



Is there any Difference in the Perception of the Airbnb Brand Gender across Cultures? An Exploration of Gender and Gender Identity

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explored the different perception of Airbnb's brand gender across cultures on the basis of gender and gender identity. Specifically, the objectives of this study are, first, to examine how users perceive Airbnb's brand gender; second, to explore the effect of gender and gender identity on brand gender; and finally, to observe the differences in perception of Airbnb's brand gender across cultures.

Design/methodology/approach: The exploration was conducted by comparing two countries with different cultural backgrounds (American vs. Korean). Data was collected in the US and Korea. Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk) was used for the US sample. For the Korean sample, a research company specialized in online surveys was employed. Data were analyzed by SPSS, AMOS to test hypotheses.

Findings: Gender identity fully affected brand gender for Americans, but for Koreans masculine gender identity (MGI) had an influence on the perception of masculine brand gender personality (MBP) and feminine gender identity (FGI) on the perception of feminine brand gender personality (FBP) only. Further, this study revealed that gender does not play a significant role in the relationship between gender identity and brand gender for the American group, while gender was found to be an important variable moderating the relationships for Koreans. In addition, the study showed that the impact of gender identity on brand gender is greater in the US than in Korea.

Research limitations/implications: This study has several limitations. First, this study considered only two countries. More countries from different continents with diverse social backgrounds should be investigated to generalize the study results. Second, gender-related phenomena are multifactorial and involve several variables, including gender attitudes, gender role behaviors, and sexual orientation, therefore, future research may observe other gender-related variables. Third, there are questionable items in the measurement of brand gender. Future research may focus more on addressing this issue in the cross-cultural study of brand gender. Fourth, more in-depth insights into the role of gender identity will result if future research explores the relationship between Aaker's (1997) five brand personalities and gender identity. Finally, this study examined only one brand, Airbnb. Therefore, the results could be difficult to generalize and apply to other brands and industries. Future studies should focus on investigating the relationship between brand gender, identity, and gender in other brands in the hospitality industry.

Originality/value: This study is one of few researches investigating the relationships between gender identity, gender, and brand gender across cultures. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide novel insights into brand strategies in marketing, both academically and practically, in terms of gender and gender identity market segmentation.

Keywords: Brand gender personality, Gender, Gender identity, Cross cultural study, Gender equality paradox, Airbnb

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I. Introduction

Regarded as a representer of "sharing economy" and "disruptive innovation" (Guttentag, 2015), Airbnb has rapidly grown since it was born in San Francisco in 2007. Airbnb has hosted over 900 million guests in more than 100,000 cities and 220 countries (Airbnb, 2021). Forbes (2020) announced that Airbnb had a value of 75 billion dollars when it went public in 2020, which was greater than most hotel groups. Accordingly, as it has become one of the most important phenomena affecting the tourism and hospitality industry, scholarly research on Airbnb with various topics is increasing—there are numerous studies of travelers' motivations to use Airbnb (Amaro, Andreu, and Huang, 2019; Guttentag et al., 2018), behavior and preference (Ranson and Guttentag, 2019), trust and satisfaction (Liang et al., 2018; Phua, 2019), customer experiences (Li et al., 2019), the online reputation of Airbnb (Zevass et al., 2021), analyses of online review comments (Cheng and Jin, 2019), press treatment (Huertas et al., 2021), the professionalization of Airbnb (Gil and Sequera, 2020), and Airbnb space (Farmaki et al., 2020), and reviews of research progress and trends in Airbnb (Andreu et al., 2019; Guttentag, 2019). This growing body of literature on Airbnb implies that both scholars and practitioners in hospitality and tourism are paying attention to the effects of Airbnb on the industries (Dogru et al., 2020; Mody and Hanks, 2020).

Scholars have argued that the success of Airbnb may be ascribed to several attributes perceived by consumers, such as unique experiences (Guttentag, 2015), authenticity (Mody and Hanks, 2020; So et al., 2021), credibility (Jun, 2020), togetherness (Sthapit et al., 2021), and a sense of closeness affecting feeling belonging (Liu and Mattila, 2017). These attributes are somewhat intended by Airbnb when it rebranded with a mission "Belong Anywhere" in 2014; consequently, they have achieved a strong brand identity, based on which Airbnb brand extensions were recently launched: Airbnb Experience, Airbnb Plus, and Airbnb Collection. This successful extension indicates that Airbnb's brand image has a substantial positioning in consumers' minds

because brand image is an important information cue for consumers in evaluating a product (Lee and Jin, 2019)

Airbnb's strong brand identity can be related to its distinctive brand personality. Brand personality is a key facet of brand identity (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003). Brand personality, a type of brand association in consumer memory (Haigood, 1999), refers to "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). A favorable brand personality has a positive effect on consumer preference and usage (Kim et al., 2011; Sirgy, 1985), levels of brand trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998; Ghorbani and Mousavi, 2014), product differentiation (Aaker, 1996), consumer involvement (Biel, 1992), and brand endurance in the consumer mind (Freling and Forbes, 2005). Looking at the evolution of brand messages (i.e., Forget Hotels in 2007, Travel like a Human in 2008/2009, Belong Anywhere in 2013/2014, Don't Go There, Live There or "Live Like a Local" in 2016), it is found that Airbnb emphasizes experiences with connections to a human being, not just the aspect of functional accommodation. Consequently, consumers may perceive Airbnb as having a certain personality, like humans. Lee and Kim (2018) examined Airbnb's brand personality and found that excitement was rated the highest of the five dimensions of brand personality (Sincerity, Ruggedness, Sophistication, Excitement, and Competence).

Recently, dimensions of brand personality have become more sophisticated with the development of a scale reflecting human gender identity, which measures personality traits for identifying masculine and feminine characteristics in individuals. Consumers express masculinity and femininity through brand choice because gender is a part of a consumer's self-concept (Freimuth and Homstein, 1982; Grohmann, 2009). Like other brand personality traits, consumers are likely to associate masculine and feminine personality traits with brands (Grohmann, 2009). Since Grohmann (2009) developed a scale measuring brand gender, a growing body of research on this topic has provided new insights into brand strategy in marketing (i.e., Azar, Aime, and Ulrich, 2018; Lieven et al., 2014; Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016; Machado et al., 2019; Machado et al., 2021; Vacas de Carvalho et al., 2020).

Consumer gender has been investigated as an important demographic variable affecting consumer behavior for market segmentation in the lodging industry (Lee and Kim, 2018). Meanwhile, gender identity is not regarded as an important factor in the hospitality literature. However, when considering the important role of gender identity, for example, in predicting the process of purchase behavior, including ethical and eco-friendly consumption (Brough et al., 2016; Pinna, 2020), the variable is worthy of more attention from academics and practitioners.

This study seeks to address two questions: How then do consumers perceive Airbnb's brand gender, and what impact do gender and gender identity of Airbnb users have on Airbnb brand gender? In addition, this study investigates the differential influences of gender and gender identity on brand gender across cultures. The perception of brand personality traits can differ across cultures. For example, Murase and Bojanic (2004) discovered that Americans perceived KFC and Wendy's brand personalities differently from consumers in Japan. Similarly, the perception of Airbnb's brand gender may differ across countries. Accordingly, this study examines Airbnb's brand gender perception across cultures, in particular from the perspectives of gender and gender identity. Recent phenomena of gender differences are explained by an emerging paradigm or hypothesis, the so-called gender-equality paradox (MacGiolla and Kajonius 2019). This hypothesis assumes that in economically advanced and more gender-equal societies, there are greater differences between men and women in personality, preferences, tastes, and other psychological variables than in countries with less gender-equal societies (Kaiser et al., 2020; Mac Giolla and Kajonius 2019). The perception of Airbnb's brand gender may be affected by this paradigm such that there is a greater difference in perception of Airbnb's brand gender between genders in a more gender-equal society. In this case, Airbnb can launch different strategies in different countries when planning to establish a global market based on their brand gender perceptions. Researchers are aware of the importance of consumer perception of brands in the hospitality industry (Li, Yen, & Liu, 2020), and have conducted studies

on this subject. However, while there is considerable research on brand personalities (e.g., on hotels' brand personalities: Li et al., 2014; Sop and Kozk, 2019; Su and Reynolds, 2017; Tran et al., 2013; and on restaurant brand personalities: Choi et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2009; Lin and Huang, 2012; Siguaw et al., 1999), little is known about brand gender in the hospitality industry.

In sum, the objectives of this study are, first, to examine how users perceive Airbnb's brand gender; second, to explore the effect of gender and gender identity on brand gender; and finally, to observe the differences in perception of Airbnb's brand gender across cultures. These objectives are examined by comparing two countries with different cultural backgrounds and different levels of gender equality. The results of this study are expected to provide novel insights into brand strategies in marketing, both academically and practically, in terms of gender and gender identity market segmentation.

II. Literature Review

A. The Terms "Sex and Gender" and Consumer Behavior

Defining the terminology of sex and gender remains complex and controversial (Hyde et al., 2019). According to Haig (2004), the use of the term "gender" began to increase in the 1980s when feminists adopted it in research to distinguish sociocultural differences between men and women from those of biological sex. While the term "sex" is conceptualized as sexualized behaviors and different physical characteristics in males and females, including chromosomes, hormones, reproductive anatomy, and different traits that originate from biological factors, the meaning of gender embraces more social and culturally oriented aspects such as stereotypes, expectations, roles, and psychological traits of masculinity and femininity (Hyde et al., 2019; Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2011). However, some variables (usually psychological variables such as

personality traits) are both biological and social; therefore, they are inseparable and cannot be classified into one of those two categories (Anders and Dunn, 2009; Halpern 2013; Lippa, 2002; Yoder, 2003). For this reason, Hyde et al. (2019) suggested the term "gender/sex" to refer to general aspects of biological and social differences between males and females.

In research on consumer behavior, Fisher and Arnold (1994) showed that biological sex and gender constructs were distinctive from each other, and they contended that representing biological sex as gender constructs such as gender identity and gender role attitudes was a logical fallacy. Arnold and Wetsch (2001) noted that despite the importance of distinguishing the meanings of the terms, researchers in consumer behavior had not clarified the differences but used the term gender to refer to biological sex. Recently, the terms gender and biological sex have been used simultaneously to refer to males and females. For example, in a recent extensive review of gender differences in consumption and marketing, although Meyers-Levy and Loken (2015) recognized the tendency to use the terms sex and gender distinctively in some research disciplines, they preferred to use them interchangeably. This identical use of sex and gender is reasonable when considering the current trend in which the use of gender has overwhelmingly expanded to encompass the biological aspect (Haig, 2004). Halpern (2013), a gender theorist, predicted that the term gender will become dominant in referring to any differences between males and females in the future. Current gender theories such as the gender equality paradox (MacGiolla and Kajonius, 2019) and gender similarities hypotheses (Hyde, 2005) use the term gender to embrace not only the sociocultural perspectives but also the biological aspects of men and women. Therefore, for this study, it was rational to follow the current trend in terms of using the terms. That is, the term gender was used to refer to males and females in this study.

B. Gender Identity and Consumer Behavior

Gender identity refers to two types of gender norms

(Wood and Eagly, 2009): descriptive and injunctive. Descriptive norms refer to the construal of oneself in terms of the culturally typical men or women, and injunctive norm means that gender identity represents ideal men and women that are required characteristics in cultures. In this injunctive sense, each gender has a high tendency to follow gender stereotypes and roles that are expected from the societies they belong to. Gender identity encompasses social and cultural connotations related to the self-perception (descriptive norms) and social expectations (injunctive norms) of masculinity and femininity. For this reason, gender identity is a personality feature (Fischer & Arnold, 1994), like the Big Five personality traits, because it is an outcome of the interaction between biological and social processes (Bandura and Bussey, 2004). Thus, it is a useful predictor of behavior when gender identity is defined both conceptually and empirically (Wood and Eagly, 2009).

With respect to the relationship with consumer behavior, researchers agree that gender identity is an important aspect of consumer behavior, as it represents personal characteristics (Calder and Burnkrant, 1977), choices (Brough et al., 2016), and information search (Barber, 2009; Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2012). Palan's (2001) review of gender identity in the consumption context revealed that it is a more effective predictor than biological sex because, in certain situations, the concept of gender identity has been operationalized accurately. In early studies of gender identity and gender, researchers did not distinguish them. Fisher and Arnold (1994) criticized this practice and provided empirical evidence that biological sex and gender identity are distinct constructs. Numerous studies have demonstrated that gender identity is significantly related to market variables, including information search behavior (Kepmf et al., 1997; Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2012), household decision-making (Qualls, 1987), shopping (Fischer and Arnold, 1990, 1994), involvement and loyalty (Ye and Robertson, 2012), eco-friendly behavior (Brough et al., 2016), and brand congruence (Neale et al., 2016; Nickel et al., 2020).

C. Brand Gender Personality (BGP)

Consumers perceive and categorize products as having feminine and masculine characteristics (Allison et al., 1980). The degree of masculinity or femininity of a product affects purchase behavior (Till and Priluck, 2001). This is because gender stereotypes still shape our judgment and behavior (Ellemers, 2018). As people judge human characteristics on the basis of gender, they have a tendency to identify lifeless objects as either male or female as well (Levy, 1959).

Brand gender is defined as the set of human personality traits associated with masculinity and femininity applicable and relevant to brands (Grohmann, 2009). This is an extension of the definition of Aaker's (1997) brand personality, which is "a set of human characteristics associated with a brand." Researchers argue that brand personalities differ from human personalities in terms of perception and formation (Aaker, 1996, 1997; Sung and Tinkham, 2005). While human personality traits are genuine characteristics of individuals regardless of what others perceive, brand personality and brand gender are consumers' perception of the symbolic meanings and images of a brand. Therefore, brand traits such as brand personality and brand gender are entirely associated with consumer perceptions.

The scale used to measure brand gender is different from that used to identify human gender. When Aaker (1997) developed the five dimensions of brand personality traits, namely sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, the last two attributes were implicitly considered as feminine and masculine traits of brands, respectively, until Grohmann (2009) developed a brand gender measurement scale. She demonstrated that her scale did not show an overlap between sophistication and ruggedness. Further, she found that consumers' responses toward brands increased when the brand gender and consumer gender role (self-concept) were congruent than when they lacked congruity. Grohmann's brand gender scale has been adopted in several studies (e.g., Lieven & Hildebrand, 2016; Machado et al., 2018; Ugolini et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies have found that brand gender

results in positive consumer response such as brand equity (Lieven et al., 2014; Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016; Machado et al., 2019) and brand loyalty (Vacas de Carvalho et al., 2020).

D. Studies of Gender and Brand Personalities in the Hospitality Industry

While studies of gender identity do not have a long history, marketers and academic researchers have focused on gender, as it is one of the most common forms of market segmentation (Barber, 2009). Research across various domains shows that males and females have different consumption behaviors in the hospitality industry, such as choice (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2010; Kim and Perdue, 2013; Meng and Uysal, 2008), satisfaction (e.g., Suki, 2014), and customer value (Han et al., 2019). Several theories explain the underlying causes of gender differences; however, researchers generally agree that females are more sensitive to risk than males (Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015). For this reason, some of the gender differences in consumer behavior occur due to intrinsic factors; for instance, risk avoidance has evolved since ancient times. Females seek information more comprehensively and extensively (e.g., Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2018) to reduce risk, and they are more concerned about food safety to avoid any risk of infection from a dining experience in a restaurant (Cha and Borchgrevink, 2019).

Research on brand personality demonstrates that consumers' perception of a restaurant brand personality affects emotion and satisfaction (Lee et al., 2009), attitudinal brand loyalty, and brand preference (Kim et al., 2011). Choi, Ok, and Hyun (2011) found that a coffeehouse brand personality has a significant effect on brand prestige and brand trust. Involvement in accommodation (Lee & Kim, 2018) and the use of social media in cultural tourism (Peco-Torres et al., 2020) are factors that influence consumers' perceptions of brand personality. Further, Lee and Kim (2018) showed that gender is a significant moderator of the relationship between the degree of involvement and Airbnb's brand personality.

E. Hypotheses

Figure 1 illustrates the framework of this study. A consumer's personality traits are the intrinsic organization of an individual's mental world that is stable over time and consistent over the situation (Piedmont, 1998). Due to this consistency, consumers' personality traits can be used in segmentation for better target marketing (Baumgartner, 2002). Brand personality traits, including brand gender, originate from "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical users of a brand" (Aaker, 1997), and endorsers with a certain personality transfer the associated brand image to consumers (McCracken, 1989). Research has indicated that consumer personality and brand personality have a significant relationship. For example, Eisen and Stokbueger-Sauer (2013) found a positive relationship between brand personality and consumers' Big Five personality traits. Lin (2010) found positive relationships between extroversion personality traits and excitement brand personality and between agreeableness personality traits and excitement, sincerity, and competence in brand personality. With regard to gender identity personality traits, Rup, Gochhvat, and Samanta (2018) found that gender identity affects brand personality traits. Their research revealed that consumers with masculine gender identity were positively related to Responsibility, Activity, Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Aggressiveness, Ruggedness and Emotionality, while consumers with feminine gender identity were associated with Responsibility, Activity, Emotionality, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Ruggedness, Simplicity, and Sincerity. Collectively, these studies imply that gender identity, which is a personality trait, can affect brand gender, which is

a type of brand personality. Further, a brand has symbolic and abstract attributes. The symbolic use of brands differs considerably across cultures (Aaker and Schmitt, 1997). Therefore, the perception of brand gender will be different across culture. Based on the aforementioned studies, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand gender will be perceived differently depending on the user's gender identity. Specifically, the consumers' gender identity who have different cultural background (American vs. Korean) will perceive the brand gender differently.

The differences between men and women in personality traits have been consistently found in research over the past few decades. For example, most recently, Akyunus et al. (2021) found that men score higher in openness and hostile dominance than women, while women score higher in neuroticism and agreeableness traits than men. This finding is consistent with previous research on gender differences in personality traits, in that women scored higher in agreeableness and neuroticism than men did (Feingold 1994; McCrae et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2008; Weisberg et al., 2011). In addition, gender differences were consistent across cultural aspects. Schmitt et al. (2008) revealed that women scored higher in agreeableness and neuroticism across 55 nations.

The difference in personality traits between males and females affects how they express their personality when it comes to brand personality (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). According to Mulyanegara et al.'s (2007) research findings, females with conscientiousness are likely to prefer trustful, reliable, and persevering brand personalities (the "Trusted" dimension in brand personality, redefined by the researchers), and male consumers express their personality through sociable and exciting brand personalities. These findings suggest that gender plays a significant role in the relationship between personality traits and brand personality. Similarly, gender is expected to function in the relationship between gender identity and brand gender. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

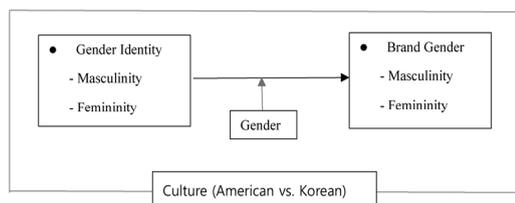


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

H2: Gender moderates the relationship between gender identity and brand gender.

Gender differences have been constantly observed in terms of personality traits (e.g., Akyunus et al., 2021; Costa, Terracciano and MacCrae, 2001; Feingold, 1994; Schmitt et al., 2008; South et al., 2018). More interestingly, gender differences were found across cultures in such a way that the differences were larger in American and European cultures than in African and Asian ones (McCrae et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2008). A recent cross-cultural examination of gender differences suggested that there are larger differences between men and women in personality traits in a more affluent society (MacGiolla and Kajonius, 2019). Similar patterns have been observed in preference, risk, patience, and altruism (Connolly et al., 2019; Falk and Hermle, 2018). This phenomenon is called the gender equality paradox. Falk and Hermle (2018) described the occurrence of this phenomenon in the context of resource theory, explaining that people express their own traits more freely when basic needs are satisfied. This paradox has been supported by subsequent studies (Kaiser et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2021). The present study adopts this paradigm to observe the differential perception of brand gender through gender identity and gender across cultures. For this purpose, this study selected the US and Korea. The US's gender gap score is 0.724, 53th out of 153 countries, while Korea's score is 0.672, ranking 108th (Global Gender Gap Report 2020), which indicates that greater gender equality has been achieved in the US than in Korea. In addition to the gender gap score, the selection is reasonable in that the two countries have different cultural backgrounds. As previously mentioned, the gender differences are bigger in America and Europe compared to Asian and African (McCrae et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2008). Korea belongs to Asia, which indicates that Korea may be smaller gender differences than the US. Further, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the scores for individualism are 18 in Korea, a collectivist culture, and 91 in the US, a highly individualistic culture. These two countries may thus be good contrasting

examples for observing the differential perception of gender identity. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: American men perceive themselves to be more manly (masculine gender identity) than do Korean men, and American women perceive themselves to be more womanlike (feminine gender identity) than do Korean women.

H3-1: The impact of gender identity on brand gender will be greater in the US than in Korea.

III. Methodology

A. Sample

According to Global Gender Gap Report 2020 published by World Economic Forum, the US's gender gap score is 0.724, 53th out of 153 countries, while Korea's score is 0.672 standing 108th. The score indicates that the closer this score to 1, fewer disparities between men and women are in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The US score is much higher than the average 0.686, whereas Korea's is lower than the average score. Regarding to GDP per capita, World Economic Outlook published by International Monetary Fund in 2019 was referred. Korea is 31,430 \$, while the US is 65,111\$. The US' GDP is twice as much as higher in Korea's.

Data was collected in the US and Korea. Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk) was used for the US sample. When designing the questionnaire, three screening questions were inserted for selecting right respondents. "Are you an American?", "Were you mostly educated in the US while growing up?" and "Have you used Airbnb for an overnight stay within the last year?" The first two screening questions were used to ensure that a potential respondent is an American influenced by American society. Only those who passed the three questions participated in the survey. A Total of 379 usable responses were retained. The sample contained slightly more males (n=202, 53.3%) than

female (n=177,46.7%). The mean age of participants was 35.11 years old, with a range from 20 to 72. Majority of participants were Caucasian (n=240, 63.3%), followed by African American (n=80, 21.1%), Asian Pacific (n=29, 7.7%), Hispanic (n=21, 5.5) and Native American (n=9, 2.4%). For the Korean sample, a research company specialized in online surveys was employed. This institute possesses over one million panels that are maintained in a systematic way. Similar screening questions as Mturk were used except the questions on nationality and education because the panels the company used for this study are comprised of only Korean consumers that the research company is maintaining thoroughly. A total of 310 Korean responses was collected. The data consisted of 153 males (49.4%) and 157 females (50.6%). The mean age of participants was 36.61 years old ranging from 20 to 67. The mean age of the female group was 34.19 years old while the males' mean age was 39.09 years old.

B. Measures

Grohman's twelve items of brand gender personality traits were adopted for measuring femininity brand personality (FBP, express tender feelings, fragile, graceful, sensitive, sweet and tender), and masculinity brand personality (MBP, adventurous, aggressive, brave, daring, dominant and sturdy) of Airbnb. FBP and MBP were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 "not at all applied" to 5 "very much applied". Gender identity for American group was measured with a shorter version of the Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). BSRI has been used for measuring gender identity in psychology and marketing literature (Ulrich, 2013). However, Palan (2001) argued that some studies measured sex-role identity or sex-role concept by using BSRI. This usage still appears in recent studies. For example, Rup et al. (2018) measured gender identity by using BSRI, but they referred it to gender role. To avoid this confusion, it is safe to confirm that this study used the BSRI to measure gender identity (consumers' degree of masculinity and femininity). The shorter version of BSRI consists of

twelve items for identifying individual's masculinity and femininity traits (Carver et al., 2013): warm, gentle, affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive to other's needs, and tender for femininity gender identity, leadership, strong personality, act as leader, defends own beliefs and makes decisions easily for masculinity gender identity. 5-point Likert scale was facilitated from 1 for not at all applicable to 5 for totally applicable. For Korean sample, following back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1986), the items of brand gender personality of Grohman were translated into Korean first and then were back translated by bilingual experts. 5-point Likert scale was used. However, for measuring gender identity for Koreans, the Korean Sex Role Inventory (KSRI) consisting of ten items (five for masculinity and five for femininity) was adopted (Kim et al., 2016). It is reasonable to use KSRI for measuring gender identity for Koreans because the concept of gender identity is different across cultures (Lippa, 2005).

C. Common Method Bias

Because this study used self-report measurement, common method bias might exist. Hence, Harman's single-factor test was performed to check the bias (Harman, 1967). The finding indicates that the largest overall variance explained by a single factor was 23.636% for Korean, and 29.753 for the American group. The results were less than the recommended 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2012). It was confirmed thereby that data for two groups were free from bias.

D. Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the validity and reliability of four measures of masculinity and femininity of gender identity, masculinity and femininity of brand gender for both samples. For the American group, the initial model's psychometric values were $\chi^2=827.946$, $df=246$, $\chi^2/df=3.366$, GFI=.813, CFI=.873, RMR=.100, RMSEA=.079). These indices show no proper fit of the measurement

model. To obtain better fit indices, a scale refinement process was performed by checking low factor loading and cross-loading, and modification indices of covariance in measurement errors of observed items (Byrne, 2013). Items of 'dominant' and 'defend myself' were removed from masculine gender identity, and 'adventurous' and 'aggressive' were deleted from masculine brand gender. This procedure resulted in a goodness of fit for the measurement model ($\chi^2=355.893$, $df=156$, $\chi^2/df=2.281$, $GFI=.913$, $CFI=.947$, $RMR=.076$, $RMSEA=.058$), and all the values are within the acceptable range (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2009). Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable were calculated. As Table 1 shows, the composite reliability of all measures ranged from .778 to .873, which exceeded the acceptable level

of .60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE ranged from .478 to .535. All AVEs except masculinity brand personality (MBP) exceeded the recommended level of .5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). However, Fornell and Larcker (1981) argued that AVE may be a more conservative estimate of the validity of measurement model, and "on the basis of composite reliability alone, the researcher may conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate" (p.46). Even if The AVE of MBP was slightly lower than the recommended level, CR of MBP exceeded the recommended level, therefore, we conclude that the measurement of MBP has internal reliability. Discriminant validity of measures was examined. As Table 3 shows, discriminant validity was partially supported in that all squared correlations between variables are less than AVEs except MBP

Table 1. Measurement model for American

Construct	Mean	SD	Estimate	CR	AVE	α
Masculinity brand personality (MBP)	3.22			.778	.478	.768
brave	3.29	1.212	0.888			
Daring	3.37	1.181	0.701			
Dominant	2.87	1.303	0.863			
Sturdy	3.35	1.146	0.479			
Femininity brand personality (FBP)	2.97			.862	.511	.903
Express tender feelings	3.16	1.210	0.785			
fragile	2.45	1.313	0.700			
graceful	3.09	1.160	0.775			
Sensitive	2.97	1.279	0.799			
Sweet	3.17	1.222	0.811			
Tender	2.98	1.254	0.837			
Masculinity gender identity (MGI)	3.67			.814	.532	.830
leadership	3.71	1.139	0.832			
Strong personality	3.59	1.143	0.737			
Act as leader	3.54	1.233	0.892			
Makes decision easily	3.84	1.000	0.521			
Femininity gender identity (FGI)	3.96			.877	.544	.872
warm	3.92	0.961	0.768			
gentle	4.04	0.910	0.677			
affectionate	4.00	0.993	0.750			
sympathetic	4.02	0.982	0.702			
Sensitive to other's needs	3.99	0.943	0.667			
Tender	3.76	1.036	0.781			

(Table 3).

The same process as the American group for CFA was performed for the Korean group. The initial model's indices were $\chi^2=749.511$, $df=203$, $\chi^2/df=3.692$, $GFI=.794$, $CFI=.803$, $RMR=.059$, $RMSEA=.093$). To obtain better fit indices, a scale refinement process was performed. Items of 'adventurous' from MBP and 'fragile'

from FBP were deleted through the refinement process. This procedure yielded a goodness of fit for the measurement model ($\chi^2=327.767$, $df=154$, $\chi^2/df=2.128$, $GFI=.902$, $CFI=.935$, $RMR=.047$, $RMSEA=.060$), and all the values were within the acceptable range. Convergent validity was examined by calculating CR and AVE. The composite reliability of all measures

Table 2. Measurement model for Korean

Construct	Mean	SD	Loading	CR	AVE	α
Masculinity brand personality (MBP)	2.91			0.857	0.554	0.793
Aggressive	2.54	.997	0.577			
Brave	3.37	.863	0.555			
Daring	3.43	.797	0.547			
Dominant	2.51	.988	0.955			
Sturdy	2.73	.890	0.811			
Femininity brand personality (FBP)	3.17			0.882	0.601	0.826
Express tender feelings	3.38	.786	0.631			
Graceful	2.82	.858	0.706			
Sensitive	3.16	.884	0.678			
Sweet	3.39	.796	0.810			
Tender	3.09	.853	0.744			
Masculinity gender identity (MGI)	3.46			0.867	0.568	0.815
Valorous	3.56	.698	0.727			
Daring	3.36	.823	0.719			
Forceful	3.19	.852	0.733			
Ambitious	3.58	.839	0.619			
Confident	3.61	.804	0.579			
Femininity gender identity (FGI)	3.65			0.904	0.653	0.881
Affable	3.65	.871	0.751			
Sweet	3.63	.840	0.777			
Attentive	3.81	.787	0.800			
Good-tempered	3.60	.797	0.719			
Gentle	3.57	.832	0.660			

Table 3. correlation and discriminant validity

	American				Korean			
	MGI	FGI	MBP	FBP	MGI	FGI	MBP	FBP
MGI	0.532				0.568			
FGI	0.234	0.544			0.317	0.653		
MBP	0.292	0.175	0.478		0.205	-0.051	0.554	
FBP	0.334	0.323	0.671	0.511	0.086	0.223	0.322	0.653

ranged from .857 to .904, and the AVE ranges from .553 to .653 (Table 2). Discriminant validity of measures was secured. All squared correlations between variables were less than AVEs (Table 3 for the Korean group).

IV. Results of Hypothesis Tests

We estimated the structural analysis using the ML method for testing H1 and H2. Overall, the goodness of fit statistics revealed that the model reasonably fits the data for both groups (American group: $\chi^2=391.765$, $df=159$, $\chi^2/df=2.464$, $GFI=.903$, $CFI=.939$, $RMR=.077$, $RMSEA=.062$, Korean group: $\chi^2=305.202$, $df=150$, $\chi^2/df=2.035$, $GFI=.909$, $CFI=.942$, $RMR=.045$, $RMSEA=.058$). In terms of H1, for the American sample, the test discovered that all structural paths were significant (masculine gender identity (MGI)→MBP: coefficient=0.50, $t=4.066$, $p<0.001$, MGI→FBP: coefficient=.491, $t=4.434$, $p<.001$, feminine gender identity (FGI)→MBP: coefficient=.229, $t=3.034$, $p<.005$, FGI→FBP, coefficient=.307, $t=4.516$, $p<.001$). This finding indicates that consumers' gender identity affects brand gender perception. For the Korean group, the path from MGI to FBP (coefficient=0.036, $t=.559$, $p=.576$), and from FGI to MBP (coefficient=-.118, $t=-1.701$, $p=.089$) were found to be not significant. Other paths were significant (MGI→MBP: coefficient=.286, $t=3.291$, $p<.005$, FGI→FBP, coefficient=.193, $t=3.153$, $p<.005$). This result indicates that Korean consumers' gender identity may be a significant predictor of brand gender except MGI to FBP and FGI to MBP. Therefore, hypothesis 1, which was that brand gender will be perceived differently depending on the user's gender identity was fully supported for Americans, but partially supported for Korean.

To assess the moderating role of gender (H2), we conducted a multi-group analysis for each sample. A non-restricted (free model) was estimated for American sample first ($\chi^2=584.610$, $df=318$, $p<.001$). Then, equality constrained model (all structural paths were set to be equal) was estimated ($\chi^2=588.430$, $df=322$, $p<.001$). The Chi-square difference between free model

and constraint model was calculated ($\Delta\chi^2=3.820$, $\Delta df=4$, $p=.431$). This result found no difference between the models, indicating that gender does not play a significant role as a moderator between structural relationships of gender identity and brand gender for the American. Same procedure was performed for Korean sample: free model ($\chi^2=451.158$, $df=300$, $p<.001$), constraint model ($\chi^2=461.318$, $df=304$, $p<.001$), Chi-square difference ($\Delta\chi^2=10.160$, $\Delta df=4$, $p<.05$). This outcome revealed that gender is an important variable moderating the relationships between gender identity and brand gender for the Korean group. The moderating effect of gender mainly come from the paths from the MGI to MBP (coefficient=.514 for men vs. Coefficient=.135 for women) and from FGI to FBP (coefficient =.278 for men vs. coefficient=.171 for women). This indicates that the effects of masculine gender identity on MBP and feminine gender identity on FBP are significantly bigger in Korean men than Korean women. In sum, the test of the moderating role of gender showed that hypothesis 2 was supported in the Korean group but not in the American group. Table 4 demonstrates the results of the moderating role of gender for each group.

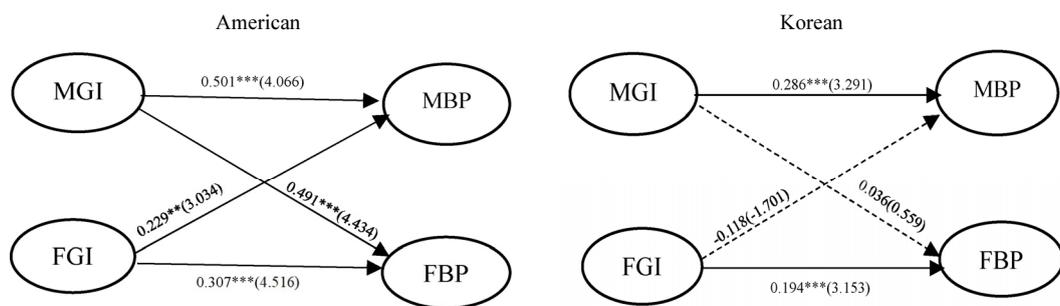
t-tests were performed to test hypothesis 3. Yang (2009)'s study was referred for this analysis. In Yang's study, BSRI was used for the US sample while KSRI was adopted for the Korean sample to compare the mean differences of gender identity between the two groups. We calculated the gender identity index by summing the responses for the 10 items of BSRI (four items of MGI, six items of FGI) and 10 items of KSRI (five items for each gender identity), and compared the means between American men and Korean men, between American women and Korean women. As shown in Table 5, the results of the test revealed that American men perceive themselves significantly more to be masculine than do Korean men ($MD=-2.233$, $t=-6.649$, $p<.001$) and American women perceive themselves more to be feminine than do Korean women ($MD=5.951$, $t=13.262$, $p<.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was supported. To assess H3-1, we compared the coefficients of structural paths for each group. As shown in Figure 2, all coefficients

Table 4. The results of moderating role of gender

	American	Korean
Free model	$\chi^2=584.610$, $df=318$, $p<.001$	$\chi^2=451.158$, $df=300$, $p<.001$
Constraint model	$\chi^2=588.430$, $df=322$, $p<.001$	$\chi^2=461.318$, $df=304$, $p<.001$
Chi-Square difference	$\Delta\chi^2=3.820$, $\Delta df=4$, $p=.431$	$\Delta\chi^2=10.160$, $\Delta df=4$, $p<.05$
H 2	Non-supported	Supported

Table 5. Mean difference

MGI	Mean	SD	FGI	Mean	SD
American men (N=202)	15.040	3.548	American women (N=177)	25.215	4.445
Korean men (N=153)	17.373	2.872	Korean women (N=157)	18.274	3.638
	$\Delta -2.333(-6.946)$	$p<.001$		$\Delta 5.951(13.262)$	$p <.001$

**Figure 2.** The Results of analysis of structural path: American vs. Korean

for the American group were greater than the Korean group, indicating that gender identity had effects on brand gender for the American group more than for the Korean group. This result supports H 3-1.

V. Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, we explored the relationship between consumers' gender identity and brand gender and the moderating role of gender in the context of Airbnb. The exploration was conducted by comparing two countries with different cultural backgrounds (American vs. Korean) and gender equality indices, showing that

gender identity fully affected brand gender for Americans, but for Koreans masculine gender identity (MGI) had an influence on the respondent's perception of masculine brand gender personality (MBP) and feminine gender identity (FGI) on the perception of feminine brand gender personality (FBP) only. In terms of the moderating role of gender, this study revealed that gender does not play a significant role in the relationship between gender identity and brand gender for the American group, while gender was found to be an important variable moderating the relationships for Koreans. According to the gender similarity hypothesis (Hyde, 2005), males and females are similar on most psychological variables. Especially, in cognitive areas such as perception speed, abstract reasoning, and verbal reasoning, the effect size of gender difference is almost zero in terms of the

result of meta-analysis results from American samples (Hyde, 2005). This might explain why gender was found to be not significant in the American group in the study. Further, the study found that American men perceive themselves to be more manly than do Korean men, and American women perceive themselves to be more womanlike than do Korean women. In addition, the study showed that the impact of gender identity on brand gender is greater in the US than in Korea.

A. Theoretical Implications

The results of this study have several meaningful theoretical implications. First, this study provides empirical evidence to support the critical role of gender identity in consumers' perception of a brand, which is distinct from the role of gender (biological sex). Gender identity is a separate construct from gender (Fischer & Arnold, 1994). Palan (2001) argued that when carefully conceptualized, gender identity provides meaningful insights into consumer behavior. This study confirmed that gender identity is a significant factor in the perception of brand gender. Therefore, this study expands the literature on gender identity in consumer behavior by providing substantial evidence in the context of Airbnb. This indicates that future researchers can adopt this variable to examine the perception of a brand. Second, this study extends prior works that investigate the perception of brand gender across cultures (Liven & Hildebrand, 2016). Liven and Hildebrand examined the relationships between brand gender, brand equity, and culture (individual vs. collectivistic culture), showing that consumers' perceptions of brand gender personalities are influenced by culture. With regard to cultural differences in the perception of brand gender, the current study provides additional evidence to reinforce the importance of culture. In particular, the study compared two countries on the basis of the degree of gender equality and cultural dimension (individualism vs. collectivism). Noticeably, this study shows that a brand's perception of brand gender can differ across cultures. In the case of Airbnb, while Americans scored higher on MBP (3.22) than FBP

(2.97), Koreans scored higher on FBP (3.17) than MBP (2.91). These differences may be due to culture and the degree of gender equality. Therefore, future researchers can consider these two backgrounds to examine cultural differences in brand perception. Finally, there remains little research on brand gender and gender identity in the hospitality industry, even if the importance of this topic is increasing. Hence, this study holds meaningful implications as one of the few studies guiding future research on consumers' gender identity and perception of brand gender.

B. Managerial Implications

The same brand can have different perceptions across cultures. Whether gender, gender identity, or both, it is necessary to understand which variable should be targeted when considering brand gender strategy. This study suggests that this issue depends on culture and the degree of gender equality in a society. In the US, both femininity and masculinity in gender identity have differential effects on the femininity and masculinity traits of brand perception. Male consumers prefer more masculine traits, and female consumers prefer more feminine characteristics in a brand (in this case, Airbnb). Gender does not play an important role in moderating the relationship between gender identity and the perception of brand gender. These results indicate that gender identity can be an excellent predictor of an effective brand gender strategy in the US market. American men and women tend to be more confident that they are masculine and feminine, respectively, than do Koreans. Americans live in a culture in which this confidence can be expressed more freely than in Korea. Therefore, to appeal to a brand image, marketers can develop distinct masculine and feminine traits for the brand. However, the fact that American consumers scored higher on MBP than FBP in the context of Airbnb should be borne in mind. This is likely to be related to the more individualistic culture of the US. People in individualistic countries, such as the US, tend to prefer highly masculine brands (Liven & Hildebrand, 2016). This preference may affect the

perception of Airbnb's brand gender. Further, according to Hofstede's cultural dimension, the US is a masculine society (scoring 62 on the masculinity dimension). Therefore, positioning a product in a masculine image may be a more effective strategy when choosing between masculinity and femininity.

Meanwhile, for Koreans, the impact of gender identity is significant but partial. Only masculine gender identity was found to have an impact on MBP, and only feminine identity affected FBP. Korean men and women showed no differences in gender identity. However, gender moderated these relationships. Korean men with masculine gender identity perceive Airbnb's masculine traits more sensitively than did Korean women with masculine gender identity. This phenomenon also applies to Korean men with a feminine gender identity. They perceive the feminine traits of Airbnb more sensitively than do Korean women with feminine gender identity. This indicates that Korean men's gender identity matters in perceiving brand gender. Further, unlike the American sample, Koreans scored higher on FBP than MBP. This might relate to Korean collectivist culture. In collectivist cultures, people tend to place more value on feminine traits (Lieven and Hildebrand, 2016). In addition, Korea is a feminine society (scoring 39 on the masculine dimension). Therefore, in Korea, conveying a feminine image of Airbnb may provide a competitive edge. In sum, the implications of this study are clear: the same brand may be perceived differently across cultures. Practitioners including marketers should take the cultural differences into consideration when establishing global strategies for their brands. Especially, the study surely shows that in the hotel industry that is globally marked by increasingly tight competition (Utama, 2019), differentiation from other brands can be achieved by discerning their brand gender identity related to consumer gender identity that has different meanings across cultures.

C. Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This study has several limitations. First, this study considered only two countries. The gender-equality

paradox is an emerging paradigm related to various cultures and economic conditions in the world. Therefore, more countries from different continents with diverse social backgrounds should be investigated to generalize the study results. Second, the study employed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) items to measure gender identity for US consumers and the Korean Sex Role Inventory (KSRI) for Korean consumers. However, gender-related phenomena are multifactorial and involve several variables, including gender attitudes, gender role behaviors, and sexual orientation (Palan, 2001). Measuring only the individual degrees of masculinity and femininity may not represent a global gender-related construct (Spence, 1995). Future research may observe other gender-related variables, including femininity and masculinity. Third, there are questionable items in the measurement of brand gender. Notably, in their cross-cultural study across 10 countries, Lieven and Hildebrand (2016) emphasized that follow-up studies are necessary to understand the underlying reasons for this problem (Lieven & Hildebrand, 2016). Future research may focus more on addressing this issue in the cross-cultural study of brand gender. Fourth, this study examined only the relationship between gender and gender identity with brand gender personality. However, more in-depth insights into the role of gender identity will result if future research explores the relationship between Aaker's (1997) five brand personalities and gender identity. Finally, this study examined only one brand, Airbnb. Therefore, the results could be difficult to generalize and apply to other brands and industries. Future studies should focus on investigating the relationship between brand gender, identity, and gender in other brands in the hospitality industry.

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