Is warmth more critical than competence? Understanding how destination gender affects destination identification and destination advocacy

Abstract

Purpose: This investigation examines a new approach to understanding the interrelationships between destination brand gender, stereotypes, destination brand identification, and brand advocacy, as well as the mediating role of destination warmth (vs. competence) in the connections between destination brand femininity (vs. masculinity) and destination brand identification.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative study and literature review were conducted to revisit and refine the items on the scale. Preliminary item reduction was qualitatively grounded in focus groups, a panel of experts, and a pilot study. A follow-up quantitative evaluation of two studies (N1 = 705 and N2 = 472) was conducted to test seven hypotheses using exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis with structural equation modeling.

Findings: The findings provide robust evidence for the interrelationships among destination brand gender, stereotypes, destination identification, and destination advocacy. The outcomes also reveal that warmth is more important than competence for destination identification. Finally, the results indicated that only destination warmth serves as a partial mediator in the association between destination brand masculinity and femininity, on the one hand, and destination identification, on the other hand.

Originality/value: This article adds to the destination branding literature by using social role theory and the stereotype content model to explore novel connections among destination brand gender, stereotypes, destination brand identification, and brand advocacy.

Keywords: social role theory, destination brand gender, warmth, competence, destination identification, and destination advocacy.

1. Introduction

Although product and service branding has yielded significant benefits for numerous marketers, the concept of branding in the tourism industry has yet to be fully investigated. It aids in the development of a strong and distinct destination image by powerfully and positively presenting a destination in the global marketplace (Chiang and Chen, 2023). Recently, the Tourism and Travel Research Association (TTRA) constructed a membership-wide plan for the most important issues in travel research, identifying destination image and competitiveness as the two management research concerns that will be most critical for decision-makers in the coming years (Hamdy and Zhang, Eid, 2023). Branding strategies can give destinations a competitive advantage by helping them establish a strong and distinctive image. As destinations have learned to compete to attract visitors, they have drawn academic and practical interest (Pan et al., 2021). Many brand studies show that brands have traits that resemble those of a human personality (Pang and Ding, 2021).

In this regard, consumers can also evaluate brands just as they evaluate individuals or groups, which creates a brand impression just like a personality does (Nash and Sidhu, 2023; Pan et al., 2021). In this regard, customers' opinions of a brand's truthfulness (i.e., warmth) and ability (i.e., competence) affect their relationships with it (Li *et al.*, 2023; Micevski *et al.*, 2021). More specifically, stereotypes (e.g., truthfulness and ability) can influence consumer choices and indicate future behavioral outcomes (Szőcs *et al.*, 2023), so destination managers who are cognizant of stereotypes will probably enhance their brands' competitiveness more than their competitors will (Hassan and Mahrous, 2019). The importance of warmth and competence impressions in the business context is unsurprising (Gidaković and Zabkar, 2022), so

understanding how stakeholders (e.g., tourists) form these impressions is, for many reasons, both theoretically and practically advisable in the context of destination branding.

First, one of the issues that developing country tourism marketers encounter is negative stereotypes, which impair the image of destinations. Admittedly, every destination has both positive and negative stereotypes that impact tourists' judgments and travel decisions (Hefny, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2023). An example of this might be Egypt, as a study context, which is the most popular travel destination among all MENA countries (Hamdy *et al.*, 2023) but is also notorious for its tourist harassment and political instability. All of these factors combine to place the country in an unfavorable 60th place out of 140 nations evaluated for their travel sector development (Tourism and Unwto, 2022). Second, academic research is still limited in terms of understanding whether and how opinions about a certain destination (i.e., stereotypes) influence consumer behavior toward that destination. Addressing these issues is critical to managing destination brands (Guo *et al.*, 2022; Micevski *et al.*, 2021). In this respect, prior marketing studies have examined stereotypes linked to brands (e.g., He and Ge, 2023; Kolbl *et al.*, 2019), chatbots (e.g., Li and Wang, 2023), organizations (e.g., Pitardi *et al.*, 2023), advertising (e.g., Lee and Oh, 2021), and country and national stereotypes (e.g., Gomez-Diaz, 2019; Micevski *et al.*, 2021), but few researchers have explored travel destination brands from the viewpoint of the stereotypes content model (SCM). This investigation aims to address this gap.

Fortunately, anthropomorphic cognition is so widespread that a gendered lens might be used to evaluate nonhuman objects (for example, destination branding). Given the rising expressive and symbolic value of brands, customer preference for a single brand may be a helpful predictor of a customer's gender (Puzakova and Kwak, 2023; Sharma and Rahman, 2022). Prior studies have extensively explored biological gender (male and female), but destination brand

gender personality (DBGP) has received much less attention (Pan *et al.*, 2021; Pitardi *et al.*, 2023). Additional empirical evidence is needed to design and analyze destination gender as a critical component of the gender literature (Cifci *et al.*, 2023; Pan *et al.*, 2021; Tong *et al.*, 2023). To remedy this failure, the current investigation adds to the evidence linking gender to evaluating competence and the warmth of stereotypes in the setting of the DBGP using the mechanism of social role theory. The purpose of the present article is to look for such evidence, guided by the following research questions:

RQ.1: What are the associations between DBGP and destination stereotypes that support destination identification and subsequently impact destination advocacy?

RQ.2: How do destination stereotypes help improve destination identification by mediating the relationship between DBGP and destination identification?

In addressing the above gaps, this investigation adds to the existing brand research agenda in many ways. First, prior branding investigations have revealed that customers link firms with a wide range of personal qualities, including feminine and masculine attributes, which are critical for positioning and establishing a brand (Ulrich et al., 2020). Surprisingly, however, the destination branding literature has largely ignored the effects of DBGP (feminine and masculine) on perceptions of competence and the warmth of stereotypes. For this reason, the present investigation proposes extending this line of thinking by investigating the connections between destination brand feminine (vs. masculine) and destination warmth (vs. competence) based on the logic of social role theory (e.g.; Eagly and Sczesny 2019; Eagly and Wood 2012) and the literature (Cooke *et al.*, 2022; Nash and Sidhu, 2023; Pogacar *et al.*, 2021).
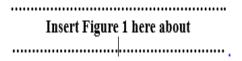
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Second, over time, marketers have recognized identification as a key strategy for achieving successful brand management (Kumar and Kaushik, 2017), but little research has examined the significance of destination brand identification in developing long-term and positive connections between visitors and the places to which they travel (Chiang and Chen, 2023). In this respect, this investigation has implications for the literature on the relative significance of warmth and competence perceptions in the formation of consumer-company connections. While some researchers indicate that warmth is the key motivator (Kolbl *et al.*, 2019), others claim that competence is more important (Güntürkün *et al.*, 2020; Xue *et al.*, 2020); finally, Japutra *et al.* (2018) demonstrate that both warmth and competence are vital. More specifically, prior research has concentrated on the unequal effect of stereotypes on brand identification in the dimension of warmth (Karri and Dogra, 2022; Kolbl *et al.*, 2019), but these studies have failed to validate this in terms of competency. These inconclusive findings impede the development of a broad theoretical understanding of the roles of warmth and competence in the connections between the customer and the service provider (in this case, the destination). As a result, there is an ongoing but as yet unresolved debate in the literature over which factor is more relevant to driving the results of marketing and the need for further empirical study (Li and Ma, 2023).

Third, to the authors' knowledge, no research has investigated the role of warmth and the competence of stereotypes in mediating the connections between DBGP and identifying a destination. Similarly, in the destination branding literature, collective investigations of DBGP, stereotypes, identification, and destination advocacy are relatively new. Finally, from a managerial standpoint, this investigation provides strategic directions for destination management organizations (DMOs) to develop gender personality-based strategies for destination positioning to generate positive perceptions of stereotypes among visitors and to manage both positive and

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negative tourist stereotypes, eventually improving destination identification and encouraging destination advocacy.

2. Conceptual model and hypothesis development

The current research incorporates social role theory (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019) and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) as the conceptual model's foundation (see Figure 1). The following section expands on the framework's relations and accompanying hypotheses.

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The theory of social roles presents a compelling argument for the propagation of gender stereotypes (Eagly and Wood, 2012). In this regard, implicit gender prejudices may influence how people perceive the warmth and ability of others. These prejudices result from the unequal distribution of roles between men and women in society, which is due to societal differences and varying circumstances, expectations, and customs (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019; Van et al., 2012). More specifically, men are often represented as dominant—agentic, skilled, aggressive, and competitive—while women are portrayed as expressive—communal, caring toward others, welcoming, and selfless (Van et al., 2012). Consequently, males prioritize goal accomplishment, assertiveness, and performance (i.e., competence), while women emphasize social ties, caring, and kindness (i.e., warmth) (Neale et al., 2016). The theories proposed by Eagly and Sczesny (2019), Eagly and Wood (2012), and Martin and Slepian (2021) contend that a person's masculine and feminine features may be able to explain their warmth and competence ratings.

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In light of this, stereotypes based on gender help individuals categorize and simplify their observations, providing predictions about other people's characteristics, such as their friendliness and competence (Eagly and Sczesny, 2019; Eagly and Wood, 2012). Earlier branding investigations have shown that customers subordinate certain brands using a broad range of traits; for example, Pang and Ding, (2021) and Ulrich *et al* (2020) found that brands need feminine and masculine attributes to be defined and positioned. Ekinci *et al.* (2013) indicate that adding feminine and competence-related attributes to a brand's personality helps express its symbolic and hedonic worth. A person's own gender identity might affect how they see a location (Pan *et al.*, 2021). Given that tourism is a product of a gendered society, its creation, presentation, and consumption are all subject to gendered standards, so places are critically evaluated and recognized as sociocultural constructions, as opposed to purely physical sites (Calvet *et al.*, 2022; Pritchard, 2018).

Destination stereotypes are broadly held judgments and beliefs about what distinguishes a nation; for instance, Germany is seen as a highly qualified but unemotional nation, while Portugal is seen as a friendly but slightly inefficient nation (Li and Ma, 2023; Micevski *et al.*, 2021). In conclusion, based on social role theory, warmth and competence dimensions reflect qualities of femininity and masculinity (Eagly and Wood, 2012). This paper expands on the way in which DBGP dimensions impact the assessment of destination warmth and competence. In other words, this paper proposes that destination brand femininity will have a greater impact than masculinity on destination warmth (as opposed to competence). The following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Destination brand masculinity has a more significant effect on competence (H1a) than warmth has (H1b).

H2: Destination brand femininity has a more significant effect on warmth (H2b) than competence has (H2a).

In marketing, social identity theory has been used to explain how consumers identify with and attribute traits that significantly represent self-referring categories to brands (Wen and Huang, 2021). Following Tajfel and Turner's (1986) theory of social identity, when travelers describe their feelings about themselves, they often form a social identity: they label themselves as, or identify with, members of various groups (e.g., based on interests, gender, profession, or ethnicity). People who have a positive perception of a social group tend to label it amicable and cooperative. This occurs when they have positive impressions of the group's ability to achieve its stated objectives. They then label it competent (Fiske *et al.*, 2007; Ren *et al.*, 2023). Stereotypes, such as warmth and competence, play significant roles in predicting consumers' good behavior and fostering consumer–brand associations (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2021; Huang *et al.*, 2023; Japutra *et al.*, 2020). More specifically, stereotypes allow for the evaluation of a brand's consumer-based identity (Güntürkün *et al.*, 2020; He and Ge, 2023; Kolbl *et al.*, 2019). Customer identification with a brand is a significant determinant of consumer behavior in numerous contexts (e.g., destination branding) (Zhang *et al.*, 2022), and researchers have shown that visitors who have deeply identified with a site are more likely to return to that site and to suggest it to others (Molinillo *et al.*, 2022). In conclusion, we propose, on the basis of social identity theory, that destination warmth and competence positively influence destination identification and subsequently impact brand advocacy. We propose the following:

H3: Destination warmth has a significant influence on destination identification.

H4: Destination competence has a significant influence on destination identification.

H5: Destination identification positively impacts destination advocacy.

The phenomenon of customers evaluating brands in terms of femininity and masculinity (Grohmann, 2009) and applying social judgment to nonhuman things (Sharma and Rahman, 2022) indicates that they identify and understand physical markers of femininity and masculinity in a brand setting. Perceptions of brand femininity and masculinity effectively predict brand equity above and beyond other brand characteristics (Lieven *et al.*, 2015). The literature proposes that brand femininity and masculinity result in positive customer responses (Grohmann, 2009; Lieven *et al.*, 2015), but empirical confirmation of this relationship is limited. A strong brand identity also satisfies consumers on a symbolic rather than practical level, thus enhancing their perception of value and helping them recognize the brand (Büyükdağ and Kitapci, 2021). Gender is a permanent and distinctive part of a person's identity, according to gender schema theory, and is the most reliable predictor of personality traits, determining people's sense of self-worth (Puzakova and Kwak, 2023). Diamantopoulos *et al.*, (2017) showed that consumers responded favorably to a brand's masculinity and femininity; these researchers found that customers were more likely to buy from a friendly and informed nation.

Brand identification may also play an important role in allowing customers to express what their self-definition and self-identity require (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). The gender of a brand may influence customer attitudes, impressions, brand value, and future buying intentions (Carter, 2014; Neale *et al.*, 2016). In this respect, prior studies have shown that destination personalities engender destination brand identification (Kumar, 2022; Kumar and Kaushik, 2017). In conclusion, there is

evidence that the DBGP has a favorable influence on stereotypes, which is consistent with Eagly and Wood's (2012) social role theory. Similarly, according to several studies (e.g., Güntürkün *et al.*, 2020; Kolbl *et al.*, 2019; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), destination stereotypes improve destination identification. As a result, our research adds to the existing evidence that DBGP influences destination stereotypes and subsequently impacts destination identification. We propose the following:

H6: The link between destination brand masculinity and destination identification is mediated by the competence of stereotypes H6a (and warmth H6b).

H7: The link between destination brand femininity and destination identification is mediated by the warmth of stereotypes H7b (and competence H7a).

3. Research Method

This article investigates the validity, dimensionality, and reliability of the scale and tests the hypotheses through two key studies. Study 1 provides initial evidence of the dimensionality, discriminant validity, convergent validity, and reliability of the scale through a sample of diverse nationalities (n = 705). Then, when we use a different sample (N = 472), Study 2 adds to the first study's evidence of the scale's discriminant, convergent, and dimensional validity and offers empirical evidence on the interrelationships among DBGP, stereotypes, destination identification, and destination advocacy (H1–H7).

4. Destination gender scale refinement

The scale was refined and validated in five stages (see Web Appendix 1). The aim of Step 1 involved refining and revisiting items in a deductive and inductive sequence. In Step 2, the number

of items was reduced through assessment by focus groups, a panel of experts, and a reliability test conducted in a pilot study. In Step 3, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), discriminant and convergent validity, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used to test the initial validity of the scale. In Step 4, additional data were collected, and a final scale was validated to confirm the stability of the scales. Finally, in Step 5, structural equation modeling (AMOS-28) was used to test, predict, and evaluate the concurrent, nomological, and predictive validity of the proposed framework.

4.1 Step 1: Item generation and refinement

The concept of DBGP has not been thoroughly examined in recent travel studies, except by Pan *et al.* (2021). They created a 25-element DBGP scale by incorporating insights from samples originating from China and the U.S., but it remains unknown whether this scale can be extrapolated to other settings. This finding is in line with the those of Morgado et al. (2017) and Hinkin (1995) regarding the importance of sample diversity when addressing scale-related issues. Morgado *et al.* (2017) also state that during the psychometric evaluation phase, data should be collected from random, diverse samples to gain a better understanding of the validity and reliability of the new measure. According to Kumar and Nayak (2018), fundamental cultural norms are likely to influence a gendered destination and its associated masculine and feminine connotations.

The large number of items on the current scale may make it more difficult to study correlations precisely with other variables and could result in a low response rate for the data (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005; Morgado *et al.*, 2017). To reduce the period needed to respond (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005; Morgado *et al.*, 2017), it was proposed that the number of items on the scale should be balanced. In addition to the brand literature (e.g., Grohmann,

2009; Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016), earlier studies in which the concept was applied practically or theoretically in travel research were scrutinized as primary sources (e.g., Pan *et al.*, 2021). A list of 25 characteristics was formulated and refined using the data from this study, with twelve elements designated masculine and thirteen representing femininity.

4.2 Step 2: Item reduction

This stage was completed in three phases, as follows:

4.2.1 Phase 1: Focus groups

In the initial stage of scale refinement, we complied with Churchill's (1979) guidelines by convening three focus groups, each of which included eight foreign students at the University of Cairo and the American University in Cairo (college and graduate students) from various nations (such as the U.S., UK, Spain, Sudan, Jordan, Kuwait, China, the UAE, Senegal, and Malaysia). All of the participants were older than 20 years, and approximately equal numbers of females and males were included in each session. First, the research team outlined the primary objectives of this phase to all participants in the focus groups. We also supplied the attendees with the destination's gender definitions, along with a collection of specific characteristics associated with the destination's masculinity and femininity derived from analyses of prior studies.

The participants were then prompted to define from their own perspectives the key features of femininity and masculinity at the destination and were asked to describe their perspectives on masculinity and femininity traits in writing before a group discussion was held to elicit their thoughts on the qualities of the DBGP. This approach yielded 19 elements for DBGP: ten elements for femininity and nine for masculinity. For example, all focus group participants recommended

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removing traits such as grandiosity, inventiveness, and the ability to compete because in a setting of gender equality, they apply to both men and women. This is particularly significant now that women are actively participating in the workforce and displaying great accomplishments. These recommendations are logical given the shifting status of women throughout history (Pritchard, 2018). The groups also advised against adding characteristics such as tenderness and unselfishness because these are not restricted to women but can apply to men. This approach removes discrimination based on male and female features, which is especially important in worldwide and regional initiatives to improve gender equality, notably tourism (Kabil *et al.*, 2022).

4.2.2 **Phase 2: A panel of experts**

Next, six academic professors who work at Egyptian and UK universities assessed the focus groups' results to ensure that they addressed all of the scale domains. In this regard, we provided each adjudicator with an explanation and definition of the DBGP. The professors proposed keeping some parts that they took to be a form of the DBGP for further refinement of the scope. More specifically, they proposed removing some attributes if they overlapped or integrating some if they had the same meaning. For instance, they proposed combining qualities such as purity, kindness, and love in a single item (kindheartedness). This process yielded a final total of 15 elements (7 for feminine and 8 for masculine).

4.2.3 **Phase 3: Pilot study**

In the last phase, we ran a pilot study with 55 foreign visitors to the Egyptian Museum (the last visit arranged in their travel program at the destination), which allowed us to assess the validity, reliability, and internal consistency of the concepts and the concept validity of the 15 acceptable elements. According to the Cronbach's alpha results, the scale had a total reliability score of 0.86,

with a reliability value of 0.88 for destination-brand masculinity and 0.85 for destination-brand femininity (Hair *et al.*, 2010). This process ultimately yielded 15 elements (7 items for the feminine and 8 items for the masculine).

4.3 Step 3: Initial scale validation

To implement this stage, this investigation gathered information from a sample of visitors from various nations (n = 705) as follows:

4.3.1 **Data collection**

In Study 1, the respondents were chosen on the basis of their country, education level, age, income, and gender to avoid bias in sampling and provide a representative sample. In this regard, we asked travel companies, hotels, and travel agencies by official letters to provide us with data about visitors to Egypt from anywhere in the world that would help us complete our data. Fortunately, some travel companies, hotels, and travel agencies assisted us in two ways. First, some of them consented to give us access to their travel databases. In this respect, we promised that these databases would be accessible only to the study team and that the completed questionnaire would be kept confidential. The researchers then sent the visitors a study bundle comprising a cover letter and an anonymous self-administered questionnaire, together with an online survey platform.

Second, some travel companies, hotels, and travel agencies allowed the poll to be posted on social media channels, including WeChat, WhatsApp, and Facebook. This approach increased the sample size. The data were gathered between August 5th and November 22nd, 2022. We circulated 1200 surveys and gathered 726 questionnaires, eliminating 21 with missing data, so

there was a final response rate of 60.5%. The final sample size (n = 705, as shown in Table 1) was sufficient for SEM with AmoS-28. To ensure the quality of the translation, the survey was first written in English and then back-translated into German, Arabic, and Chinese (Brislin, 1983). A multilingual associate outside of our study team checked the accuracy of the translation. The survey was then piloted with fifteen participants, whose input guided us to adjust some questions for clarity.

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4.3.2 **Common method bias (CMB)**

Harman's single-factor method was used to observe CMB. Our findings indicated a substantial difference of 39.261% (ranging from 5.104 to 39.261%), with the main factor contributing to this difference being 39.261, but no single factor was found to account for more than 50% of the observed variation. According to these results, CMB is not a substantial concern. We also integrated a concept not directly related to the theory into our data analysis using the marker variable technique to evaluate common method variance (see Lindell and Whitney, 2001). Previous studies, such as that by Liu et al. (2023), have recommended using respondents' catering preferences as a marker variable; however, including or excluding this marker variable in our research models did not result in notable findings. We adopted the Malhotra et al.'s (2006) method for the post hoc estimation of CMV, selecting the second-smallest positive correlation (0.02) between the two concepts as a cautious estimate. After subtracting this value from all associations and reanalyzing the data, we found no substantial difference between the adjusted and original associations. This assessment also indicated that CMV was not a major concern in our research.

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4.3.3 **Measurement model**

Based on the pilot study's results, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was used to explore the DBGP in Study 1. First, an EFA was applied to 8 items on destination brand masculinity and 7 items on destination brand femininity using principal component extraction (PCE) with a varimax rotation (VR) approach. Following the recommendations of Hair *et al.* (2016), components from the scale were eliminated if they had loadings listed below 0.50, cross-loadings above 0.30, or commonalities below 0.50. According to the EFA results, thirteen items that kept pace with the two-factor solution accounted for more than 68% of the total variance. The loadings of the thirteen items ranged from 0.735 to 0.844, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, the reliability coefficient results for all DBGP dimensions ranged from 0.908 to 0.918, which exceeds the suggested threshold of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2016), as illustrated in **Web Appendix 2.**

Following this, CFA was performed. The destination's gender specification has two dimensions, so we used masculinity and femininity as latent variables in a CFA. A significant proportion of the goodness-of-fit metrics for all the concepts exceeded the threshold of 0.90 proposed by Hair *et al.* (2010). The following values all show that the model fits the data well: RMSEA = 0.053, GFI = 0.959, CFI = 0.941, NFL = 0.968, TLI = 0.973, AIC = 243.520, and NFL = 0.968. The CFA results were consistent with the EFA results, and the results indicate that every load exceeded the advised threshold of 0.60. The average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) for the latent construct were computed, and as demonstrated in **Web Appendix 3**, all of the constructs exceeded the AVE and CR threshold values of 0.50 and 0.70, respectively.

The Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion also clearly supports this, since the AVE (0.787) must be greater than the squared estimated correlation (0.308) for each pair of factors. This provides an initial indication of the dimensionality of the scale. Upon calculating these squared correlations and comparing them to the AVE, we ascertained that the scale possesses discriminant validity for each pair of factors. To summarize, seven items are used to evaluate masculinity, while six items are used to assess femininity. This aligns with previous research conducted in the domain of brands (for example, Grohmann 2009 and Lieven and Hildebrand 2016), which confirms that DBGP is a first-order variable with two dimensions.

4.4 Step 4: Final-scale validation

To validate the destination gender scale, we collected data from a different sample (n= 472, as shown in Table 1). To do this, we followed the same procedures as in Study 1. The detailed findings of Study 2 are provided in **Web Appendix 2**, and we summarize the results here. First, an EFA with variable rotation with 13 items substantiated the two factors of destination gender recognized in Study 1. Specifically, each item loaded on the anticipated dimension and showed no large cross-loadings. Similarly, most of the goodness-of-fit metrics for all the concepts fell within the suggested threshold (above 0.90) proposed by Hair et al. (2010), suggesting acceptable model fit (X^2 = 140.600, GFI = 0.956, AGFI = 0.936, CFI = 0.980, NFL = 0.965, TLI = 0.975, RMSEA = 0.051, AIC = 196.600). The results of the CFA were found to be consistent with the EFA results. The AVE and CR were calculated for each latent construct, and all the constructs exceeded the threshold value of 0.50 for AVE and 0.70 for CR, as shown in **Web Appendix 3**. Second, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was fulfilled for each pair of factors; the AVE (0.794) must be greater than the squared estimated correlation (0.252), which confirms the outcomes of the scale's

dimensionality in Study 1. In conclusion, Study 2 also validated the items of the destination gender scale using different samples.

4.4.1 **Measurement invariance test**

To test the measurement invariance of the scale constructs, we followed the recommended procedure (Bauer, 2017) to test configural, metric, and scalar invariance across nationalities for the overall two-factor model of the DBGP. The unconstrained model (factor loadings and thresholds free to vary across countries) showed an acceptable-to-good model fit [x^2 (320) = 589.043, p = 0.000; X^2/df = 1.841, GFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.974, NFL = 0.944, TLI = 0.968, RMR = 0.049, AIC = 859.043, and RMSEA = 0.026]. This finding indicates that the configural invariance of the constructs across the nationalities is supported by excellent CFI, TLI, GFI, IFI, SRMR, and RMSEA values, confirming the similarity of the two-factor structure across nationalities. The constrained model also showed an acceptable-to-good model fit [x^2(368) = 630.761, p = 0.000; CFI = 0.974; TLI = 0.973; GFI = 0.927; AIC = 804.761, and RMSEA = 0.024]. The chi-square difference test further showed that a constrained version of the two-factor model of destination gender did not significantly differ from the unconstrained model [Dx^2(48) = 41.718, p =.727 > 0.05 for Metric invariance; Dx^2(52) = 55.791, p =.334 > 0.05 for scalar invariance; Dx^2(84) = 86.406, p =.407 > 0.05 for measurement residuals], indicating metric and scalar invariance of the measurement model across the nationalities.

4.5 **Step 5: Nomological validity**

In Study 2, we used the revisited scale to test the unexplored relationships among DBGP, destination stereotypes, destination identification, and destination advocacy (H1–H5). We also

investigated the role of stereotypes as a mediator in the link between DBGP and destination identification (H6 and H7).

4.5.1   Data Collection

We distributed the survey to a different sample in Study 2 to guarantee the generalizability of the results. To ensure an unbiased sample, we used the same procedures as in Study 1. For this purpose, data were collected between October 2, 2023, and November 24, 2023. We circulated 1000 surveys and gathered 488 questionnaires, but 16 were removed because of missing data, leading to a response rate of 48.8%. The final size of the sample (n = 472, as shown in Table 1) was acceptable for SEM.

4.5.2   Measures

In Study 2, we used thirteen elements from the outcomes of the qualitative study and the empirical evidence in Study 1 to measure DBGP (e.g., six for feminine and seven for masculine). Eight elements from Diamantopoulos *et al.* (2021) and Micevski *et al.* (2021) were also used to assess destination stereotypes. Destination identification was also evaluated by borrowing three elements from Hultman *et al.* (2015). Finally, destination advocacy and familiarity were assessed by adapting three and four elements, respectively, from Zhang *et al.* (2022) and Chi *et al.* (2020), using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

4.5.3   Measurement Model

In Study 2, we used Harman's single-factor technique to examine CMB. Our investigation indicated a substantial difference of 23.077% (7.154 to 23.077%), with 23.077 being the top factor leading to this difference, but no single factor was found to account for more than 50% of the

recorded variance, so CMB is not a major problem. Like in Study **1**, we used a marker variable methodology and Malhotra et al.'s (2006) technique for post hoc CMV estimation to assess CMV. Our results also reveal that CMB and CMV are not major concerns in our research.

Following Hamdy *et al's* (2023) suggestion, this study separated the CFA of the overall measurement framework into two parts. According to Hair *et al.* (2010), the majority of goodness-of-fit metrics for all concepts were above 0.90. This means that the model fits well (X^2 (413) = 875.038, X^2/df = 2.119, GFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.948, NFL = 0.907, TLI = 0.942, and RMSEA = 0.049). As shown in **Web Appendix 4**, the outcomes show that all loadings surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.60. The CR results ranged from 0.862 to 0.922, which is higher than the suggested value of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010); this indicates that all the measuring items are reliable. Third, the results show that the AVE values are greater than the suggested value of 0.50. In addition, the AVE for each concept is greater than the squared structural route coefficient among the two concepts. The interfactor association is less than 0.85. These findings support both convergent and discriminant validity, as presented in Table 2. Given the validity and reliability of the measurement model, we may test the structural model.

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4.5.4 **Structural Model**

This investigation aimed to explore the associations among DBGP, stereotypes, identification, and destination advocacy. The results indicate that the model's chi-square value was relatively small (X^2 = 12.095) and nonsignificant (p = 0.10), indicating an excellent model fit. The

results revealed that the structural model was satisfactory and aligned well with the data ($\chi 2$ = 12.095, GFI = 0.993, AGFI = 0.972, CFI = 0.991, NFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.973, AIC = 54,095 and RMSEA = 0.039). As revealed in Table 3, the outcomes indicate the direct impact of destination brand masculine on destination competence (β = 0.43, t = 9.922, p = 0.00) and warmth (β =.242, t = 5.823, p = 0.00). The outcome indicates the direct impact of destination femininity on warmth (β =.366; t =8.810, p = 0.000) but not on competence (β = -.06, t = -1.420, p = 0.16). The outcome indicates that the direct impact of competence on identification is not significant (β = 0.04, t = 0.877, p = 0.381) and that destination warmth has a positive effect on destination identification (β = 0.178, t = 3.759, p = 0.00). Finally, the outcomes indicate the direct effect of destination identification on destination advocacy (β =.58, t = 15.741, p = 0.00). Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2b, 4, and 5 were supported, but H2a and H3 were not supported.

In our conceptual approach, we utilized destination familiarity as a control variable. As shown in **Web Appendix 5**, CVs had an impact on destination brand identification (β =.157, t = 3.790, p =.00) and destination advocacy (β =.114, t = 3.090, p =.002). Specifically, the inclusion of CVs does not alter the findings of the direct associations hypotheses. This finding implies that the outcomes obtained from Model 1, without CVs, also remain acceptable in Framework 2, with CVs.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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4.5.5 **Mediation Analysis**

We employed Bootstrapping (2000) via AMOS 28 to evaluate the impact of warmth and competence as mediators of the connections between DBGP and destination identification. Table 4 shows that destination masculinity has an indirect impact on identification via warmth ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.018, 95% CI LL = 0.005; UL = 0.036) but not competence ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.007, 95% CI LL = -0.009; UL = 0.027). The direct impact is still substantial ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.274, t = 5.671, p = 0.00). As a result, destination warmth serves as a partial mediator. Similarly, destination femininity has an indirect effect on identification via warmth ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.030, 95% CI LL = 0.011; UL = 0.056) but not competence ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = -0.001, 95% CI LL = -0.007; UL = 0.001). Since the direct effect of destination femininity on identification is not significant ($\boldsymbol{\beta}$ = 0.027, t = 0.595, p = 0.552), this means that warmth acts as a full mediator. These data support H_{6b} and 7b but do not support H_{6a} and 7a.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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5. Discussion

5.1 Key results

This article aims to examine the interconnected relationships among DBGP, stereotypes, destination identification, and destination advocacy in an emerging market such as Egypt. A mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in this investigation to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Given this study's results, the integrated model provides a high level of predictive power for destination identification and destination advocacy. The findings indicated that DBGP impacts warmth and competence. In particular, destination brand masculinity affected competence

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more favorably than warmth, while destination brand femininity promoted only warmth more favorably but did not affect competence. These results are consistent with the social role theory proposed by Eagly and Sczesny (2019), and Eagly and Wood (2012) and earlier literature (e.g., Eyssel and Hegel, 2012; Pino *et al.*, 2020; Pogacar *et al.*, 2021; Subroto and Balqiah, 2022), which noted the unbalanced impact of masculine and feminine cues on assessments of the warmth and competence of stereotypes.

The findings also indicated that destination warmth positively influences destination identification but demonstrated that competence has no effect. These outcomes are aligned with earlier brand research (e.g., Güntürkün *et al.*, 2020; Kolbl *et al.*, 2019), which indicated that only warmth positively affects destination identification. However, this finding contradicts the claim of Japutra *et al.* (2018) that both warmth and competence are vital for improving consumer-company relationships. The results of this study also corroborated earlier research by Zhang *et al.* (2022) regarding the positive association between destination identification and destination advocacy.

Finally, the outcomes revealed that destination warmth partially mediates the link between destination brand masculinity and destination brand identification and completely mediates the link between destination brand femininity and destination identification. This result is consistent with our argument based on social role and social identity theories (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Eagly and Wood, 2012; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), which proposed that DGBP influences destination warmth and subsequently impacts destination identification. The results also show that destination competence does not mediate the connection between DGBP and destination identification. This finding does not align with our argument; this may be related to the nature of the research context, which is an emerging destination (i.e., Egypt), and might be due to travelers' perceptions of emerging places as incompetent yet friendly.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study established the first theoretical implications in the realm of destination branding research by establishing and validating the link between DBGP and stereotypes. Although warmth and competence assessments have commonly been related to feminine and masculine qualities in personality psychology (Kervyn *et al.*, 2022), the influence of DBGP has yet to be investigated. This is the first study to investigate the connections between DBGP and destination stereotypes using social role theory. According to the study's outcomes, the DBGP influences destination stereotypes. These findings support social role theory (e.g., Eagly and Sczesny 2019; Eagly and Wood 2012) and the current literature (e.g., Cooke *et al.*, 2022; Nash and Sidhu, 2023; Pogacar *et al.*, 2021). According to these views, gender influences how people assess whether a destination is warm and competent. The findings reveal that destination brand masculinity (vs. femininity) has a stronger influence on destination competence (vs. warmth). This study supports the tenets of social role theory and earlier studies (e.g., Eyssel and Hegel, 2012; Pino *et al.*, 2020; Pogacar *et al.*, 2021; Subroto and Balqiah, 2022), which state that masculine and feminine characteristics are not equally indicative of competence and warmth. This shows that gender norms apply to destinations like brands.

As a second contribution, the findings reveal that warmth is more important than competence in destination identification. Specifically, warmth is the only significant predictor of destination identification in developing countries, indicating that perceiving a destination to be well-intentioned (warmth) is a reliable indicator of consumer behavior (Güntürkün *et al.*, 2020). This research offers further empirical evidence highlighting the importance of warmth in destination brand identification in the destination branding literature. In contrast, this investigation explores two parallel research strands that offer empirical and theoretical insights into the influence of

DBGP and stereotypes as antecedents of destination brand identification. Finally, this study is the first to demonstrate that linking DBGP and stereotypes sequentially provides a better explanation of destination identification and destination advocacy. Notably, destination warmth alone serves as a significant mediating factor between DBGP and destination identification in the emerging destination context; this constitutes our third theoretical contribution.

5.3 Practical contributions

From a practitioner's perspective, understanding the connections between destination gender personality, stereotypes, destination identification, and destination advocacy will help destination managers and policy-makers enhance a destination's image, provide memorable experiences, and increase destination advocacy. The findings suggest that destination brand masculinity has a greater influence on destination competence than destination warmth, so destination marketers should focus on cultivating masculine features in their branding and marketing approaches. This might include stressing specific features (e.g., being professional, adventurous, challenging, or untamed) to generate an image of expertise and ability. By doing so successfully, venues can attract male visitors who respect competence and are more inclined to pick a destination based on its perceived capacity to satisfy their requirements and expectations.

Destination managers should be aware that masculinity may not have as much of an impact on destination warmth as it does on competence. Instead, warmth may be more closely associated with other factors, such as hospitality, friendliness, and a welcoming atmosphere. It is important to prioritize initiatives that foster a sense of hospitality and create positive interactions between tourists and residents to enhance perceptions of destination warmth. Destination policy-makers can design training programs for service providers, community engagement activities, and the

promotion of cultural exchange. These findings also highlight the need for destinations to understand and target specific groups of tourists based on their preferences. Some travelers may prioritize competence when choosing a destination and when seeking efficiency and reliability in their travel experiences. In contrast, others may prioritize warmth, looking for a welcoming and hospitable environment. By understanding these preferences, destination managers can tailor their marketing efforts to different target audiences using messages and visual imagery that align with the desired perception (masculine).

Nevertheless, the findings of that study show that destination femininity favorably affects only destination warmth and has significant practical implications for tourism, hospitality, and destination marketing. Destination policy-makers should understand feminine attributes to create more effective promotional strategies and, to enhance the overall image and appeal of the destination, should emphasize and highlight feminine aspects such as nurturing, care, and hospitality in their promotional strategies. Finally, the evidence suggested that destination warmth has a positive effect on destination identification. Destination marketers and tourism organizations can focus on promoting the warmth of their destinations to attract and engage visitors. To accomplish this, the local populace needs to be trained and educated on how to be more hospitable and friendly to tourists, raise customer service standards, and foster a welcoming and inclusive environment. Generally, given the mediating effect of destination warmth, DMOs might emphasize feminine and masculine qualities in marketing approaches for visitors with competence or warmth stereotypes because the stereotypes of a location may differ for travelers from various nations. DMOs must promote better knowledge of their destination stereotypes.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

This article adds to the body of current knowledge, but it has several limitations that need to be remedied by additional research. First, only two techniques for gender positioning were investigated. If femininity and masculinity are considered to be two different dimensions rather than two positions on a continuum, then androgynous (high feminine/high masculine) and undifferentiated (low feminine/low masculine) brands are two additional gendered destination positioning strategies that need to be examined further. Second, further research may explore the role of individualism and collectivism as moderator variables in the proposed model because there is evidence that highly masculine brands generate greater brand equity in more individualistic countries, whereas highly feminine brands generate greater brand equity in more collectivistic countries (Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016). Future research may also investigate the role of biological sex (male and female) as a moderator variable in the proposed model because there is evidence supporting this possibility. Such evidence has vital implications for companies since consumers' biological sex is observable, while gender roles are not (Kumar, 2022; Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016). This study was conducted in a developing country, i.e., Egypt, so future research should adapt the proposed methodology to more varied contexts. In conclusion, because domestic passengers are gaining importance in the travel sector, further studies could compare the perspectives of local and global tourists via the projected model.

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