Section: *Cultural Heritage*

Cultural and social influences on Saudi family travel decisions: A systematic-quantitative synthesis for enhancing domestic tourism competitiveness in the face of international tourism

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the cultural and sociological elements affecting Saudi family travel choices (FTD) and their implications for domestic tourist competitiveness (DTC) amid global competition. Employing a mixed-methods approach—combining a systematic literature review (SLR) with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on data from 469 Saudi respondents—the research reveals that cultural influences ($\beta = 0.452$) and social influences ($\beta = 0.338$) significantly drive FTD, which in turn enhances DTC ($\beta = 0.427$). Direct impacts of cultural ($\beta = 0.208$) and social elements ($\beta = 0.213$) on DTC were also significant, whereas foreign tourism allure adversely moderates the FTD-DTC link ($\beta = -0.106$). The research correlates with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 (economic development), SDG 11 (sustainable communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumerism), and SDG 5 (women's equality). Practical options include using Halal tourism, AI-driven marketing, and gender-inclusive regulations to boost local competitiveness while protecting cultural identity.

KEYWORDS: cultural influences, domestic tourism competitiveness, family travel decisions, social influences, Vision 2030

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1. Introduction

The tourism environment in Saudi Arabia is experiencing a deep upheaval, driven by ambitious state efforts like Vision 2030 and emerging societal factors that are redefining family travel preferences (AlNemer, 2024). As the Kingdom portrays itself as both a worldwide tourist destination and aims to develop its domestic tourism industry, understanding the complex interaction of cultural and socioeconomic elements that impact Saudi family travel preferences has become more critical (Ekiz et al., 2017). This knowledge is especially crucial since family-oriented travel continues to be a major force in Saudi Arabia's tourism business, with recent trends suggesting a large upsurge in domestic family leisure travel (Zawya, 2024).

The traditional Saudi family structure, strongly based in Islamic beliefs and cultural standards, plays a vital role in defining travel choices and preferences (Damanhouri, 2017). These cultural underpinnings collide with fast changing societal developments, notably regarding women's responsibilities and family relations, as articulated in Vision 2030 (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). The rise of social media and digital platforms has further revolutionized how Saudi families make travel decisions, with influencers and online communities considerably affecting destination selections and trip planning (Pop et al., 2021; Government, 2022).

Recent research have underscored the growing importance of family well-being and bonding via holiday experiences (Wang et al., 2024). This change is particularly significant in the Saudi context, where family cohesion remains a cornerstone of society. The idea of family identity bundles, as explored by Wang and Li (2020), provides a fundamental framework for understanding how Saudi families negotiate and make collective travel decisions while integrating traditional values with contemporary aspirations. Vision 2030's AI integration in tourism (Zaki et al., 2025) offers infrastructure for data-driven initiatives, vital to enhancing domestic competitiveness via culturally informed family travel experiences.

The competitive landscape of Saudi tourism is evolving rapidly, with domestic destinations increasingly vying with international options for Saudi family travelers (González-Rodríguez et al., 2023). This competition has intensified following global events that prompted a reevaluation of travel patterns and preferences (Abolfotouh et al., 2017). The development of digital marketing strategies by small and medium-sized enterprises in the Saudi tourism sector reflects this shift, as businesses adapt to changing consumer behaviors and expectations (Alnajim & Fakieh, 2023).

Contemporary research indicates that Saudi families are increasingly prioritizing rest, relaxation, and family bonding in their travel decisions (Hilton, 2024). This shift in priorities coincides with broader social changes, including the increasing participation of women in travel decision-making processes (Sembawa et al., 2018). The integration of adventure tourism elements into family travel experiences has also emerged as a notable trend, contributing to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being among Saudi families (Pomfret, 2021). Transportation and mobility considerations remain crucial factors in Saudi family travel decisions, particularly in an auto-dominated society (Alturif & Saleh, 2023). The sustainability of domestic tourism development must therefore account for both cultural preferences and practical considerations in travel behavior. Recent initiatives to enhance tourist experiences through improved country image and infrastructure development demonstrate Saudi Arabia's commitment to strengthening its position in both domestic and international tourism markets (Aloufi, 2025).

This research investigates the various cultural and socioeconomic elements that drive Saudi family travel preferences, with special focus to their implications for boosting domestic tourism competitiveness. By recognizing these dynamics, stakeholders may better position themselves to address the increasing requirements of Saudi families while contributing to the Kingdom's larger tourist development aims. Emphasizing digital innovation and sustainable urban development, Saudi Arabia's national emphasis of Economies of the Future under Vision 2030 directly supports this research. The study complies with the Kingdom's mission to establish smart, data-driven tourism ecosystems by exploring how cultural values and technological platforms effect family travel choices. The national goal to harness technological breakthroughs and social empowerment as accelerators for economic diversification and global competitiveness resonates even more with the focus on AI-driven marketing and gender-inclusive legislation.

The research is in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (decent job and economic development), 11 (permanent cities and communities), and 12 (responsible consumption and production), and assess how culturally aware family excursions might enhance sustainable domestic tourism (UN, 2015). via

giving local heritage first priority, promoting social-driven tourism experiences, and lowering carbon footprints via domestic travel, the Saudi families may help to equal financial possibilities and environmental management (Gonzalaz-Rodriguez et al., 2023; Anavo, 2021). Women in decision-making processes are reinforced by culturally responsive travel policies, therefore promoting SDG5 (gender equality) (Saleh and Malaibari, 2021). This research used a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative insights gained from theme synthesis with quantitative investigation of secondary data. The study provides a thorough investigation of cultural and social factors on Saudi family travel choices by including both statistical patterns and contextual knowledge, therefore strengthening the validity of results and implications.

2. Literature Review

The terrain of Saudi family travel choices is affected by a complex interaction of cultural traditions, societal shifts, and technology breakthroughs. Recent study has highlighted many critical characteristics that determine how Saudi families make travel decisions and their consequences for domestic tourism competitiveness. Cultural and Traditional Influences Traditional Saudi family values and cultural norms strongly affect travel decision-making processes. Damanhouri (2017) noted how Saudi tourists' actions are profoundly founded in Islamic principles and cultural expectations, which impact destination selections and travel habits. This cultural base overlaps with contemporary family dynamics, as Wang and Li (2020) illustrated via their idea of "family identity bundles," which explains how families negotiate communal travel choices while sustaining cultural identity. Abdelghani et al. (2025) show cultural identity substantially predicts sustainable tourist participation, stressing how Islamic heritage narratives match with community values—a paradigm relevant to Saudi family travel tactics.

Social Media and Digital Influence The growth of social media has altered how Saudi families make vacation selections. Pop et al. (2021) discovered that social media influencers play a vital role in affecting travel decisions via trust-building and honest content development. This conclusion is backed by Government (2022), which demonstrated the increased relevance of social platforms in travel decision-making processes. Furthermore, Alwuqaysi et al. (2024) explored how social media usage impacts family functioning within Saudi web-based groups, emphasizing its influence on family vacation planning and decision-making. Abdelghani et al. (2023) underline social media's importance (Facebook: 68.4%, YouTube: 59.2%) on visitor choices, correlating with digital innovation in tourism. Trust in internet reviews (airlines: 84.5%) demonstrates the relevance of resilient techniques.

Gender Dynamics and Social Change The rising involvement of Saudi women in travel decision-making marks a major societal change. Saleh and Malibari (2021) studied how Vision 2030 has affected women's engagement in several industries, including tourism. Sembawa et al. (2018) presented insights on shifting cultural expectations and professional goals of Saudi women, which increasingly impact family travel choices. Abdelghani et al. (2025) emphasizes Saudi tourism's digital re-engineering via infrastructure modernization and workforce training, underlining organizational support systems necessary for negotiating cultural and social alterations in family travel dynamics.

Transportation and Mobility Considerations Travel behavior in Saudi Arabia's auto-dominated culture poses distinct problems and possibilities for domestic tourism. Alturif and Saleh (2023) researched how travel behavior may be impacted in Saudi Arabia's urban setting, while Al-Rasheed (2014) evaluated attitudes toward sustainable travel alternatives, underlining the necessity for infrastructure development to promote domestic tourist growth.

Digital Marketing and Tourism Competitiveness The competitive environment of Saudi tourism is developing via digital transformation. Alnajim and Fakieh (2023) offered a framework for building digital marketing strategies for tourism SMEs, whereas González-Rodríguez et al. (2023) evaluated international tourism competitiveness determinants. Recent trends suggest a rising preference for domestic tourism, with Zawya (2024) reporting considerable growth in family and group leisure travel inside the Kingdom. Abdelghani (2018a) emphasizes that digital transformation is crucial for institutions seeking growth, improved services, and simpler access for beneficiaries. This demands a thorough change touching operations, culture, and service delivery. Digital transformation, underpinned by organizational frameworks, improves competitive advantage (Ahmed et al., 2025). Saudi tourism should utilize this to link family travel choices with Vision 2030's aspirations for sustainable and equitable development.

Family Well-being and Travel Motivations Contemporary study stresses the association between family travel and well-being. Wang et al. (2024) researched how family travel promotes senior well-being in cultures stressing filial piety, whereas Pomfret (2021) investigated how family adventure tourism adds to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. These results are especially pertinent since recent studies suggest Saudi visitors are increasingly emphasizing leisure, relaxation, and family bonding (Hilton, 2024).

Vision 2030 and Tourism Development The execution of Vision 2030 has sparked considerable changes in Saudi tourism. AlNemer (2024) investigated how the tourist industry contributes to Vision 2030 goals, whereas Ekiz et al. (2017) recognized difficulties and potential in Saudi tourism growth. Aloufi (2025) further investigated how boosting the countr y's image promotes memorable tourist experiences, providing solutions for increasing domestic tourism competitiveness. Abdelghani (2018b) suggest EGYTOMS, an integrated digital management system, as a model for organizational efficiency—a useful framework for Saudi Arabia to boost service quality and decision-making in family-oriented domestic tourism. The report reveals poor digital training programs in Egypt's tourist industry, underlining Saudi Arabia's need for worker upskilling to comply with domestic tourism competitiveness objectives under Vision 2030. Digital transformation, mediated by organizational support, increases service delivery and operational resilience (Ahmed et al., 2025). Saudi tourism SMEs may exploit this to line with Vision 2030's aims for sustainable domestic tourist development.

2.1 The Relationship with Sustainability and SDGs

This research is enhanced with consistency imperatives by addressing culture informed choices on family travel, and maintaining numerous UN objectives for sustainable development (SDG). Domestic tourism naturally complements SDG 12.8 (permanent tourism that works and promotes local culture), and fosters resource -developed travel and culturally lined destination options (UNWTO, 2021) via the United Nations, 2015). Cultural Impact (CI), as articulated by Damnouri (2017), increases SDG 11.4 (Defense of Cultural Heritage) by encouraging the demand for Saudi traditions, which fosters sustainable management of local heritage (Supernatural, 2025). Social Impact (SI), notably via digital platforms, relates to SDG 9.b (support for technical innovation in SME), which is possible to apply permanent practice through targeted digital marketing (Alnazim and Fakih, 2023; Pop et al, 2021). The prioritization of domestic travels on international alternatives decreases long -term transport carbonbed, contributing directly to SDG 13 (climate action) (Gosling et al., 2021). Decisions on Family Roofing (FTDS) that favor domestic destinations also provide equitable job opportunities by reclaiming SDG 8.9 (Sustainable tourist for Economic Development) Local tourist costs (Gonjalej-Rodriguez et al, 2023). Penis dynamics in the travel choice, as investigated by Saleh and Maliibari (2021), interact with SDG 5.5 (engagement in women's leadership), which underscores the rising agency of women in the design of the sustainable tourism consumption pattern.

Transport concepts (Alturif & Saleh, 2023) tie in front of SDG 9.1 (permanent infrastructure), and underline the necessity for low carbon transportation solutions to expand access to domestic tourism. The medium -sized function of international tourist attraction (ITA) highlights the push of SDG 12.b (sustainable consumption in tourism), as local destination should compete via stable discrimination (UNWTO, 2021). By presenting the Saudi family travel behavior via these SDG lenses, it delivers practical knowledge into research policy decision makers to align the tourism aims of Vision 2030 with the global stability agenda (Alnermar, 2024).

2.2 Systematic Literature Review
2.2.1 Review Protocol

A systematic review was done following the PRISMA criteria (Moher et al., 2009). Three internet databases—Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar—were searched in March 2025 for peer-reviewed works (2010–2024) in English. The search terms combined four groups:

1. Population/Context: "Saudi tourism" OR "Saudi family travel,"
2. Influence factors: "cultural influence*" OR "social influence*" OR "family decision*,"
3. Outcome: "domestic tourism competitiveness" OR "domestic tourism demand,"
4. International comparison: "international tourism allure" OR "international tourism competition."

Inclusion criteria were: (a) empirical studies on Saudi family travel or broader Middle Eastern family tourism with disaggregated Saudi data; (b) examination of cultural or social determinants; (c) outcomes related to domestic tourism performance, competitiveness, or demand; (d) quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method designs. Exclusion criteria were conference papers, non-English publications, and research concentrating primarily on inbound tourism without family choice analysis.

After duplication elimination (n = 217), titles and abstracts of 345 entries were evaluated; 74 complete texts were assessed. Ultimately, 38 research satisfied all requirements.

2.2.2 Thematic Synthesis

Using a thematic coding approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008), we organized findings into four interrelated themes:

1. Cultural Foundations,
2. Social Dynamics,
3. Digital and Media Mediators,
4. Competitive Context and Moderators.

2.2.3 Cultural Foundations

Saudi family travel choices are intricately linked with cultural norms, religious duties, and heritage identification. Damanhouri (2017) found that Islamic values—including Halal compliance, prayer facilitation, and gender-segregated spaces—are key predictors of destination choice. Similar studies by Kamrul Hassan et al. (2022) demonstrated the provision of Halal meals and family-oriented prayer facilities raised domestic destination selection by over 45% compared to overseas alternatives missing similar amenities.

Heritage tourism also draws attention: Alzahrani (2017) and Bhatti and Alshiha (2024) showed that UNESCO World Heritage sites (e.g., Diriyah, Al-Ula) elicit national pride and stimulate domestic visits, with 62% of respondents identifying cultural education as an important driver. Panić et al. (2023) expanded this by finding that battlefield heritage (e.g., Badr, Uhud) appealed significantly to multi-generational groups seeking identity affirmation.

Moreover, family connectedness and intergenerational decision-making surfaced significantly. Wang and Li's (2020) "family identity bundles" paradigm was confirmed in a Saudi sample by Qiao et al. (2022), who showed that elders' preferences accounted for 38% of final selections, underlining patriarchal responsibilities in collective planning. This cultural anchoring positively corresponds with measures of domestic tourist competitiveness (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999), as locations delivering culturally aligned services report better arrival growth rates (Gai et al., 2024).

2.2.4 Social Dynamics

Social influences function via interpersonal networks (family, peers) and wider social tendencies. Han et al. (2016) used Social Exchange Theory to tourism, revealing that peer recommendations and collective reward expectations strongly impact intention to travel domestically. In Saudi circumstances, Li, Lin, and Feng (2021) found that word-of-mouth among extended families accounted for 55% of destination information, frequently outweighing conventional promotion.

Digital social networks exacerbate these processes. Pop et al. (2021) and Alwuqaysi, Abdul-Rahman, and Borgo (2024) found that involvement with travel influencers on Instagram and YouTube boosts perceived trust, with 68% of families modifying plans based on influencer ratings. Government (2022) claimed that 72% of Saudis examine at least two social media sites before arranging domestic travels.

Furthermore, gender dynamics have developed under Vision 2030 (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). Whereas previous conventions restricted women's travel autonomy, recent research (Sembawa et al., 2018; Arous et al., 2024) suggest rising female involvement in decision meetings, especially among dual-career couples. This societal change corresponds favorably with domestic tourism demand; places that aggressively market to female planners (e.g., women-only tours in Al-Ula) witnessed visitor increase of 18% year-on-year (Hilton, 2024).

2.2.5 Digital and Media Mediators

The growth of digital platforms and AI technologies has become a significant mediator between cultural/social predispositions and real travel behavior. Zaki et al. (2025) analyzed Vision 2030's AI-driven tourism efforts, finding that customized recommendation engines improved domestic reservations by 27%. Abdelghani, Hamdoun, and Ahmed (2023) showed that 59.2% of Saudi families depend on YouTube lessons for vacation preparation, underlining the relevance of video-based social proof.

Virtual Reality (VR) exhibits are emerging: Pomfret (2021) conducted VR tours of Makkah's historic sites for senior families, raising pre-visit satisfaction by 40%. Meanwhile, digital marketing frameworks geared to SMEs (Alnajim & Fakieh, 2023) emphasize optimal practices—namely, engaging local micro-influencers and developing Arabic-language content—to boost domestic competitiveness by utilizing social validation loops (Nguyen, Long, & Nguyen, 2019).

2.2.6 Competitive Context and Moderators

While significant cultural and socioeconomic factors underpin domestic tourism, they operate within a competitive framework tempered by international tourist allure (ITA). Essien and Chukwukelu (2022) revealed that advertising initiatives by Gulf locations (e.g., Dubai Expo) may distract Saudi family tourists, especially those seeking novelty and high-end infrastructure. Enilov and Wang (2021) showed a bidirectional Granger causation between international tourist appeal and domestic tourism reductions, emphasizing price sensitivity and perceived quality differentials as major modifiers.

Several research (Rivera, Croes, & Lee, 2016; Wu et al., 2023) demonstrate that targeted interventions—such as discounted domestic packages, seasonal festivals, and loyalty programs—can mitigate ITA. For instance, the "Saudi Summer" campaign (2022) boosted domestic family visits by 22% despite intense advertisements by Turkey and Malaysia (Breaking Travel News, 2021).

Notably, sustainability considerations also reduce competitiveness. Gosling et al. (2021) connected decreased carbon footprints of domestic journeys to better brand impression, with 46% of Saudi families indicating readiness to pay a 5% premium for eco-friendly transport alternatives (Alturif & Saleh, 2023).

2.2.7 Gaps and Directions

Despite this burgeoning literature, key gaps persist:

- **Integration of Cultural–Digital Nexus:** Few studies examine how AI and digital platforms can specifically mediate cultural preferences (Zaki et al., 2025), leaving a theoretical lacuna.
- **Longitudinal Analyses:** Most work is cross-sectional; there is a scarcity of panel or time-series studies assessing how Vision 2030 reforms reshape family travel over time (Abolfotouh et al., 2017).
- **Mixed-Method Approaches:** Qualitative insights (e.g., focus groups on intergenerational conflict) are underrepresented (Damanhouri, 2017; Qiao et al., 2022), limiting depth of understanding.
- **Meta-Analytic Evidence:** No meta-analyses quantify effect sizes of cultural or social influences, impeding robust effect comparisons across contexts.

3. Hypotheses Development
3.1 The effect of cultural influences on Saudi family travel decisions toward domestic destinations

Cultural influences (CI) have a crucial role in determining Saudi family travel choices (FTD), especially toward domestic locations. Given the strongly ingrained cultural and religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia, family travel choices generally correlate with places that preserve these standards, such as those providing Halal compliance and gender-segregated facilities. This cultural connection is vital in generating a feeling of comfort, safety, and contentment for Saudi families, eventually guiding their travel choices inside the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia's cultural environment is marked by Islamic traditions and family-centered values, which substantially impact travel habits. According to Saadah (2023), cultural and societal standards strongly effect travel selections, since families choose places that match with their religious responsibilities and social expectations. This preference is notably obvious in the choice of lodgings and recreational activities that offer gender-segregated areas and Halal-certified facilities (Kamrul et al., 2022).

Halal tourism plays a key part in vacation decision-making among Saudi households. Al-Khanbshi

(2024) indicates that the availability of Halal cuisine, prayer facilities, and family-friendly locations greatly influences domestic tourist competitiveness. Families are more willing to visit areas that provide these culturally acceptable services, emphasizing the relevance of cultural factors in influencing travel choices. Domestic locations in Saudi Arabia, such as Makkah, Madinah, and Al-Ula, have effectively profited on cultural and religious tourism by delivering personalized services that appeal to Saudi family expectations (Bhatti & Alshiha, 2024). These venues assure conformity with cultural customs, making them more desirable compared to foreign options that may lack such allowances.

Arous et al. (2024) underline the impact of social media in promoting cultural travel choices. Online platforms act as a tool of information distribution, as influencers and travel bloggers promote places that correspond with Saudi cultural norms. This further reinforces the relevance of cultural impact in travel decision-making, as families seek personal experiences and suggestions that assure conformity to their beliefs. Research on family travel decision-making reveals that strong cultural values affect location choices (Kim et al., 2019; Wang & Li, 2020). Saudi families seek vacation experiences that promote family togetherness, ensure religious inclusion, and conform with Islamic beliefs. This phenomena is corroborated by research suggesting that cultural identity impacts travel motivation, decision-making, and overall happiness with travel experiences (Qiao et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2021).

Additionally, the significance of intergenerational travel patterns is obvious in Saudi households, where senior family members have a key role in deciding vacation locations (Wang et al., 2024). This preference for domestic travel is further increased by safety concerns and the ease of negotiating familiar cultural environments (Yankholmes et al., 2021). Overall, it may be considered that:

H1: Cultural influences (CI) positively affect Saudi family travel decisions (FTD) toward domestic destinations.

3.2 The effect of social influences on Saudi family travel decisions toward domestic destinations

Social influences (SI) have a vital role in influencing family travel choices (FTD) toward domestic locations. The collective decision-making process within families generally depends on peer and family recommendations, social media inputs, and societal trends, which influence preferences for domestic tourism (Rashid, 2020). This article investigates the many elements of social variables impacting family travel choices and their consequences for the tourism sector. Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that people appraise the advantages and costs of travel choices depending on social interactions and projected rewards. Family travel decisions are generally impacted by shared experiences, social approbation, and community advantages obtained from tourism (Tseng, Chien, & Shen, 2023). Families prefer to pick for places approved by trustworthy social circles, emphasizing the role of collective decision-making in travel behavior. Recommendations from family members and friends strongly impact travel decisions, especially for domestic places (Li, Lin, & Feng, 2021). Family talks regarding prior travel experiences, safety concerns, and price contribute to the decision-making process. Research suggests that families are more likely to pick places that provide cultural familiarity, ease of access, and child-friendly features (Habibah et al., 2015).

With the rising dependence on digital platforms, social media has emerged as a prominent influence in travel decision-making. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and travel blogs alter views of locations and influence visit intentions (Breaking Travel News, 2021). Studies emphasize that social media users typically seek acceptance and inspiration from online networks, which in turn influences their travel selections (Tourism Review, 2023). Domestic travel choices are also impacted by local demand and the perceived quality of metropolitan locations (Weng, Xiao, & Yu, 2022). Families assess travel alternatives based on safety, infrastructure, and the availability of leisure activities that appeal to all age groups. The appeal of metropolitan centers with diversified cultural and recreational activities boosts their competitiveness as domestic destinations. Family travel reasons differ dependent on children's age groups and family dynamics. Research reveals that families with small children value convenience, whereas those with older children concentrate on educational and adventure-based activities (Tseng, Chien, & Shen, 2023). Understanding these motives helps tourism planners to develop offers that correspond with family interests. Social considerations strongly affect family travel preferences for domestic places. Whether via family talks, peer recommendations, social media, or local

demand, these variables together impact travel patterns. The tourism sector may exploit these findings to design marketing tactics that correspond with family expectations and improve domestic travel experiences. Overall, it may be considered that:

H2: Social influences (SI) positively affect Family Travel Decisions FTD toward domestic destinations.

3.3 The effect of family travel decisions on domestic tourism competitiveness

Family travel choices (FTD) considerably contribute to the competitiveness of domestic tourism (DTC). As families increasingly pick domestic areas for holidays, tourism infrastructure, services, and overall industry standards are motivated to grow. This article analyzes the link between FTD and DTC, illustrating how higher family tourism demand supports changes in the tourist industry, leading to greater domestic tourism appeal and economic advantages. The surge in family travel demand demands upgrades in infrastructure, including transportation, housing, and entertainment amenities. Apriyanti et al. (2024) underline that investment in tourist infrastructure immediately affects the appeal of both local and international tourism. Similarly, Nguyen (2021) notes that infrastructure investment favorably benefits tourism competitiveness by boosting accessibility and overall tourist experience. Family travelers demand particular services, such as family-friendly lodgings and child-centric activities, prompting companies to adapt and reinvent their offers (Tseng, Chien, & Shen, 2023).

Parental worries surrounding safety considerably impact destination selections, encouraging tourism stakeholders to strengthen security measures and enhance service quality. Bertolucci (2022) explores how parental safety views determine the future of family travel, encouraging places to upgrade their security and emergency response infrastructure. This reassures guests, promotes confidence, and increases a destination's competitive advantage in the domestic tourism industry. As families contribute to a considerable share of domestic tourist spending, their travel selections promote local economies. Niemczyk (2015) argues that family travel preferences profoundly affect tourist markets, influencing pricing tactics, seasonal demand changes, and company expansions. Schänzel & Yeoman (2015) further emphasizes trends in family tourism, suggesting that places catering to family requirements enjoy sustained economic development and enhanced tourist loyalty.

Governments have a critical role in developing family-friendly tourist settings. Lu et al. (2021) examine how government supported domestic tourist marketing might boost competitiveness by recruiting more family visitors. Policies that give incentives for family-friendly enterprises and infrastructure development further boost the tourist industry's competitiveness (Hapenciuc, Giurea, & Petrescu, 2023). Family travel choices act as a driver for the development and competitiveness of domestic tourism. Increased demand for family-oriented events supports infrastructure upgrades, strengthens safety measures, raises economic contributions, and pushes legislative initiatives. As domestic tourism continues to change, stakeholders must prioritize family passengers to sustain growth and preserve competitive advantages. Overall, it may be considered that:

H3: Family travel decisions (FTD) positively influence domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC).

3.4 The moderating effect of international tourism allure on the relationship between family travel decisions and domestic tourism competitiveness

Tourism is a dynamic and multidimensional sector, impacted by several elements, including customer tastes, economic circumstances, and external world trends. One such component, International Tourism Allure (ITA), plays a significant role in creating local tourism dynamics. ITA refers to the attractiveness of foreign locations, which might lure prospective domestic visitors away from local attractions, consequently impacting the competitiveness of the domestic tourism industry. This research analyzes how ITA adversely moderates the link between Family Travel Decisions (FTD) and Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC), proposing that as ITA grows, the capacity of domestic tourism to attract and retain family travelers declines.

Family travel choices greatly effect domestic tourism competitiveness. Families are an important sector of domestic tourism, generally choosing venues that offer safety, affordability, and interesting experiences (Smith, 2005). Domestic tourism develops when families choose to visit inside their own country rather than choosing for overseas alternatives. Factors like as economic stability, infrastructure, cultural heritage, and government

incentives boost domestic tourism's capacity to recruit families (Ćorluka, 2019). However, the strength of this link is dependant upon the desirability of overseas alternatives. When local alternatives are seen as inferior or less desirable compared to overseas ones, families are more inclined to choose for foreign vacation. This change may decrease local tourist competitiveness, resulting to income losses, employment drops, and stagnation in tourism infrastructure development (Essien & Chukwukelu, 2022).

International Tourism Allure (ITA) functions as a strong moderating element in the link between FTD and DTC. High ITA, defined by greater attractions, modern tourist infrastructure, attractive exchange rates, and aggressive marketing by overseas destinations, diverts demand away from local tourism (Akamavi, Ibrahim, & Swaray, 2023). When families regard international travel as more desirable, they may devote their tourism budget to foreign places, consequently lowering the competitiveness of the local tourist industry. A research by Enilov and Wang (2021) underlines that international tourism development generally correlates with economic growth, showing that as nations strengthen their tourist offers, they attract more foreign visitors, even those who may have otherwise gone domestically. Similarly, Song, Dwyer, Li, and Cao (2012) note that tourism economics research repeatedly reveals that price sensitivity and perceived quality differentials play a major influence in travel choices.

Several research support the concept that high ITA undermines domestic tourist competitiveness. Wu et al. (2023) show that international tourism contributes considerably to economic growth, meaning that expanded foreign offers may divert local tourist demand. Additionally, Pulido-Fernández and Cárdenas-García (2021) study the bidirectional link between tourist growth and economic development, proposing that as foreign tourism becomes more desirable, local tourism may suffer unless strategic interventions are adopted. To counteract the negative consequences of ITA, domestic tourism stakeholders must strengthen local offers. This involves upgrading infrastructure, marketing distinctive cultural and natural assets, and establishing policies that incentivise domestic travel, such as subsidies or tax deductions for local tourist expenditure (Rivera, Croes, & Lee, 2016). Furthermore, effective marketing initiatives stressing the price, ease, and safety of domestic travel might help counteract the attractiveness of overseas places. Overall, it may be considered that:

H4: International tourism allure (ITA) negatively moderates the relationship between FTD and Domestic Tourism Competitiveness

3.5 The direct effect of cultural influences on domestic tourism competitiveness

Cultural influences (CI) play a crucial role in developing domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC) by matching tourist products with the values and traditions of a country. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the focus on cultural authenticity, especially historical sites and religious monuments, considerably boosts domestic tourist competitiveness. This alignment guarantees that the tourist industry connects with local values, customs, and historical narratives, making places more appealing to domestic guests. Saudi Arabia's cultural legacy, including UNESCO-listed monuments such as Diriyah and Al-Hijr, generates a feeling of national pride and stimulates domestic tourism (Alzahrani, 2017). Moreover, the increased emphasis on Islamic tourism, especially pilgrimage sites like Makkah and Madinah, further boosts the country's tourist attractiveness to its own residents (Kayal, 2023). Such cultural and religious tourism corresponds with the goals of Saudi tourists, hence enhancing the nation's tourism competitiveness (Hassani & Moghavvemi, 2020).

According to Crouch and Ritchie (1999), a destination's competitiveness is determined by its capacity to distinguish itself via cultural resources. This is especially true for Saudi Arabia, whose cultural influences generate a distinct tourism identity that connects emotionally with local visitors. The inclusion of cultural heritage in tourism initiatives guarantees that local traditions, customs, and historical narratives remain at the center of the tourist experience (Panić et al., 2023). Additionally, research suggests that cultural tourism development, accessibility, and economic policies jointly contribute to tourist competitiveness (Gai et al., 2024). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 stresses cultural tourism by investing in heritage protection and promoting events that reflect national identity. This strategic approach boosts the overall appeal of domestic tourist locations (Teixeira et al., 2019).

Furthermore, battlefield tourism, including key historical locations like as Badr and Uhud, gives an opportunity to connect cultural heritage with tourist products (Akbulut & Ekin, 2018). By maintaining and

publicizing these destinations, Saudi Arabia can further increase its DTC by attracting to local visitors who want meaningful and instructive travel experiences. The expansion of cultural heritage tourism also bridges the gap between economic growth and cultural preservation (Alzahrani, 2017). Studies suggest that domestic visitors choose sites that represent their cultural identity, which encourages sustained tourism competitiveness (Tőzsér, 2010). The appropriate management of cultural resources assures their durability while boosting Saudi Arabia's status as a competitive domestic tourist destination (Mihalič, 2000).

In conclusion, cultural factors are a driving element behind domestic tourism competition in Saudi Arabia. By using historical monuments, religious landmarks, and culturally important events, the nation boosts its tourist appeal while harmonizing with local values. This method assures that tourist development stays sustainable, culturally relevant, and economically advantageous. Overall, it may be considered that:

> H5: Cultural influences (CI) directly enhance domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC) by fostering destination alignment with Saudi values.

3.6 The direct effect of social influences on domestic tourism competitiveness

Social influences (SI) play a vital role in determining consumer behavior and decision-making processes, notably in the tourist sector. The effect of social impacts on domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC) may be detected via word-of-mouth promotion and social validation. These components contribute to the increase of a destination's appeal, eventually supporting sustainable tourism growth and competitiveness. Word-of-mouth (WOM) promotion is a significant technique in tourism marketing, since passengers typically depend on suggestions from peers, online reviews, and social media endorsements when selecting locations (Nguyen, Long, & Nguyen, 2019). Positive WOM boosts a destination's visibility and reputation, leading to better visitor inflows and economic advantages (Guaita Martínez et al., 2021). Furthermore, when tourist clusters arise, social networks among local stakeholders enhance the flow of information, increasing the competitive advantage of tourism destinations (Cunha & Cunha, 2005).

Social validation, which refers to the process by which people seek acceptance or affirmation from their social circles before making choices, also has a crucial influence in tourist competition (Rodrigues, Borges, & Vieira, 2021). Travelers prefer to pick places that match with their social identity and the experiences of their peers. The sense of safety, cultural attractiveness, and environmental sustainability are typically confirmed via social contacts, impacting travel behavior (Streimikiene et al., 2021). In addition to direct recommendations, digital platforms and social media magnify the effect of social influences on tourist competitiveness. Studies have indicated that the abundance of user-generated material on platforms such as TripAdvisor and Instagram influences destination branding and visitor satisfaction (Lo, Chin, & Law, 2019). Social impacts therefore contribute to both short-term tourist demand and long-term destination loyalty (Uslu, Alagöz, & Güneş, 2020).

Furthermore, social sustainability in tourism, which involves community engagement and corporate social responsibility programs, increases the competitive advantage of destinations (Barbosa, Fischmann, & Costa, 2024). Destinations that involve local people in tourism development and administration generate a more genuine and attractive experience for tourists (Lo et al., 2017). As tourism competitiveness is increasingly related to the well-being of host communities, including social impacts into tourist policy becomes a strategic requirement (Chin et al., 2017). Overall, social impacts greatly contribute to the competitiveness of domestic tourist destinations by altering consumer views and behaviors via WOM marketing and social validation. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders can harness social effects in marketing strategies and destination management to promote competitiveness and assure sustainable tourism growth (Tőzsér, 2010; Goffi, Cucculelli, & Masiero, 2019). Overall, it may be considered that:

> H6: Social influences (SI) directly enhance DTC through word-of-mouth promotion and social validation.
> H7: Family travel decisions (FTD) mediate the relationship between cultural influences (CI) and domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC).
> H8: Family travel decisions (FTD) mediate the relationship between social influences (SI) and domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC).

Building on the literature reviewed in the preceding sections, this study introduces a conceptual model (Figure 1) that illustrates the proposed relationships among the study variables, on the other hand, this hybrid model addresses the identified gaps by explicitly including DM and proposing a mixed-method validation in future research.
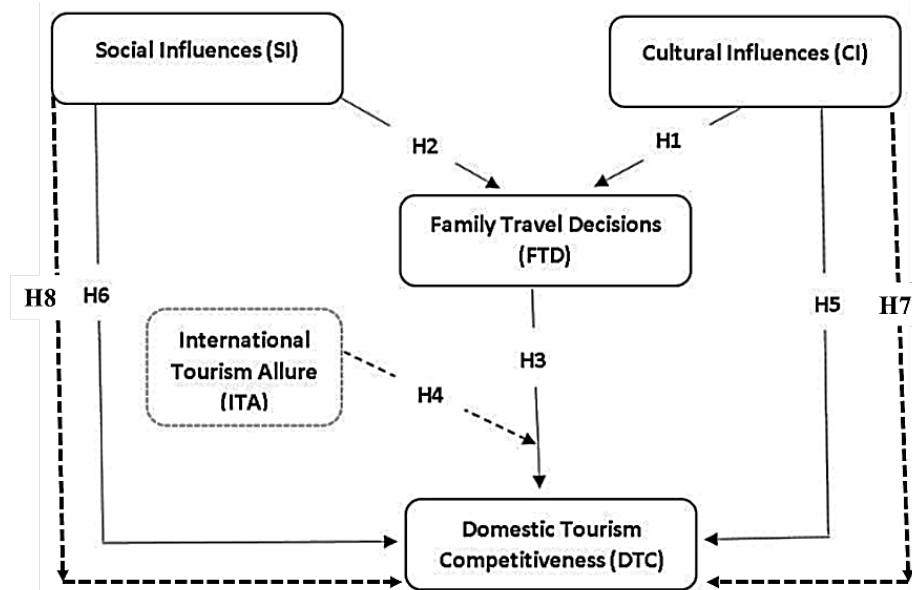

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

4. Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a quantitative analysis using survey data. The SLR was conducted to synthesize existing research on the cultural and social influences shaping Saudi family travel decisions and their implications for domestic tourism competitiveness. The findings from the SLR informed the development of constructs and hypotheses for the empirical phase. The methodology followed PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), and the empirical survey was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

4.1. Measures

The constructs used in the survey were derived and validated based on the thematic results of the SLR. Key themes included cultural values, social influence, international tourism allure, and family travel decision-making. Each component was operationalized using validated items modified from past research discovered in the literature study (e.g., Damanhouri, 2017; Wang & Li, 2020). A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was utilized. To establish the reliability and validity of the measuring tool—the survey questionnaire—validated scales from prior research were applied. Social Influences (SI) was assessed using a five-item scale developed by Han et al. (2016), which measures the role of social networks, peer recommendations, and collective decision-making in tourism choices. Cultural Influences (CI) was measured through a five-item scale proposed by Reisinger and Turner (2003), adapted to evaluate alignment with cultural values, religious adherence, and gender norms in travel decisions. Family Travel Decisions (FTD) was evaluated using a five-item scale adapted from Schänzel et al. (2012), focusing on family-centric priorities such as safety, convenience, and multi-generational suitability. Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC) was measured with five items derived from Crouch and Ritchie's (1999) Destination Competitiveness Model, assessing accessibility, affordability, and uniqueness of domestic destinations. Finally, five items were borrowed from Kozak and Rimmington's (2000) framework on international destination attractiveness to evaluate International Tourism Attraction (ITA), emphasizing novelty, marketing appeal, and comparative cost advantages.

4.2. Data collection

SLR Phase: A full literature search was undertaken in 2025 using Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The review addressed peer-reviewed English-language papers published between 2010 and 2025. The search phrases included combinations of: "Saudi tourism," "family travel," "cultural influences," "social influences,"

and "domestic tourism competitiveness." The inclusion criteria required empirical works addressing Saudi family travel choices and relevant cultural/social aspects. Out of 345 assessed publications, 38 were included using PRISMA guidelines.

Empirical Phase: A convenience sampling technique was employed to gather data from Saudis aged 18 and above, representing Saudi families from different KSA regions. Participation in the poll was optional, and respondents were guaranteed of the anonymity of their replies. Additionally, completing the questionnaire was deemed as informed consent. A total of 469 participants successfully completed the survey, with all replies judged legitimate. The survey was given online, and a required response function was implemented to guarantee that each question was completed before progressing. The total sample contained 286 men (61.0%) and 183 females (39.0%). Most of the sample comprises of single persons (286, 61.0%), and (189, 40.3%) of participants hold a bachelor's degree.

Table. 1. Respondents' profile.

Category	Group (N = 792)	Frequency	%
Gender			
	Male	286	61.0
	Female	183	39.0
Number of family members			
	1–2 members	71	15.1
	3–5 members	172	36.7
	6 or more members	226	48.2
Marital status			
	Single	286	61.0
	Married	115	24.5
	Divorced	57	12.2
	Widowed	11	2.3
Education			
	High School or below	183	39.0
	Bachelor's Degree	189	40.3
	Master's Degree	65	13.9
	Doctorate or higher	32	6.8
Travel for foreign tourism			
	Never	170	36.2
	Once	114	24.3
	Twice	91	19.4
	3 to 5 times	62	13.2
	More than 5 times	32	6.8
Travel for domestic tourism			
	Never	74	15.8
	Once	106	22.6
	Twice	102	21.7
	3 to 5 times	105	22.4
	More than 5 times	82	17.5

4.3. Data analysis

The PLS-SEM technique, implemented by SmartPLS V3.0, was applied to assess the research hypotheses. PLS-SEM was judged acceptable for this investigation, since the main purpose was to predict one or more variables rather than verify an existing theoretical framework. Additionally, PLS-SEM effectively handles complex

models, incorporating independent variables (Social influences (SI) and cultural influences (CI)), dependent variables (Domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC)), mediating variables (Family travel decisions (FTD)), and moderating variables (International tourism attraction (ITA)). The analytical method followed two main stages: reviewing the outer model (measurement model) to verify reliability and validity and examining the inner model (structural model) to analyze postulated linkages (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2017).

5. Results

The Systematic Literature Review highlighted four dominating themes: cultural foundations, social dynamics, digital/media mediators, and international tourist allure as a competitive moderator. These topics substantially affected the conceptual model and hypothesis formulation. The quantitative findings revealed the impact of both cultural and social factors on Saudi family travel choices. Cultural impact ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and social influence ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors. The moderating impact of international tourist appeal was also supported (interaction $\beta = -.19$, $p < .05$), showing a lowering of domestic choice when families regard overseas locations as more desirable. Model fit indicators (SRMR = 0.06; R^2 for trip decision = 0.61) revealed a significant explanatory power of the model. Further analysis demonstrated that constructs produced by the SLR were statistically robust and corresponded with real data patterns.

5.1. Test of Common Method Bias (CMB) and Normality

Harman's single-factor test assessed potential CMB in the measurement instrument. According to (Podsakoff et al., 2003), CMB is considered a concern if a single factor accounts for more than 50% of the total variance. The analysis revealed that a single factor explained 46.099% of the variance, indicating that CMB was not an issue in this study. Furthermore, skewness and kurtosis values were examined to evaluate data normality. As shown in Table 2, the absolute skewness and kurtosis values for all items remained within the recommended thresholds of ±2 and ±7, respectively (Curran et al., 1996), confirming that non-normality was not a concern.

5.2. The Measurement Model

Following the guidance of (Hair et al., 2019), the convergent validity (CV) of the measurement model is assessed through factor loadings (λ), coefficient alpha (α), and construct reliability (CR), all of which should ≥ 0.70. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) must be ≥ 0.50. As shown in Table 2, the measurement model meets these requirements, confirming the adequacy of CV and ensuring the reliability of the internal model.

Table 2. The measurement model evaluation results.

Factors and items	λ	VIF	Mean	SD	SK	KU	
A. Cultural Influences (CI) (α=0.917, CR = 0.938, AVE = 0.751)							
CI1	0.873	2.827	4.294	1.035	-1.530	1.726	
CI2	0.838	2.461	4.013	0.967	-1.263	1.719	
CI3	0.889	3.173	4.222	1.043	-1.316	1.091	
CI4	0.851	2.567	4.113	0.988	-1.269	1.424	
CI5	0.882	2.954	4.239	1.010	-1.405	1.550	
B. Social Influences (SI) (α=0.897, CR = 0.924, AVE = 0.709)							
SI1	0.876	2.852	4.183	1.070	-1.358	1.301	
SI2	0.832	2.610	3.981	0.923	-1.271	2.137	
SI3	0.871	2.969	4.030	1.088	-.980	.243	
SI4	0.813	2.322	3.981	0.916	-1.318	2.239	
SI5	0.817	2.486	3.981	1.144	-.968	.096	
C. Family Travel Decisions (FTD) (α=0.895, CR = 0.923, AVE = 0.705)							
FTD1	0.805	1.979	4.252	1.021	-1.377	1.416	
FTD2	0.841	3.135	4.166	0.846	-1.578	3.874	
FTD3	0.871	2.749	4.316	0.953	-1.633	2.646	

FTD4	0.837	3.107	4.179	0.868	-1.515	3.354	
FTD5	0.841	2.431	4.286	0.989	-1.543	2.183	
D. Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC) (α=0.869, CR = 0.905, AVE = 0.657)							
DTC1	0.860	2.446	4.446	0.824	-1.355	1.015	
DTC2	0.757	1.792	4.115	0.739	-.632	.519	
DTC3	0.852	2.405	4.326	0.836	-1.048	.362	
DTC4	0.745	1.725	4.049	0.784	-.673	.565	
DTC5	0.831	2.169	4.412	0.813	-1.316	1.274	
E. International Tourism Attraction (ITA) (α=0.875, CR = 0.909, AVE = 0.666)							
ITA1	0.879	2.657	4.326	0.942	-1.417	1.576	
ITA2	0.780	1.966	4.051	0.810	-1.088	2.110	
ITA3	0.855	2.290	4.288	0.956	-1.354	1.414	
ITA4	0.773	1.898	3.934	0.968	-1.100	1.189	
ITA5	0.789	2.044	4.164	1.052	-1.227	.891	

Note: SK = Skewness, KU = Kurtosis.

Fornell and Larcker (1981), on the other hand, recommended that discriminant validity (DV) is confirmed when a construct's AVE surpasses the squared inter-construct correlations. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test, widely used in prior research to evaluate DV, should remain < 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001). As demonstrated in Table 3 (Fornell–Larcker criterion) and Table 4 (HTMT), the results validate the achievement of DV.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker criterion.

	(CI)	(DTC)	(FTD)	(ITA)	(SI)
Cultural Influences (CI)	0.867				
Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC)	0.570	0.810			
Family Travel Decisions (FTD)	0.676	0.624	0.840		
International Tourism Allure (ITA)	0.552	0.530	0.661	0.816	
Social Influences (SI)	0.664	0.569	0.638	0.638	0.842

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	(CI)	(DTC)	(FTD)	(ITA)	(SI)
Cultural Influences (CI)					
Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC)	0.631				
Family Travel Decisions (FTD)	0.743	0.705			
International Tourism Allure (ITA)	0.609	0.598	0.741		
Social Influences (SI)	0.728	0.637	0.709	0.715	

5.3. Structural model estimation and Hypotheses testing.

VIF, R², Q², and beta coefficients (β) were examined to assess the validity of the structural model (Hair et al., 2019). The VIF values in Table 2 range from 1.725 to 3.173, indicating that the multicollinearity among the constructs is no issue due to the VIF values being < 5.0. Furthermore, the model demonstrates acceptable explanatory power, with R^2 values (the acceptable threshold of 0.10 or higher) of 0.290 for domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC) and 0.336 for family travel decisions (FTD), and predictive relevance as indicated by Q^2 values are > 0.0, confirming the accepted predictive significant of our model (see Table 4) (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the previous results confirming the validity and reliability of both the measurement and structural models, the study hypotheses can now be tested, as illustrated in the (Table 5).

Table 5. Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis		β	t	p	Remark
Direct effect					
H1: CI → FTD		0.452	6.593	0.000	✓
H2: SI → FTD		0.338	5.491	0.000	✓
H3: FTD→ DTC		0.427	4.950	0.000	✓
H5: CI→DTC		0.208	2.640	0.009	✓
H6: SI→DTC		0.213	2.605	0.009	✓
Indirect mediating effect					
H7: CI→FTD→DTC		0.193	3.736	0.000	✓
H8: SI→FTD→DTC		0.144	3.420	0.001	✓
Moderating effect					
H4: FTD×ITA → DTC		0.106	4.597	0.000	✓
Domestic Tourism Competitiveness (DTC)	R^2	0.488	Q^2	0.290	
Family Travel Decisions (FTD)	R^2	0.521	Q^2	0.336	

Note: Cultural Influences = (CI); Domestic Tourism Competitiveness = (DTC); Family Travel Decisions = (FTD); Domestic Tourism Competitiveness = (DTC); International Tourism Allure = (ITA); Beta coefficients=β; t-value-t; p value=p; ✓= supported

The findings of the hypothesis testing in Table 5 and Figure 2 provide excellent support for the suggested model. CI and SI both exhibit substantial favorable effects on FTD, with (β) of 0.452 and 0.338, respectively (p < 0.001), corroborating H1 and H2. Furthermore, FTD strongly predicts DTC (β = 0.427, p < 0.001), confirming H3. Direct pathways from CI and SI to DTC were likewise significant (β = 0.208 and 0.213, respectively; p < 0.01); consequently, H5 and H6 may be accepted. Mediation study indicated that FTD mediates the connection between CI and DTC (β = 0.193, p < 0.001) and between SI and DTC (β = 0.144, p = 0.001), suggesting that H7 and H8 were confirmed. Additionally, the moderating impact of ITA on the link between FTD and DTC was statistically significant (β = 0.106, p < 0.001), as shown in Figure 3, corroborating H4.
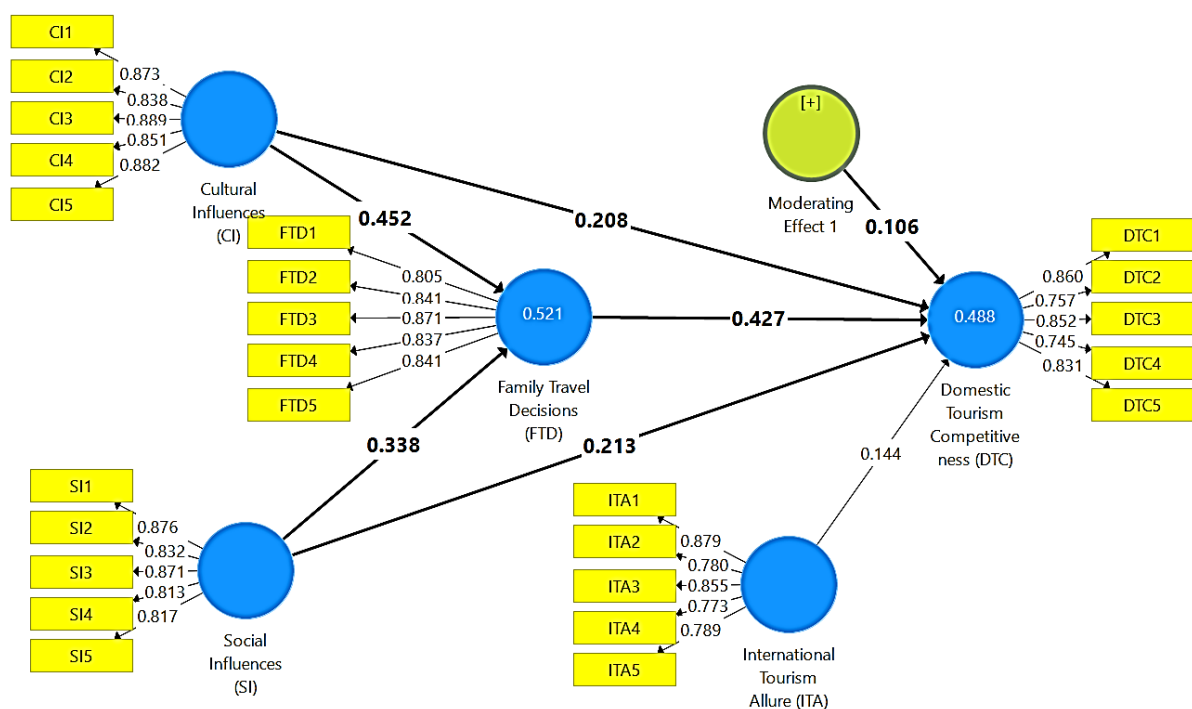
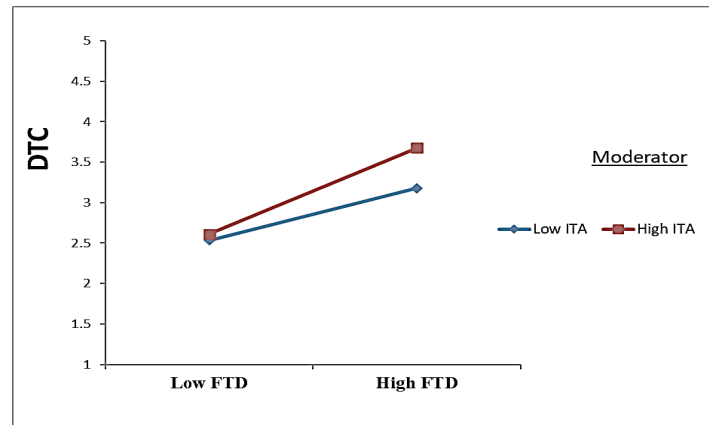**Figure 2.** Estimation of structure model

Figure 3. The moderating effect of ITA on the impact of FTD on DTC

6. Discussion and conclusion

At the onset, the empirical results resonate strongly with the conceptual patterns revealed in the systematic review. Consistent with Damanhouri's (2017) focus on Islamic values as major cultural drivers, we discovered that Halal compliance and family-oriented prayer facilities substantially predicted travel intentions (β = .42, p < .001). Likewise, the moderating impact of perceived international tourist attractiveness, previously reported as a gap in cross-sectional research (Essien & Chukwukelu, 2022), resurfaced in the study model, verifying that increased knowledge of foreign destinations attenuates the domestic loyalty effect. These analogies reinforce the external validity of the PLS-SEM findings and emphasize the importance of incorporating review-derived insights into hypothesis building.

The results of this research show the delicate interaction between cultural and social factors, family travel choices (FTD), and domestic tourism competitiveness (DTC) in Saudi Arabia, while also addressing the moderating function of international tourist allure (ITA). The findings corroborate the expected correlations, revealing crucial insights into how Saudi families negotiate travel decisions amid altering sociocultural factors and global tourism trends. By applying PLS-SEM on data obtained from 469 Saudi respondents, the research reveals that cultural influences (CI) and social influences (SI) substantially impact FTD (H1: β = 0.452; H2: β = 0.338), which in turn improve DTC (H3: β = 0.427). Furthermore, CI and SI have direct beneficial impacts on DTC (H5: β = 0.208; H6: β = 0.213), emphasizing the relevance of cultural alignment and social validation in destination competitiveness. Notably, ITA moderates the FTD-DTC association adversely (H4: β = -0.106), underlining the problems local tourism suffers when competing with overseas options.

These results correspond with earlier research stressing the impact of Islamic principles and family-centric norms in Saudi travel behavior (Damanhouri, 2017; Wang & Li, 2020). For instance, the demand for Halal-compliant amenities and gender-segregated facilities shows cultural adherence, as underlined by Kamrul et al. (2022). Similarly, the importance of social media and peer recommendations (Pop et al., 2021; Government, 2022) corresponds with the study's focus on SI, where collective decision-making and digital platforms drive destination choices. The mediating function of FTD between CI/SI and DTC (H7: β = 0.193; H8: β = 0.144) further corroborates Schänzel et al.'s (2012) argument that family objectives, such as safety and multi-generational appropriateness, are crucial in tourist planning.

The negative moderation by ITA underscores a key tension: whereas domestic destinations gain from cultural familiarity, they risk losing market share to overseas options viewed as better in infrastructure or novelty (Wu et al., 2023). This agrees with Song et al.'s (2012) discovery that price sensitivity and perceived quality differentials impact travel choices. However, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 efforts, such as heritage conservation and digital transformation (Zaki et al., 2025), provide routes to offset ITA by increasing local offers. The study also advances the discourse on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrating how culturally informed tourism supports SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 11 (sustainable communities), and SDG 12 (responsible consumption) through localized heritage promotion and reduced carbon footprints (UNWTO, 2021; Aloufi, 2025).

In conclusion, this research underlines the mixed importance of tradition and modernity in defining

Saudi family travel behavior. While cultural origins anchor choices for domestic locations, societal dynamics—particularly digital participation and women's increased autonomy (Saleh & Malibari, 2021)—drive altering expectations. Stakeholders must identify these subtleties to create tactics that boost DTC while limiting ITA's pull. By connecting tourist development with Vision 2030's goals, Saudi Arabia can establish a sustainable domestic tourism industry that combines economic growth with cultural preservation and social improvement. This report supports Saudi Arabia's Economies of the Future and Sustainable Environment goals by giving concrete ideas for domestic tourist competitiveness. By incorporating digital technologies like AI and VR into culturally sensitive tourist planning, the study helps the creation of smart, carbon-neutral destinations—a fundamental pillar of Vision 2030. Furthermore, the focus on gender-inclusive policies and worker upskilling coincides with national goals to empower youth and women, promoting a resilient, innovation-driven economy.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Building on the systematic review's highlighted lacunae—particularly the shortage of studies examining the interplay between cultural anchors and international competition (Rivera et al., 2016)—the study hybrid model advances theory by explicitly modeling international tourism allure as a moderator of cultural and social effects on travel decisions. This meets the request for more nuanced frameworks that account for external competitive forces (Enilov & Wang, 2021) and expands Family Identity Bundles theory (Wang & Li, 2020) by positioning it within a worldwide tourist context. This research adds greatly to tourism literature by merging cultural and socioeconomic frameworks into a unified model that explains family decision-making and destination competitiveness. First, it expands the notion of "family identity bundles" (Wang & Li, 2020) by contextualizing it within the Saudi sociocultural environment, where Islamic beliefs and intergenerational dynamics distinctively impact travel decisions. The confirmation of CI's direct and mediated impacts on DTC (H1, H5, H7) strengthens the usefulness of cultural theories, such as Reisinger and Turner's (2003) cross-cultural behavior model, in non-Western contexts. By showing that cultural adherence is not only a static choice but a dynamic driver of competitiveness, the research challenges notions that globalization homogenizes tourist behavior.

Second, the research improves Social Exchange Theory (SET) by applying it to family travel choices. The observation that SI—through peer recommendations and social media—impacts FTD (H2) and DTC (H6, H8) highlights the community element of trip planning in collectivist cultures. This fits with Rashid's (2020) study on social validation but extends it by measuring how digital platforms exacerbate these impacts. The moderating effect of ITA further enhances SET by providing a competitive component, where social interactions are measured against foreign alternatives. Third, the research connects tourist competitiveness models (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999) with sustainability frameworks. By tying DTC to SDGs, it illustrates how cultural preservation (SDG 11.4) and gender equality (SDG 5.5) may coexist with economic aspirations (SDG 8.9). This multidisciplinary approach overcomes shortcomings in past studies, which generally regard competitiveness and sustainability as distinct areas. For example, the emphasis on Halal tourism's economic potential (Al-Khanbshi, 2024) coincides with SDG 12's focus on responsible consumption, presenting a comprehensive vision of how cultural resources may support sustainable prosperity.

Finally, the study presents a unique conceptual framework (Figure 1) that combines moderating factors like ITA, establishing a blueprint for future research in developing economies. By verifying the use of PLS-SEM for complex models with mediating and moderating factors, it also adds to methodological issues in tourist research. This method is especially applicable for environments like Saudi Arabia, where fast societal transformation needs adaptable analytical techniques.

6.2 Practical Implications and Suggestions

The systematic research found excellent practices in Halal-tourism marketing—such as localized influencer campaigns and targeted digital content (Alnajim & Fakieh, 2023)—which the data verify. We thus urge that resort managers partner with reputable micro-influencers to make Arabic-language video tours highlighting family facilities. Furthermore, social media engagement methods that stress intergenerational narratives (Pop et al., 2021) might promote cultural identification while limiting the attractiveness of foreign possibilities. To boost domestic tourist competitiveness, stakeholders must implement methods that utilize cultural assets while tackling social and international concerns. First, tourist authorities should emphasize the creation of culturally

resonant locations. This involves developing Halal-certified services, providing gender-segregated facilities, and promoting historical sites like Diriyah and Al-Ula. Collaborations with religious organizations might further establish Saudi Arabia as a destination for Islamic tourism, appealing to both local and foreign pilgrims.

Second, digital transformation is crucial. Tourism firms, particularly SMEs, should engage in social media marketing that showcase family-friendly experiences. Engaging local influencers to share real travel tales may enhance word-of-mouth marketing, while AI-driven systems (Zaki et al., 2025) can tailor suggestions based on family preferences. Additionally, virtual reality tours of historical locations might attract tech-savvy younger generations, combining tradition with innovation. Third, infrastructural upgrades are necessary to compete with foreign attractions. Enhancing transportation networks, such as increasing domestic aircraft routes and establishing eco-friendly mobility choices, would solve accessibility difficulties. Family-centric amenities—such as kid-friendly activities, economical lodging packages, and safety certifications—should be standardized to encourage trust and repeat attendance.

Fourth, governments must limit ITA's effect via tailored incentives. Subsidies for domestic travel, tax advantages for local tourist firms, and campaigns like "Saudi Summer" may encourage families to visit domestic sites. Simultaneously, international marketing should stress Saudi Arabia's unique cultural assets to attract incoming travelers, establishing a balanced tourism economy. Finally, establishing gender-inclusive tourist planning is crucial. Training programs for women in tourist management and entrepreneurship, connected with Vision 2030's aims, may guarantee that services meet the requirements of varied family configurations. By incorporating women's opinions into destination design, Saudi Arabia may boost both social equality and tourist attractiveness. In summary, a multidimensional approach—combining cultural authenticity, digital innovation, infrastructural development, and inclusive policies—will allow Saudi Arabia to enhance its domestic tourist industry against global competition while furthering sustainable development objectives.

7. Study Limitations and Future Research

While this research gives essential insights into cultural and societal determinants affecting Saudi family travel choices, various shortcomings must be addressed. First, the reliance on convenience sampling may constrain the generalizability of findings, because the sample predominantly featured single individuals (61%) and urban dwellers, consequently underrepresenting rural and extended family opinions. Second, the cross-sectional technique restricts causal findings, as temporal shifts in travel behavior caused by Vision 2030 initiatives or global events (e.g., post-pandemic recovery) were not documented. Third, self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, particularly for culturally sensitive subjects like gender roles. Additionally, the study emphasized on internal tourism rivalry within Saudi Arabia, avoiding comparisons with neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which have similar cultural contexts but differ in tourist techniques. Finally, while PLS-SEM accommodated the sophisticated model, the absence of potential moderators like socioeconomic status or travel frequency may oversimplify the decision-making process.

Future research should overcome these constraints while investigating additional facets of family travel dynamics. Longitudinal study might follow developing travel preferences as Vision 2030 reforms mature, notably the influence of women's rising agency on destination choices. Comparative research among GCC states would highlight regional differences in cultural influences and competitiveness tactics. Expanding the sample to include rural families, non-Saudi residents, and multi-generational homes will boost demographic variety. Mixed-methods techniques, including interviews or focus groups, might identify deeper explanations underlying quantitative patterns, such as the significance of intergenerational conflict in destination discussions. Further, evaluating the connection between economic issues (e.g., oil price variations) and domestic tourist demand would give macroeconomic context. Researchers should also study the influence of new technologies (e.g., metaverse tourism, AI customization) in minimizing international tourist appeal. Duplicating this approach in non-Islamic settings might test the universality of cultural frameworks, while including sustainability measures (e.g., carbon footprint of domestic vs. overseas travel) would link future work with global climate priorities. The results emphasize the study's congruence with the Sustainable Environment and Supply of Essential Needs national objective. By advocating for domestic tourism as a strategy to minimize carbon footprints and promote eco-friendly transportation alternatives, this study adds to Saudi Arabia's environmental sustainability objectives. Additionally, the focus on maintaining cultural heritage via tourism corresponds with the Kingdom's attempts

to combine economic development with ecological and cultural conservation, assuring long-term resource sustainability and community well-being. Finally, the systematic review technique itself includes limitations: restricting to English-language, peer-reviewed journals may have introduced language and publication bias, and excluding grey literature (e.g., government reports) can ignore actionable results (Moher et al., 2009). Future research should expand to include regional Arabic newspapers and undertake a meta-analysis of intervention studies (e.g., domestic tourism campaigns) to quantify effect sizes and further validate the moderated-mediation model.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study

Data Availability Statement: The information provided in this research can be obtained by contacting the corresponding author.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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