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Developing a Scale to Measure Destination Gender

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Rosen Research Focus | Tingting Zhang

DEVELOPING A SCALE TO MEASURE DESTINATION GENDER

Destinations such as Las Vegas can be considered 'masculine' due to their associations with freedom.

Whether they depict the rugged landscape of the American West or the seductive charm of a South Asian beach, photographs and their accompanying text are powerful drivers of tourism demand. But what lies behind our response to such tourism tropes? Rosen College researchers have produced a new study which reappraises destination marketing through a gender-based lens. Led by Dr. Tingting Zhang, the study has developed and validated a cross-cultural scale to determine 'destination gender', or whether a location should be thought of as having masculine or feminine gender traits and appeal.

Destination marketing is back in business, as countries, regions and cities around the world compete to attract the tourists who stayed away as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Promoting the experiences and benefits associated with a specific location, destination marketing uses emotional cues to whet visitors' appetites and inspire them to visit. Whether it advertises outdoor adventure, cultural stimulation, sensory indulgence, or spiritual awakening, how a destination brands itself is vitally important. To study the nuances of such branding requires a consideration of the explicit and subliminal messages conveyed in destination marketing materials.

While the broader term 'destination personality' has a longer history in tourism marketing literature, destination gender is more specific and is only just beginning to attract attention. Led by Dr. Tingting Zhang, Assistant Professor at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, new research

into the subject has been published in the prestigious journal *Tourism Management*.

Gender identity is not only important for how people think about themselves, it also affects how they relate to other people, places and objects, which includes their purchasing decisions. As Zhang explains, gender is 'one of the most important self-defined labels individuals use to consider their self-concept and process the world around them.' Zhang and her co-authors argue that tourist destinations can tap into this psychology by offering opportunities for people to satisfy their 'emotional and identity needs'.

Their new study defines destination gender as a concept in tourism and hospitality, and both establishes and validates a 'Destination Gender Scale' (DGS) to measure it.

DESTINATION GENDER AND MARKETING

According to gender role theory, gender is socially and culturally constructed. As the study explains: 'Typical masculine traits include being dominant, adventurous, ambitious and

forceful, while feminine traits mainly revolve around being sensitive, loving and kind.' The study notes that various types of masculinity and femininity can co-exist, and an individual's gender identity reflects their sense of being male or female, rather than their biologically assigned sex.

Zhang and her collaborators define destination gender as 'a set of human masculine and feminine traits through which consumers envisage a destination as a man or woman.' According to the literature review which informed the research, Las Vegas, for example, could be thought of as an essentially masculine destination identified with 'freedom and lack of inhibition.' On the other hand, Paris, known for its 'elegance and romance', could be thought of as feminine.

Gendered consumption and brand masculinity/femininity is well-known in academic literature. For example, marketers may discuss whether logos are round and feminine in shape, or angular and masculine. However, the Rosen study is one of the first to both consider tourists' perceptions of destinations' gender traits and identify a scale

to measure them. Such gender traits can help destination marketers demonstrate a location's 'symbolic and hedonic value'—the pleasure and delight that consumers associate with it, and how it can satisfy a consumer's needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

The Destination Gender Scale (DGS) was developed in six stages. To ensure that it operates cross-culturally, the work was begun in China and then validated in the United States.

A set of gender-related terms, or 'items', was first gathered from the extant literature and from interviews the research team conducted. In the primary interviews, participants were asked to talk about their concept of gender with regards to photographs of tourist destinations. The resultant set included items such as 'daring', 'rough', 'sturdy' and 'adventurous' associated with masculinity, and 'sensitive', 'sentimental', 'passionate', and 'loving' associated with femininity.

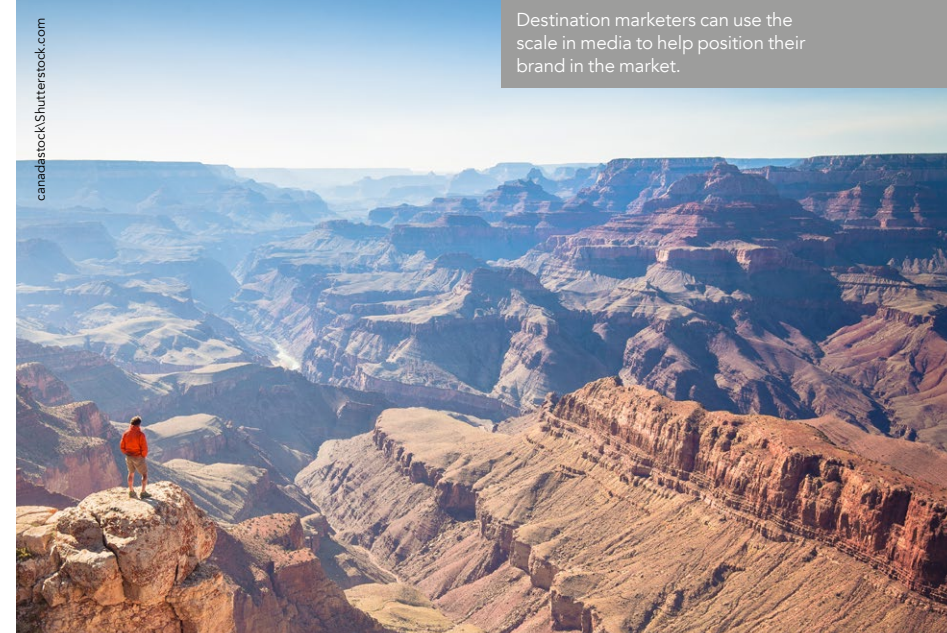
The set of items was pretested with the help of an expert panel. The resultant items were finessed further using Exploratory Factor Analysis, and then tested for reliability, validity and latent structure using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Structural Equation Modelling was used to assess the scale's nomological validity (the relationships between variables) before being validated in a Western cultural context in the United States.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The study's rigorous research and testing identified a set of 25 cross-culturally valid items (second-order constructs) to describe destinations in terms of male or female gender attributes (first-order constructs). These attributes are detailed below.

Twelve masculine attributes were sub-divided under four subscales of 'dominance', 'vigor', 'courage' and 'competence'. For example, 'dominance' comprised 'dominant', 'charismatic', 'decisive' and 'grand'; contrastingly, 'courage' comprised 'daring', 'adventurous' and 'fierce'.

Thirteen feminine attributes were sub-divided under four subscales of 'grace', 'softness', 'gorgeousness' and 'kind-heartedness'. For example, 'grace' comprised 'relaxing', 'idyllic' and 'tender', and 'gorgeousness' comprised 'luscious', 'charming' and 'romantic'. In addition, the results confirmed that



Destination marketers can use the scale in media to help position their brand in the market.

FEMININE TRAITS APPEAR TO INFLUENCE TRAVELERS' ACTUAL / IDEAL GENDER IDENTITY MORE STRONGLY THAN MASCULINE TRAITS.



A destination's perceived femininity comes from both internal and external qualities.

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THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT GENDER CUES ARE SIGNIFICANT IN NUDGING TRAVEL DECISIONS.

destination gender is significantly related to an individual's perceived and actual gender identity, which also affects their inclination to revisit destinations. As the research team explains, 'The greater the degree to which individuals connect the self (or an ideal self) to a destination's gender attributes, the more likely they are to visit that destination'—regardless of individuals' biological sex.

OUTCOMES

Zhang's research consolidates destination gender into a single measurement, the Destination Gender Scale (DGS), comprising the sub-dimensions of femininity and masculinity that tourists associate with vacation locations.

Multiple, distinct items were included in the sub-dimensions, enabling the scale to measure far more than a destination's gender. As Zhang explains: 'According to the results, the four dimensions of destination femininity either refer to outward aesthetics such as 'grace' and 'gorgeousness', or inner qualities often associated with women, including 'softness' and 'kind-heartedness.' Thus, a sense of external and internal constitutes the essence of destinations' femininity.'

The scale's level of sophistication distinguishes it from other constructs used to measure brand gender and personality. For example, the Rosen study takes cultural issues into account and corroborates gender as a 'socially constructed concept', finding that 'even destination gender can be conditioned by society's views on gender images ascribed to humans'.

The scale also provides evidence that destination gender 'can positively affect individuals' actual / ideal gender identity congruity and revisit intentions'. As Zhang explains, 'The greater the degree to which individuals connect the self (or an ideal self) to a destination's gender attributes, the more likely they are to visit that destination.'

Interestingly, the research shows that individuals perceive greater degrees of actual and ideal gender identity congruity for destinations with more dominant feminine traits than those with more dominant masculine traits. According to the report: 'This finding suggests that consistent with how women are more likely to self-assess their actual appearance than men, consumers are more likely to evaluate a destination's outward feminine (vs masculine) attractiveness and cues.'

IMPLICATIONS

The Destination Gender Scale (DGS) is a valuable tool to help destinations use masculine and feminine traits to define their gender image. However, as Zhang and her collaborators point out, the gender dimensions are not mutually exclusive and 'both DGS subscales can be applied, allowing for fluidity in projecting a destination's gender image across gender-associated traits.'

Destination marketers can also use the scale's gender trait items in text, photographs or other imagery to help position their destination's brand. For example, if a marketer wants to promote a destination as having a masculine identity, the scale's items of 'dominance', 'vigor', 'courage' and 'competence' could help them plan their branding campaign.

In addition, the study suggests that, because of the link between destinations' and individuals' own gender identities, destination marketers should make use of advanced technologies to profile customers and develop branding and communication strategies that align with their 'self-concepts.' With this in mind, it is interesting to note that feminine traits appear to influence travelers' actual / ideal gender identity more strongly than masculine traits.

The study acknowledges that more research is needed, not least because of the complexity of gender issues. For example, it suggests: 'Research could evaluate complicated destination gender types (ie transgender or third gender) and develop essential elements to portray a destination's gender image through more nuanced categories.'

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER CUES

While destination gender is just one aspect of destination brand personality, there is growing evidence that gender cues are significant in nudging travel decisions.

As the report concludes: 'This study not only offers a new angle of understanding the multi-dimensional structure of destination gender and its cross-cultural differences, but also a customised marketing tool for destination managers to evaluate the perceived destination gender image, and hence, shed new light on destination branding strategies via satisfying consumers' gender identity.'

RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Tingting Zhang and collaborators study the concept of 'destination gender' and the impact this could have on destination marketing.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE

What did you find most interesting in the differences between Chinese and American audiences in thinking about destination gender?

Unlike Chinese consumers, while Americans concur that destinations can be described as dominant, charismatic, and decisive, they do not consider such destinations to be exclusively masculine. This discrepancy may be due to China's deep-seated hierarchical social structure following from the country's long history of feudal governance; in particular, only men could assume leadership roles in the family, department, and country. Given America's social evolution and feminist movements advocating for sex equality, the traditional masculine stereotype of dominance has been shared and embodied by men and women over time.

Dr. Tingting Zhang



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