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Investigating the Impact of Spiritual Leadership on Employee Performance in Tour Operators: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

The tourism sector drives economic growth and cultural exchange, fostering innovation and employment. Spiritual leadership (SPRL) enhances employee engagement and performance through values-driven practices focused on purpose, empowerment, and connectedness. This study examines SPRL's impact on employee performance (EMP) and psychological empowerment (PSYE) in Egypt and Saudi Arabia's tourism sectors, exploring PSYE as a mediator. A quantitative design was used, with surveys from 399 employees. Structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis revealed that SPRL significantly enhances both EMP and PSYE. Moreover, PSYE positively influences EMP and mediates the SPRL-EMP relationship. These results contribute to theoretical advancements by providing empirical evidence of SPRL's efficacy in a tourism-specific context, where employee engagement and adaptability are paramount. Practically, the study underscores the potential of integrating spiritual leadership principles into management strategies to foster resilience, engagement, and productivity, offering actionable insights for leadership development in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Spiritual Leadership; Psychological Empowerment; Employee Performance; Tour Operators; Tourism Sector

Introduction

In the fast-paced tourism sector, spiritual leadership (SPRL) plays a pivotal role in shaping employee performance [1]. Spiritually grounded leadership has the ability to motivate staff members to excel in their roles by emphasizing morals, ethics, and a greater sense of purpose [1]. This leadership approach fosters a sense of community that encourages commitment, drive, and discretionary effort, ultimately enabling organizations to achieve critical objectives, like, heightened productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, positive team dynamics, and improved overall performance [2]. Heidari Haratemeh [3] illustrates the profound connection between SPRL and organizational outcomes, highlighting how it enhances psychological empowerment (PSYE) and employee performance (EMP) to cultivate a satisfying and energetic working environment.

The tourism sector operates in an intensely dynamic environment, requiring innovative strategies to maintain competitiveness and drive organizational success. Among these strategies, spiritual leadership (SPRL) has emerged as a transformative approach, yet its potential remains

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underexplored, particularly in the context of employee performance [4]. Unlike traditional leadership models, SPRL integrates moral principles, ethical behaviour, and a sense of higher purpose, inspiring employees to excel in their roles while fostering a shared commitment to organizational goals [1]. Recent studies underscore its capacity to cultivate community, drive discretionary effort, and enhance critical outcomes such as job satisfaction, team dynamics, and productivity [2]. However, the underlying mechanisms through which SPRL achieves these outcomes warrant further investigation.

A growing body of evidence highlights the connection between SPRL and enhanced psychological empowerment (PSYE), a critical mediator influencing employee performance (EMP) [3]. PSYE encompasses employees' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relevance in their roles, which significantly impact their motivation and dedication to organizational objectives [5;6]. Despite its established importance, the role of PSYE as a conduit for the positive effects of SPRL on EMP has not been sufficiently examined in the tourism industry a sector heavily reliant on engaged and adaptable employees to deliver exceptional customer experiences. This gap forms the foundation of the present study.

This study aims to address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the tourism sector, where employee engagement and adaptability are critical for success. Unlike other industries, tourism is characterized by high employee turnover, intense customer interaction, and fluctuating demand, all of which create a need for leadership approaches that not only motivate but also empower employees at a deeper, psychological level. By focusing specifically on the mediating role of PSYE, this research provides a novel lens to examine how SPRL translates into tangible improvements in EMP within this context. Moreover, it contributes to the limited body of literature that investigates SPRL in tourism, a field where the interplay between leadership, employee motivation and organizational outcomes remains underexplored.

Employee performance (EMP) serves as a cornerstone of organizational success, encompassing task proficiency, creativity, adaptability, and interpersonal effectiveness [5]. Enhanced EMP not only drives productivity and customer satisfaction but also secures a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market [6]. Organizations often focus on training, development, and feedback to optimize performance, yet these initiatives may fall short without addressing the psychological needs that underpin intrinsic motivation and engagement. By integrating the principles of SPRL, this study seeks to uncover how fulfilling employees' fundamental needs through PSYE leads to superior performance outcomes.

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this research explores how SPRL aligns individual values with organizational objectives, fostering an environment of trust, empowerment, and personal growth. SDT emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in driving intrinsic motivation, making it an ideal framework for investigating the interplay between SPRL, PSYE, and EMP [7,8]. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the tourism sector, where the fast-paced nature of operations and the demand for high employee engagement present unique challenges and opportunities for leadership innovation.

By examining the mediating role of PSYE, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how SPRL impacts EMP, offering valuable insights for practitioners and researchers alike. The findings aim to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, equipping tourism operators with actionable strategies to cultivate a resilient and motivated

workforce. In doing so, this research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the tourism industry, highlighting the transformative potential of spiritual leadership in meeting contemporary organizational challenges.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

SPRL and EMP

Numerous studies [2–4,9–11] have highlighted the rising significance of SPRL in influencing EMP, which is increasingly acknowledged as a critical factor in organizational success [2,4,9,12]. EMP has been demonstrated to benefit significantly from SPRL's emphasis on ethics, values, and purpose-driven leadership [2,13]. Spiritual leaders create a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection within organizations, which inspires and motivates employees to perform at their best [10,13,14]. According to Mantel et al. [16], SPRL enhances employee engagement, dedication, and discretionary effort, thereby improving key performance outcomes, including task proficiency, creativity, adaptability, and job satisfaction.

In a Taiwanese context, Rahmatika et al. [11] identified a strong positive correlation between SPRL and employee engagement, underscoring its universal relevance. Furthermore, SPRL fosters an encouraging corporate culture characterized by empathy, trust, and authenticity, factors that significantly enhance employee well-being and overall performance [4,12,17]. By instilling values and nurturing a shared sense of purpose, spiritual leadership creates an environment where employees feel valued and empowered to excel. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: SPRL positively influences EMP.

SPRL and PSYE

SPRL has been widely studied for its role in fostering a sense of purpose and PSYE among employees, with research focusing on its profound effects within organizational settings [15–19]. Spiritual leaders, with their emphasis on values and transcendental purpose, create an environment where employees feel emotionally invested in organizational goals and objectives [4,18–20]. This alignment fosters significant PSYE, characterized by heightened independence, proficiency, and influence in their roles [18].

Studies [16–19] have shown that the focus of SPRL on ethical practices and compassionate leadership instills confidence and autonomy in employees, enabling them to navigate challenges with greater resilience and determination [19]. Nonetheless, the intricate connection between SPRL and PSYE highlights the need for further exploration of mediating factors that deepen this relationship [21]. These insights suggest that spiritual leadership is instrumental in enhancing PSYE by creating a work environment conducive to growth, empowerment, and meaningful engagement. Based on these discussions, we hypothesize:

H2: SPRL positively influences PSYE.

PSYE and EMP

Extensive research [22–27] has underscored the critical role of PSYE in enhancing EMP across various organizational contexts. PSYE, which encompasses dimensions such as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, significantly influences employees' engagement,

motivation, and effectiveness in their roles [23]. Employees with elevated levels of PSYE perceive their work as meaningful, trust their abilities, and feel a sense of autonomy and contribution, all of which drive exceptional performance [8,26].

This sense of empowerment encourages adaptability, creativity, and commitment, fostering a collaborative and positive work environment [24]. Organizations that prioritize PSYE are more likely to experience enhanced EMP, reflected in improved productivity, job satisfaction, and teamwork. By fulfilling employees' psychological needs, PSYE serves as a key driver of individual and organizational success. Moreover, PSYE plays a mediating role in the relationship between SPRL and EMP, translating the values-driven approach of spiritual leadership into tangible performance outcomes [22,24,25]. Employees who feel psychologically empowered are better equipped to align their personal and professional goals, thereby maximizing their contributions to organizational objectives. Based on these insights, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: *PSYE positively influences EMP.*

H4: *PSYE mediates the relationship between SPRL and EMP.*

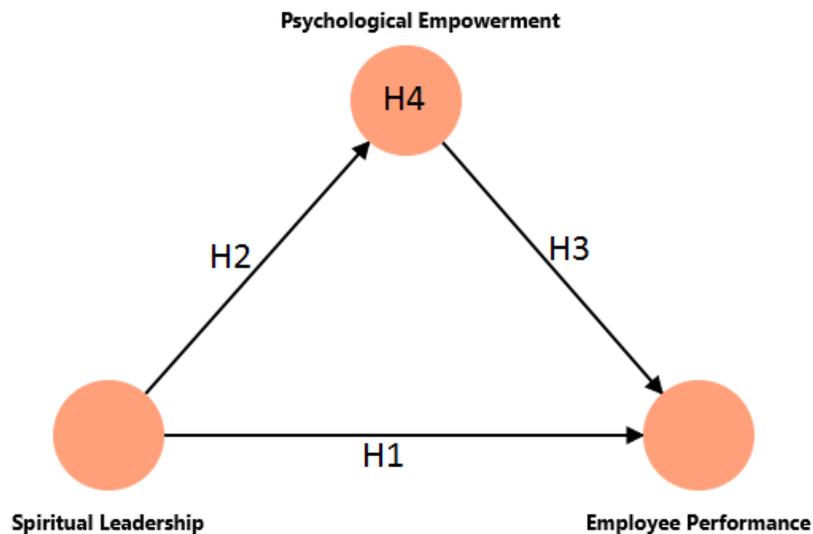


Figure 1. Study conceptual framework

Methodology

Study Constructs

The scales used to measure the variables in this study were developed based on extensive literature reviews. SPRL was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Fry et al. [28], which captures three dimensions: vision, faith, and altruism. Example phrases from the scale include: "I am encouraged to perform more successfully by my organization's vision," "My organization's executives are sufficiently brave to stand behind their staff members," and "I show my loyalty to my enterprise and its goals by giving all efforts to help it succeed." This scale was selected for its proven reliability in capturing the essence of spiritual leadership. To measure

EMP, the scale developed by Jansson and Yperen [15] was adopted. This five-item scale investigates various aspects of performance, including: the extent to which employees successfully perform their basic duties, their accomplishment of job-specific tasks, fulfilment of all official performance requirements, execution of all responsibilities required by the job, and avoidance of neglecting work-related requirements.

The mediating variable, PSYE, was measured using a scale tested and validated by Kundu et al. [29]. This seven-item scale evaluates key dimensions of empowerment, such as: "My work holds great significance to me," "My work is personally rewarding," "I have full faith in my capacity to carry out my duties," "I have sufficient autonomy in how I carry out my duties," "I have developed the skills required to excel in my work," "I have enough independence in determining how I approach my work," and "I have a substantial contribution to what occurs within my department." These statements were selected to capture the multifaceted nature of psychological empowerment.

Research Population and Sampling

The study targeted employees in the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia and Egypt as the research population. Given the challenges in determining the exact workforce size in the tourism sectors of these countries, the sample size was estimated based on a population of 20,000 individuals, following Veal's recommendations for large or undefined populations [24]. The Herbert Larkin equation was utilized to calculate a suitable sample size, resulting in a target of 377 responses [4].

To account for potential non-responses, the researchers distributed questionnaires to 414 employees in October and November 2024. Ultimately, 399 completed surveys were returned, yielding an impressive response rate of 96.4%. The sampling strategy ensured a diverse representation of employees across various roles and organizations within the tourism sectors of both countries.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire as part of the study's quantitative research approach. To enhance the questionnaire's validity and reliability, it was reviewed and refined by a panel of academics and tourism industry experts. The questionnaire was structured into four sections: the first section captured demographic information, including age, gender, education level, and years of experience, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sample characteristics. The subsequent sections focused on the three key research variables: SPRL, EMP and PSYE.

Each variable was assessed using multiple items adapted from validated scales to ensure consistency and reliability. Respondents were asked to evaluate these items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," providing a nuanced measurement of their perceptions and attitudes. The structured format ensured that all aspects of the research objectives were systematically addressed.

The distribution process involved both physical and electronic dissemination of the questionnaire to reach a broader audience within the tourism industry. Physical copies were handed out to employees in selected organizations, while electronic versions were shared through email and professional networks. To encourage participation, anonymity and confidentiality of responses were guaranteed, and participants were informed about the purpose and significance of the study.

Follow-ups were conducted to maximize the response rate and ensure the collection of high-quality data.

Data Analysis Techniques

To analyse the collected data and derive meaningful insights, descriptive statistics were computed using Excel v.15-2013, while SPSS v.29-2022 was utilized to explore the demographic characteristics of the sample, providing a comprehensive overview of respondent profiles. Hypothesis testing and examination of relationships among the study variables were performed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) v.4.1.0.9-2024. This sophisticated statistical technique was selected for its capability to handle complex, multi-layered models, as well as its suitability for evaluating both direct and indirect effects among the variables. By leveraging PLS-SEM, the study ensured robust testing of the proposed hypotheses and gained nuanced insights into the mediating effects of PSYE. The combined use of these advanced analytical tools not only enhanced the reliability and validity of the results but also enabled the drawing of well-informed conclusions regarding the interplay between spiritual leadership, psychological empowerment, and employee performance.

Results

The Outer Model

Construct Validity

Construct validity, also known as convergent validity, was assessed to determine whether the measurement items accurately reflected their intended constructs. This validation ensures that items purportedly measuring the same construct are indeed related. In this study, reliability scores for all items exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 [27], demonstrating strong consistency among the measurement items.

Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) test was conducted to measure internal consistency across scale items. CR values, represented by "rho_a," for all variables surpassed the established 0.7 threshold, as outlined by Bryman and Cramer [31] and [27]. This result indicates a high level of reliability in capturing the underlying constructs of the study.

To further evaluate how much variance in each construct was explained by its items compared to error variance, the average variance extracted (AVE) test was performed. Results revealed AVE values exceeding the 0.5 cut-off for all constructs, meeting the criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker [32]. This indicates that the items adequately captured the variance of their respective constructs, with minimal measurement error. In line with Fornell and Larcker's guidelines, an AVE value of at least 0.50 confirms that items contribute more to the construct than to errors, enhancing the validity of the outer model. Details are provided in Table 1.

Variables	Items	" λ "	"AVE"	" α "	"rho_a"
	SPRL-1	0.936			
	SPRL-2	0.723			
	SPRL-3	0.931			
	SPRL-4	0.707			

Spiritual Leadership "SPRL"	SPRL-5	0.867	0.694	0.946	0.970
	SPRL-6	0.722			
	SPRL-7	0.935			
	SPRL-8	0.742			
	SPRL-9	0.916			
Employee Performance "EMP"	EMP-1	0.922	0.761	0.919	0.947
	EMP-2	0.808			
	EMP-3	0.870			
	EMP-4	0.761			
	EMP-5	0.793			
Psychological Empowerment "PSYE"	PSYE-1	0.841	0.563	0.867	0.911
	PSYE-2	0.837			
	PSYE-3	0.893			
	PSYE-4	0.718			
	PSYE-5	0.707			
	PSYE-6	0.726			
	PSYE-7	0.707			

Table 1. Construct validity

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is a critical measure to ensure that the constructs in the proposed model are conceptually distinct and do not overlap. This is essential for confirming the robustness of the measurement model, as it ensures that each construct captures a unique aspect of the theoretical framework without being overly correlated with other constructs. The evaluation of discriminant validity in this study was performed using two well-established approaches: The Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations.

Variables	SPRL	EMP	PSYE
SPRL	0.833		
EMP	0.792	0.872	
PSYE	0.697	0.779	0.751

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker criterion

The square root of the Average Variance Extracted is shown by the bolded figures.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with all other constructs. This indicates that a construct explains more variance in its own indicators than it shares with other constructs. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, the square roots of the AVEs for all constructs in this study were consistently higher than their respective correlations with other constructs. This alignment with Fornell and Larcker's [32] recommendations confirms the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Moreover, the cross-loading analysis was performed to verify that each item within the model loads more strongly on its intended construct than on any other constructs. Results revealed that

all items exhibited higher loadings on their associated constructs compared to unrelated constructs, providing further evidence of the model's discriminant validity. These findings align with Chin's [33] guidelines for evaluating construct distinctiveness, underscoring the reliability of the measurement model.

The HTMT ratio of correlations was also calculated as a complementary method to assess discriminant validity. The HTMT is a stricter criterion that quantifies the degree of similarity between constructs. According to Henseler et al. [34] benchmark, HTMT values below 0.90 suggest sufficient discriminant validity. In this study, HTMT values for all constructs were well within the acceptable range, as shown in Table 3, thereby supporting the notion that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another.

The results from these three analyses, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loading patterns, and HTMT ratios, collectively provide robust evidence for the discriminant validity of the model. These results confirm that the constructs within the proposed framework represent distinct dimensions of the theoretical model, ensuring that each variable captures its intended concept without excessive overlap. This strong discriminant validity enhances the overall reliability and credibility of the findings, establishing a solid foundation for subsequent hypothesis testing and structural modelling.

Variables	EMP	SPRL	PSYE
EMP			
SPRL	0.819		
PSYE	0.740	0.711	

Table 3. HTMT Results

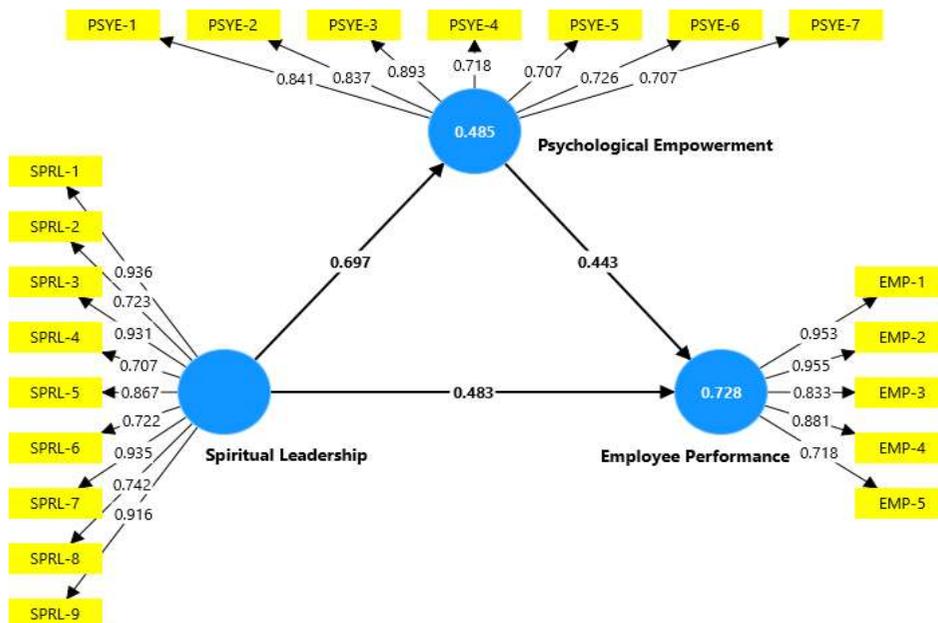


Figure 2. Measurement model

The Inner Model**Coefficient of Determination (R²)**

The coefficient of determination (R²) was computed to assess the predictive accuracy of the model. R² values indicate the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables. In this study, R² values for the dependent variables were found to be within moderate to high ranges, signifying that the independent variables had substantial explanatory power.

According to Chin's [33] evaluation thresholds, the results, shown in Table 4, demonstrate that the predictive power of the model is statistically significant.

Variable	R ²	Level
EMP	0.728	High
PSYE	0.485	Moderate

Table 4. R² test results**Effect Size (f²)**

To assess the relative impact of each independent variable on the dependent variables, effect size (f²) calculations were performed. Cohen's [35] guidelines classify effect sizes as small (0.02), medium (0.15), or large (0.35). Results presented in Table 5 indicate that the effect sizes of the independent variables on the dependent variables ranged from medium to large, suggesting meaningful and significant impacts within the proposed model.

Variables	EMP	PSYE
SPRL	0.442 (Large)	0.943 (Large)
PSYE	0.371 (Large)	

Table 5. Effect size (f²)**Goodness of Fit (GoF)**

The overall fit of the structural equation model was evaluated using the Goodness of Fit (GoF) index, which provides a global measure of model adequacy. The GoF value was calculated as follows:

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{R^2 \times \text{AVE}}$$

$$\text{GoF} = 0.639$$

The computed GoF value for the model was 0.639, exceeding the benchmark established by Wetzels et al. [[36]). This result confirms that the proposed model achieves an adequate level of fit, making it a reliable representation of the relationships among the constructs in this study.

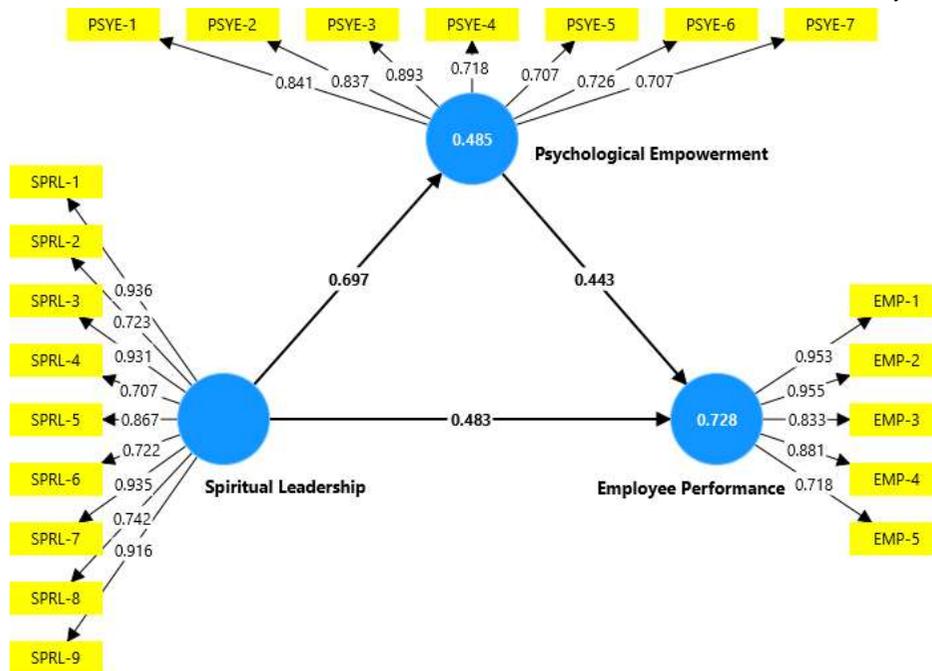


Figure 3. The final model

Hypothesis Testing: Significance of Path Coefficients

Direct Relationships

The analysis of direct relationships between the study constructs was conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM), enabling an evaluation of the hypothesized links. The results revealed the following key findings:

- Spiritual Leadership (SPRL) → Employee Performance (EMP):** SPRL demonstrated a substantial positive effect on EMP, with an effect size of 0.442, standardized beta (Std.-Beta) coefficient of 0.483, and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that spiritual leadership significantly enhances employee performance, validating Hypothesis H1.
- Spiritual Leadership (SPRL) → Psychological Empowerment (PSYE):** SPRL also exhibited a strong positive influence on PSYE, with an effect size of 0.943, a Std.-Beta coefficient of 0.697, and a P-value of 0.000. This finding highlights the critical role of spiritual leadership in fostering psychological empowerment among employees, supporting Hypothesis H2.
- Psychological Empowerment (PSYE) → Employee Performance (EMP):** The results further indicated that PSYE positively impacts EMP, with an effect size of 0.371, a Std.-Beta coefficient of 0.443, and a P-value of 0.000. This establishes psychological empowerment as a significant driver of employee performance, affirming Hypothesis H3.

The significant direct relationships observed emphasize the pivotal role of spiritual leadership in shaping both empowerment and performance outcomes. These results align with theoretical

propositions, demonstrating that an organizational culture rooted in vision, faith, and altruism positively influences employee attitudes and behaviours. Figures 3 and 4 provide visual representations of these direct pathways, while detailed results are tabulated in Tables 6 and 7.

Hypothesis	β	σ	t-score(O/STDEV)	Sig.	Result
H-1: SPRL ->EMP	0.483	0.052	9.239	0.000	√**
H-2: SPRL ->PSYE	0.697	0.035	19.859	0.000	√**
H-3: PSYE ->EMP	0.443	0.050	8.880	0.000	√**

Table 6. Direct path coefficient
Significant at P** = 0.000

Hypothesis	β	σ	t-score(O/STDEV)	Sig.	Result
H-4: SPRL ->PSYE ->EMP	0.308	0.049	6.326	0.000	√**

Table 7. Indirect path coefficient
Significant at P** = 0.000

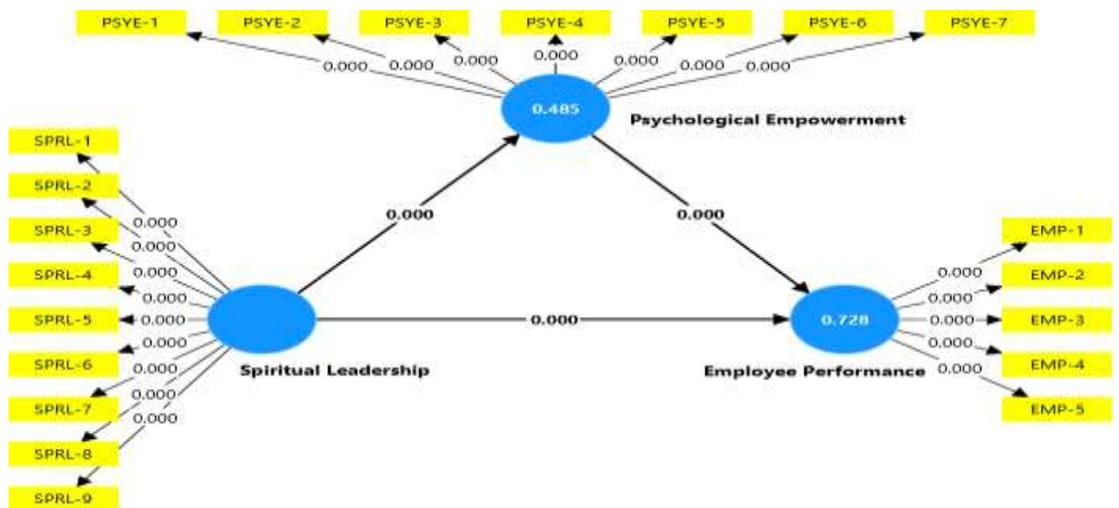


Figure 4. Significance of path coefficients

Indirect Relationships and Mediation Analysis

To explore the mediating role of PSYE in the relationship between SPRL and EMP, the indirect effects were examined using SEM. The analysis showed:

- **SPRL → PSYE → EMP:**

The mediating role of PSYE was confirmed, with an indirect effect size of 0.308, a Std.-Beta coefficient of 0.308, and a P-value of 0.000. This indicates that PSYE significantly mediates the relationship between SPRL and EMP, providing robust support for Hypothesis H4.

The mediation analysis underscores the importance of psychological empowerment as a mechanism through which spiritual leadership enhances employee performance. This finding highlights that while SPRL has a direct impact on EMP, its influence is amplified when employees feel empowered. Empowerment fosters a sense of meaning, autonomy, and competence, translating leadership practices into improved job performance.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Findings

The study findings underscore the interconnectedness of leadership, empowerment, and performance in organizational settings. From a theoretical standpoint, the results validate the central role of psychological empowerment in leadership-performance dynamics, supporting established frameworks such as Fry's [28] spiritual leadership theory. Practically, the findings suggest that organizations seeking to enhance employee performance should prioritize leadership strategies that inspire vision, foster faith, and promote altruism, while simultaneously empowering employees to take ownership of their roles.

The significant relationships observed not only strengthen the theoretical model but also offer actionable insights for managers and leaders in the tourism industry and beyond. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate these pathways, providing a comprehensive view of the structural relationships. Tables 6 and 7 further detail the statistical outcomes, solidifying the evidence for each study hypotheses.

Research Discussion and Implications

This study aimed to explore the influence of SPRL on EMP within the Egyptian tourism sector, while also examining the mediating role of PSYE in this dynamic relationship. The findings clearly indicate that SPRL significantly and positively impacts EMP, a result that aligns closely with Rahmatika et al. [9]. Their research demonstrated how spiritual leadership fosters higher levels of employee engagement, discretionary effort, and job satisfaction by encouraging a deeper sense of connection to organizational goals and values. Spiritual leaders inspire their teams by creating a shared vision, demonstrating altruistic love, and nurturing a sense of higher purpose, which in turn motivates employees to exceed expectations [19]. This comprehensive approach not only improves task performance but also cultivates creativity, resilience, and organizational commitment, crucial factors for the tourism sector's success.

In addition to its direct impact on EMP, this study reveals that SPRL significantly enhances employees' PSYE. This finding is consistent with Al Otaibi et al. [18], who highlighted how spiritual leadership creates an environment where employees feel competent, autonomous, and connected to meaningful work. By focusing on intrinsic motivation, spiritual leaders empower their teams to take ownership of their roles, exhibit innovative thinking, and achieve exceptional outcomes. The emphasis on purpose-driven leadership transforms the workplace into a supportive space that values individual contributions while aligning them with organizational objectives.

Moreover, the data underscore the strong positive effect of PSYE on EMP. This outcome resonates with the work of Sahadev et al. [26], which emphasized that psychological empowerment is a critical driver of task proficiency, teamwork, and innovation.

Employees who perceive themselves as psychologically empowered are more likely to demonstrate proactive behaviours, problem-solving skills, and collaborative efforts, all of which contribute to enhanced organizational performance. This is particularly relevant in the context of the tourism sector, where adaptability, creativity, and effective communication are indispensable.

Crucially, the findings highlight the mediating role of PSYE in the relationship between SPRL and EMP. This supports Wang et al. [21], who argued that psychological empowerment serves as a key mechanism linking leadership styles to performance outcomes. By fostering empowerment, SPRL not only directly enhances EMP but also indirectly amplifies its effects by enabling employees to maximize their potential. This dual impact illustrates the importance of creating a psychologically empowering work environment where employees feel both supported and capable of making meaningful contributions to organizational success.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes significantly to the understanding of leadership and employee performance by addressing critical gaps in the literature. The study provides empirical evidence for the mediating role of PSYE in the relationship between SPRL and EMP, offering new insights into how psychological constructs can enhance the effects of leadership. The findings underscore the importance of integrating spiritual leadership principles with psychological empowerment theories, thereby establishing a more nuanced framework for understanding employee behaviour and performance.

This research also broadens the applicability of spiritual leadership by demonstrating its relevance in the tourism sector, a field that demands high levels of employee engagement, adaptability, and service quality. By integrating concepts from spiritual leadership and empowerment theories, the study establishes a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how leadership practices can drive superior employee outcomes in service-intensive industries. The findings highlight the potential for PSYE to act as a transformative mechanism that bridges the gap between leadership intentions and employee performance, paving the way for future research on related constructs such as organizational culture, employee well-being, and resilience. Future research could build on these insights by exploring contextual and cultural factors that may influence the interplay between SPRL, PSYE, and EMP. For instance, examining how organizational size, structure, or cultural diversity moderates these relationships could provide a deeper understanding of their dynamics. Similarly, investigating additional mediators, such as job satisfaction or organizational trust, could offer a more comprehensive view of the mechanisms through which SPRL influences EMP.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have significant practical implications for managers and decision-makers in the travel and tourism sector. The demonstrated positive impact of SPRL on EMP underscores the importance of adopting leadership practices that emphasize shared values, a sense of purpose, and meaningful connections. Managers should focus on cultivating spiritual leadership skills through targeted training programs designed to enhance visionary thinking, altruistic behaviour, and the ability to foster a sense of community within their teams. These skills

enable leaders to create environments where employees feel valued, inspired, and motivated to perform at their best. Fostering PSYE among employees should also be a strategic priority for organizations seeking to improve performance outcomes. Managers can enhance PSYE by creating a workplace culture that emphasizes autonomy, competence, meaningful work, and a sense of impact. Practical steps include providing employees with greater decision-making authority, offering opportunities for skill development and professional growth, and recognizing individual contributions in a meaningful way. Aligning job roles with employees' strengths and aspirations further enhances their sense of purpose and ownership, which in turn drives performance and innovation.

Further, organizations should implement strategies to align individual goals with overarching organizational objectives. Transparent communication, regular feedback, and recognition programs can help employees feel connected to their work and the organization's mission. Providing career development opportunities and emphasizing the value of employees' contributions further strengthens their commitment and motivation. By integrating SPRL practices with initiatives that promote PSYE, organizations in the tourism sector can create a supportive, high-performing work environment that drives competitive advantage in a demanding industry.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between SPRL and EMP in the Egyptian tourism sector, with a particular focus on the mediating role of PSYE. By collecting data from 399 tour operators and utilizing advanced statistical tools such as Excel v.15-2013 for data organization, SPSS v.29-2022 for descriptive analysis, and PLS-SEM v.4.1.0.9.2024 for structural equation modelling, the study offered a methodologically rigorous approach. The findings demonstrated that SPRL positively and significantly influences both PSYE and EMP, highlighting the ability of spiritual leadership to foster an environment where employees feel connected, motivated, and purposeful. Moreover, the results revealed a partial mediation effect of PSYE in the relationship between SPRL and EMP, providing evidence that psychological empowerment acts as a crucial conduit through which the benefits of spiritual leadership translate into improved performance outcomes. These results align with previous studies, such as Rahmatika et al. [9] and Al Otaibi et al. [18], which emphasize the transformative power of spiritual leadership in enhancing engagement, autonomy, and job satisfaction. The findings not only address a critical gap in the literature but also offer valuable insights into how leadership styles can influence employee outcomes in dynamic and customer-facing industries such as tourism.

From a practical standpoint, these findings have significant implications for both managers and policymakers in the Egyptian tourism sector. Managers are encouraged to adopt leadership development programs that emphasize spiritual leadership principles, such as fostering a shared sense of purpose, promoting value-driven decision-making, and creating meaningful work environments. By embedding psychological empowerment into organizational practices through enhanced autonomy, competence-building initiatives, and opportunities for impactful contributions, leaders can unlock employees' full potential. Such efforts can lead to greater engagement, creativity, and alignment with organizational goals, ultimately driving better performance and job satisfaction. Policymakers, on the other hand, can leverage these insights to formulate strategies that support leadership practices balancing employee well-being with organizational objectives, ensuring long-term sustainability in the tourism sector. As the industry

faces increasing global competition and rapid environmental changes, fostering a workforce that is motivated, purpose-driven, and empowered will be key to maintaining competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth. This study highlights the critical role of spiritual leadership and psychological empowerment as strategic levers for enhancing organizational resilience and success, offering a blueprint for creating high-performing and resilient organizations in the tourism sector and beyond.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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