this sector is mediated by their perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts. The estimated coefficient (0.154) is positive, with a t -value of 2.297 and a p -value of 0.022. This hypothesis is also accepted. It indicates that perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts play a mediating role in this relation.

H₄: Women entrepreneurs' perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts acts as a mediator in the relationship between their emotional intelligence and their decision to enter sustainable tourism. With a p -value of 0.000 and a t -value of 5.034, the predicted coefficient (0.390) is positive. This presumption, which is acknowledged, implies that the relationship between emotional intelligence and the desire to start in sustainable tourism is influenced by a sense of perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts.

According to Table 9:

1. Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts among women entrepreneurs: R -squared = 0.808 indicates that 80.8% of the variance in the perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts among women entrepreneurs is explained by the model's independent variables.
2. Entrepreneurial intention for sustainable tourism: R -squared = 0.423 means that 42.3% of the entrepreneurial intention variance in sustainable tourism is explained by the model's independent variables.

Table 9. Coefficient of determination (R -squared)

Variable	R -squared	Adjusted R -squared
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts (PGACE)	0.808	0.805
Entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism (EIST)	0.423	0.418

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

In short, these coefficients of determination show that the models have a reasonable explanatory capacity for the examined dependent variables. Thus, for entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism, more than half of the variance is explained. This suggests that the variables considered in the models are relevant to explain the perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts and entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism among women entrepreneurs.

According to Table 10, the f^2 effect size makes it possible to evaluate the impact of each exogenous variable on the variables in connection with the change in R^2 .

Table 10. Scale of the f^2 effect

Relation variable	Effect scale	Interpretation
EI → EIST	0.105	Medium effect (close to 0.15)
EMST → EIST	0.020	Small effect
PGACE → EI	1.680	Very large effect
PGACE → EMST	0.349	Large effect

Note: EI – emotional intelligence, EIST – entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism, EMST – entrepreneurial motivation in sustainable tourism, PSP – perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts.

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

According to Cohen (2013), values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 mean successive scales of effects: small, medium and large, while a value lower than 0.02 means the absence of an effect.

To improve entrepreneurial intentions in sustainable tourism, it can be more effective to concentrate on mediators such as perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts, which strongly influences the independent variables (emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial motivation). This approach would make it possible to obtain a more significant impact on entrepreneurial intentions.

As indicated in Table 11, according to Hair et al. (2017), the coefficient of Stone-Geisser (Q^2), also known as the index of redundancy in crossed validation, is the test of the validation crossed between the manifest variations of a variable, the endogenous test, and all of the manifest variations of the latent variables explaining the aforementioned endogenous latent variable using the estimated structural model. Calculated by the blindfolding procedure, if this last is positive, then the model has a predictive validity, on the other hand if it is negative, the studied model presents an absence of predictive validity and is thus unacceptable.

Table 11. Stone-Geisser (Q^2) coefficient

Constructs	Q^2
Entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism (EIST)	0.549
Perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts (PGACE)	0.257

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

In Table 11, all the Q^2 indices are positive, which indicates that our model has predictive relevance. For example, the Q^2 of entrepreneurial intention in

sustainable tourism is 0.549, suggesting good predictive validity for this construct. Similarly, the Q^2 of perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts is 0.257, which also reflects an acceptable predictive validity for this construct. Overall, the positive Q^2 values for both entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism and perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts confirm that the model demonstrates satisfactory predictive validity, in line with the cross-validation criteria mentioned by Hair et al. (2017).

The results of Table 12 present the overall quality of the model: the goodness of fit (GoF) index for the constructs. In the PLS approach, no total index of validation of the model exists, which is why Tenenhaus et al. (2005) developed an index of GoF adjustment as an operational solution to this problem. This last considers the model of measurement and the structural model. The formula for the computation of the geometric mean of the average of the communities (AVE, R^2) and the average of the coefficients of determination (calculated for each endogenous variable).

Table 12. Index of goodness of fit (GoF)

Construct	Values
Average of the AVEs	$(0.717 + 0.653 + 0.795 + 0.676) / 4 = 0.710$
Average of the R^2	$(0.808 + 0.423) / 2 = 0.616$
GoF	$\sqrt{(0.710 \times 0.616)} = \sqrt{0.437} = 0.661$

Source: elaborated by the author using PLS results.

Thus, the GoF of the model is 0.661. This the measurement model has good internal reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The structural model is validated with significant relationships between variables, and the coefficients of determination indicate reasonable explanatory power. The GoF value suggests that the model fits well and can be considered robust in explaining relationships in the context of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship among women.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND IMPLICATION

5.1. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The research results confirm all the hypotheses advanced. First, regarding hypothesis 1, on entrepreneurial motivation and the intention to engage in sustainable tourism, significant positive relation is seen. That indicates that when women have a strong entrepreneurial motivation, they are more likely to intend to engage in projects of sustainable tourism.

While supporting and encouraging this motivation, their involvement in sustainable tourism can be supported. The entrepreneurial intention is influenced by factors such as attitude towards behaviour, subjective standards and perceived behavioural control, in accordance with the model of planned behaviour of Ajzen (1991). This is validated by several former studies like Lang and Liu (2019), who confirmed that motivation is a critical factor for entrepreneurial intentions. Moreover, Al-Jubari et al. (2023) provided positive evidence between motivation and entrepreneurial intention, and that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that both play a big role in the explanation of an individual's will to launch out on an entrepreneurial adventure. In addition, any person can set out on sustainable tourism on the condition of adapting the project to the city's tourist potential and to technical and financial means. Moreover, small entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed in social trade due to effective control of the chosen trade, the geographical proximity of sites, and strong relational networks with customers and suppliers (Gutberlet, 2016).

Secondly, regarding hypothesis 2 on emotional intelligence and the entrepreneurial intention in sustainable tourism, a significant positive relationship between women entrepreneurs' emotional intelligence and their intention to engage in it is noted. This stresses the importance of competences in emotional intelligence for this sector as to form and reinforce emotional intelligence among women entrepreneurs could increase their engagement in sustainable tourism. Emotional intelligence, which includes the capacity to identify, use, understand and manage the emotions, is recognized as a key factor in entrepreneurial success. This competence can improve decision making and interpersonal relationships, two essential components in entrepreneurship. The results are confirmed by Nwibe and Ogbuanya (2024) who suggest that emotional intelligence can help entrepreneurs with managing uncertainties better and the emotional challenges related to the creation and the management of a company. Furthermore, research on emotional intelligence showed that when assessed separately it greatly increased entrepreneurial intentions in sustainable tourism. The findings of earlier research (Ahmetoglu et al., 2011; Ingram et al., 2019) are consistent with this.

Lastly, for hypotheses 3 and 4, emotional intelligence and the desire to engage in sustainable tourism entrepreneurship are significantly positively mediated by the perception of the struggle against corruption. This is similar to women's entrepreneurial motivation and their intention to engage in sustainable tourism. These observations stress the crucial importance of a transparent and ethical environment to support the engagement of women entrepreneurs. The relationship between emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial motivation in

sustainable tourism is mediated by the perception of governance and anti-corruption efforts. This suggests that women, who perceive a less corrupted environment, feel safer to exploit their emotional competences in favour of entrepreneurial initiatives, especially in a sector that is influenced by ethical practices such as sustainable tourism. The more successfully a nation manages corruption, the more successful it is in drawing in new businesses and retaining its current ones. This has ramifications for the players in the corporate sector.

Our findings are consistent with research by Shumetie and Watabaji (2019), which found that in a business where controlling corruption is not critical, there is an increase in business profits and in the number of new entrants on the market. The countries that suffer from weak and unsatisfactory entrepreneurship are known for their weak scores as regards corruption control. According to a different study by Memeti Karemani and Memeti (2023), corruption has a regressive effect on growth in entrepreneurship since it gives the nation's system an advantage over certain more established and well-connected businesses while also creating unfavorable incentives for entrepreneurs. The suitability of entrepreneurial development is irrelevant in nations with flexible entrepreneurial governance systems. This inference was corroborated by Shumetie and Watabaji (2019), who affirmed that political instability in each country involves a reduction in the extent of companies' innovation and new companies' entry on the market.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

This study's conclusions highlight important managerial consequences for actors in the promotion of female entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism, particularly in Tunisia. Special development programs to reinforce women's entrepreneurial motivation, to develop their competences in emotional intelligence, and to sensitize them to governance and the struggle against corruption are essential for organizations which support entrepreneurship. Regarding public institutions, their role can be crucial by supporting a favourable framework with female entrepreneurship in this field, while putting in place policies that support companies' creation, transparency and struggle against corruption, by facilitating access to financing and resources. Lastly, tourist sector companies have a responsibility to support women entrepreneurs by establishing partnerships and subcontracting their products and marketing services. While working with women entrepreneurs in a proactive way, these actors can support their autonomy and support the sustainable development of tourism in Tunisia.

6. CONCLUSION

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges through interconnected targets, including those promoting sustainable tourism as a driver for economic inclusion and environmental protection. Through sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12), sustainable tourism may help accomplish development goals and create sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). This is accomplished by emphasizing it to support regional culture and provide employment (SDG 12.b). It may also be satisfied by spiritual tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, etc., since these endeavors seek to reduce the harm done to an area and yield favorable results for local communities.

This research underscores the crucial role of emotional intelligence in fostering entrepreneurial intention among women in Tunisia's sustainable tourism sector. The findings confirm that emotional intelligence, alongside entrepreneurial motivation, significantly drives women's engagement in this field. In particular, the capacity to recognize, comprehend and control emotions enables female entrepreneurs to successfully negotiate sustainable tourism's challenges, adjust to changes in the market, and create robust enterprises.

Since emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial ambition are positively correlated, it is imperative that its growth be given top priority. As demonstrated by Alotaibi and Badawi (2023) and Bagheri et al. (2024), higher emotional intelligence enhances entrepreneurial success by enabling effective leadership, strong professional relationships, and the ability to transform challenges into opportunities. Similarly, Nassif and Garçon (2024) emphasize its role in building resilience, a vital trait for success in the dynamic tourism sector.

Moreover, the study reveals that a transparent and ethical business environment strengthens the emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial intention relationship. The perception of a robust struggle against corruption acts as a crucial mediator, allowing women to fully leverage their emotional intelligence and motivation. This highlights the importance of implementing policies that promote good governance and support a 'level playing field'.

The study's conclusions indicate that to fulfill female entrepreneurs' potential in the sustainable tourism industry, strategic interventions are necessary. First and foremost, it is critical that training programs, both current and future, incorporate the development of emotional intelligence. These programs should equip women with the necessary competencies to effectively manage emotions, cultivate robust professional relationships, and exercise effective leadership. Secondly,

the creation of supportive ecosystems is essential, which necessitates the fostering of ethical and transparent business environments that actively encourage and facilitate women's participation. Thirdly, the provision of targeted resources is crucial. This includes offering accessible financing options, mentorship programs and networking opportunities, all specifically designed to deal with sustainable tourism needs and unique challenges for women entrepreneurs.

Future studies ought to focus more on how public policies affect women entrepreneurs in sustainable tourism. Specifically, examining the effectiveness of existing policies and identifying persistent challenges will inform the development of more targeted and impactful support mechanisms. By adopting a multidimensional approach that prioritizes emotional intelligence, ethical governance and targeted support, the full potential of women entrepreneurs in driving sustainable tourism in Tunisia can be unlocked.

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