Tourist Guides' Perspectives of Demarketing the Taj Mahal

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A UNESCO world heritage site since 1983, the Taj Mahal, located in the city of Agra in India is an important contributor to tourism in India. In the year 2018 alone, approximately 280 million tourists visited the monument. However, the popularity of the site has several negative impacts such as yellowing of the structure, pollution and overcrowding which endangers this built cultural heritage. Due to this, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which is the national authority entrusted with managing heritage sites, has initiated steps to check overcrowding in the Taj Mahal. One of the widely adopted strategies is demarketing. This paper discusses the impact of different demarketing techniques implemented at Taj Mahal on the tourist guides operating in the monument. To do this, investigative research was conducted with a total of 17 tourist guides who offer their services at the Taj Mahal. A thematic analysis based on semi-structured in-depth interviews was carried out. The study found that though the tourist guides at Taj Mahal are not directly affected by the demarketing measures yet, they face the reverberations of these initiatives. They appreciate the strategies adopted by the authorities to curtail overcrowding and emphasise the need for conservation of the monument as well. The study suggests that demarketing measures not only help in conserving the monument but also prove beneficial for stakeholders. The findings of the study are helpful for policymakers, and monument leadership in taking such measures to control the excessive tourism activities without affecting local stakeholders' income. As demarketing is a delicate measure, it should be considered carefully on a case-by-case basis, taking important stakeholders into confidence. Various destinations have applied demarketing strategies in western countries, however, in India, the Taj Mahal is the first monument which has decided to implement such techniques to curb excessive flows of tourists. This study provides a fresh perspective on the effectiveness of this strategy. Further, the concept of demarketing is novel to stakeholders in India in general and the Taj Mahal in particular.

Key Words: demarketing, tour guides, crowding, heritage management, Taj Mahal

Introduction

The striking fame of Mughal architecture can be seen in the standing pride of Agra's Taj Mahal (Hannam & Knox, 2005). Globally, one of the most renowned monuments in India, Taj Mahal is a splendid mausoleum in the city of Agra, Uttar Pradesh, built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1632 to house the tomb of his favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal (Koch, 2006). The monument has established itself on the world map with its extensively rich architecture and intriguing history (Arunmozhi & Panneerselvam, 2013; Carolina Sparavigna, 2013). The image of the Taj Mahal has been used extensively in both international and domestic literature to reflect the image of India. It is believed that any trip to India is incomplete without visiting this magnificent world heritage site of India (Michell & Pasricha, 2011). The Taj Mahal is a major contributor to the economy of Indian tourism (Silas, 2019). In 2018, the Taj Mahal

earned approximately INR 1.19 million from ticket sales, a fifteen per cent jump from the previous year (ministry of Tourism, 2019, U.P Tourism, 2019). In 2007, as a part of a marketing campaign organised by a private organisation, the structure was named as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World (New 7 Wonders, 2007). The symbol of a lover's grief and sadness, the monument is also a prominent dark tourism site in India (Sneha & Maheswari, 2019). The desire to visit the Taj Mahal is such that an average tourist is happy to stand in long queues to see the mausoleum with large numbers of others (Silas, 2019).

The popularity of the monument has led to an increasing number of challenges for the city as well as for the Taj Mahal itself. The discolouring of the monument, overcrowding, pollution and traffic has concerned the government of the state and Archaeological Survey (ASI) of India. (Lal et al., 2016). Overcrowding at the Taj Mahal has contributed to issues like pollution, lack of open space, degradation of the UNESCO Heritage site, endangering its culture value and fear of long-term loss.

The site is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Founded in 1861, ASI is a government body of India linked to the Ministry of Culture and is in charge of preserving, protecting, and safeguarding cultural monuments in the country and for archaeological research. Even though the Taj Mahal is a popular UNESCO World Heritage site, there is a dearth of literature on the monument and its current state of tourism. India has reported overcrowding only in few destinations like Shimla and Nainital and to address the issue of overcrowding in Taj Mahal is a prominent and important move for the site and the state. Further, Taj Mahal is the first monument in India where demarketing initiatives are adopted and, if seen to be successful, this might trigger similar actions for the preservation and maintenance of other sites. The focus of the paper is on the demarketing measures adopted by the government to reduce overcrowding at the monument. As tourists are the key source for engagement of tourist guides and source of their income, the study aims to offer a unique perspective and study the effect of demarketing on the tourist guides operating at the Taj Mahal.

Crowding and Tourism

Crowding is a generic term which can take place anywhere (Arnberger & Brandenburg, 2007; Stokols, 1972) and is generally understood as a negative evaluation (Ditton et al. 1983; Gramann and Burdge, 1984; Kalisch and Klaphake, 2007; Lee and Graefe, 2003) of a specific density level in a particular area. Various studies have indicated that crowding is a complex phenomenon (Stokols, 1972) and is often subjective due to the involvement of human behaviour at different levels (Ditton et al. 1983; Kalisch & Klaphake, 2007). Lee & Graefe (2003), citing Stokols (1972), describe crowding as a complicated 'psychological construct' which can lead to both physiological and psychological stress for an individual. The 'feeling of being crowded' develops over time and is influenced by numerous factors.

The tourism sector has expanded dramatically in the last few decades. The curiosity of tourists to explore, easy accessibility, advanced technology and increasing disposable income have all unquestionably contributed to the growth of the tourism sector (Dichter & Gloria, 2017; Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019). Due to the growing monetary profits through tourism, stakeholders are often blinded to the adverse impacts of the sector until it affects them directly. The problem of 'too many tourists' in a city with little focus on sustainability would pose a threat to the essence of the destination. (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019). The ill-managed and unsustainable growth of tourism leads to adverse impact on the destination which is termed as 'overcrowding' (Weber et al. 2017). Overcrowding is a general term and can be defined as a state where there are more people present at a destination than is perceived acceptable (Dichter & Gloria, 2017; Santana-Jiménez & Hernández, 2011; Weber et al. 2017). The major driver of perceived crowding (including both over-crowding and under-crowding) broadly includes the destination image,

tolerance of a person and the nature of tourism that the destination manifests (Lu & Wei, 2019; Weber *et al*. 2017). This is a complex situation where there is a fine line between popularity and crowding that starts impacting the tourist experience and the lives of the locals (Santana-Jiménez & Hernández, 2011).

The terms like overcrowding, overtourism, gentrification and tourismphobia are increasingly used to define the phenomenon where destinations are facing challenges due to the negative effects of tourism. This can be observed in famous tourism cities like Rome, London, Berlin and Venice among others (Gursoy *et al*. 2010; Martins, 2018; Milano *et al*. 2019; Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019; Phi, 2019). Large influxes of tourists can threaten the physical, cultural, and social aspects of tourism destinations (Oklevik *et al*. 2019). The role of the media and backlash from the host community is eminent in spreading awareness to the government of the ramification of uncontrolled tourist movement (Bertocchi *et al*. 2020; Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019). Though the words 'overcrowding' and overtourism' have gained popularity in the tourism literature since 2016, it is not a new concept. The negative effects of tourism have been studied by scholars like Doxey and Butler since the 1960s (Butler, 2015; Milano *et al*. 2019). Leading from this, the issue of carrying capacity gained impetus through the 1980s as researchers attempted to understand the issue quantitatively (Koens *et al*. 2018; O'Reilly, 1986; Raj Sharma & Bisht, 2019).

More recently, some destinations have taken drastic measures, not allowing tourists to enter the destination, which is termed as Trexit or tourist exit (Seraphin *et al*. 2018), whereas some are still struggling to create a balance between locals' right to quality living and tourists' right to travel (Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019). Therefore, it is justified to study the models and measures implemented globally to learn from the many possibilities, mistakes and opportunities.

Demarketing

Marketing is an efficient and effective tool to carry a product forward. Kotler defines marketing as an important function of an organisation focused on demand and composition of the product for the company (Kotler, 1972). Demarketing is employed as a strategy to control demand for a product or service. It can be temporary or permanent in nature and may target only a certain class of customer (Kotler, 1971). The strategy is generally fruitful when supply of the product is scarce or when a product is considered undesirable. Demarketing manipulates availability in the market and voluntarily influences demand for the product through conscious strategies and schemes (Beeton & Benfield, 2002; Chaudhry *et al*. 2019; Miklos-Thal & Zhang, 2011). Kotler and Levy (1971) categorised demarketing into three broad areas namely general, selective and ostensible demarketing. General demarketing is applied when the organisation intends to reduce demand for the product or service. Selective demarketing is applied where various schemes are adopted to decrease demand for the product from a certain class of consumer which is considered beneficial to protect the interests of loyal or core customers of the business. Lastly, ostensible demarketing is applicable in situations wherein an organisation intends to create a perceived shortage of goods to encourage consumers' desire towards the product. Limited supplies of products are created, which consequentially lead to the stocking of these sparse goods by consumers.

Figure 1 mentions the three categories of demarketing conceptualised by Kotler and Levy in 1971 (general, selective, and ostensible demarketing). The authors have adapted the diagram and mention the measures undertaken at the Taj Mahal with respect to each category. For instance, time capping of three hours at the monument is categorised as general demarketing whereas price differentiation with respect to tourists' typology (domestic and international) as well as access within the site are categorised as selective demarketing. Likewise, demarketing in promotion of the monument is considered under the ostensible demarketing strategy.

Figure 1: Demarketing of Taj Mahal
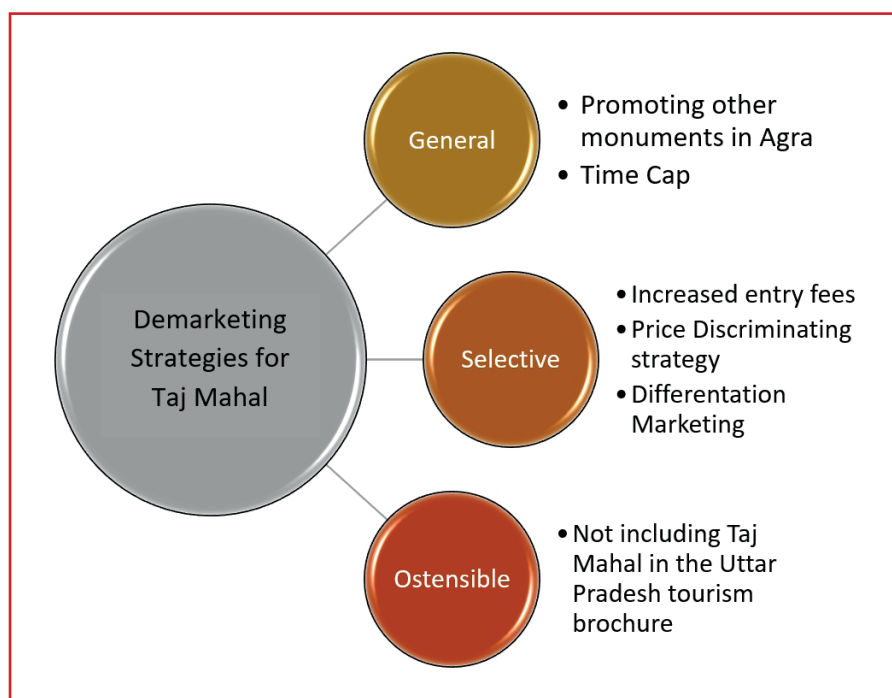
Adapted from Kotler and Levy (1971)

Amongst many destination, the Republic of Cyprus and the Pyramids of Giza have adopted measures of demarketing. The Cyprus Tourist Organisation (CTO) categorised their markets on the basis of income, and following this, middle and high income tourists were consciously targeted (Clements, 1989). The Pyramids of Giza utilises demarketing measures such as differential pricing, targeting certain classes of tourist and limiting access to certain regions. Differential pricing is also adopted by pyramids of Giza, Egypt (Soliman, 2010).

Demarketing Taj Mahal

Over the years, the Taj Mahal has encountered a number of challenges in the face of yellowing of its white marble and overtourism (Lal *et al*., 2016). Such problems have become a deterrent to the experience that the Taj offers to the tourists. These problems mandated the government to intervene and implement measures to save the world heritage site. Traffic in the city and the purchase of tickets directly at the site are inconvenient tasks due to the long queues during peak season (Raj Sharma & Bisht, 2019). Heavy footfall during the peak season requires

management and control by the authorities. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India ordered ASI to manage the monument effectively, as the major problems had persisted for years even after certain measures were taken by the authorities (DownToEarth, 2018). As a result, the ASI has adopted demarketing strategies to curtail overcrowding.

In 2018 December, ASI increased the price of entry to the mausoleum. The entry fees for the domestic tourist have been increased by 400 per cent and for the foreign tourists, the fee jump is 15 per cent (Allen, 2019). The tickets are now priced at INR 1100 (US$ 15.75) for foreign nationals, with an additional INR 200 (US$ 2.86) for entry to the main mausoleum. A domestic tourist has to pay INR 50 for entry to the monument and an additional INR 200 for entry to the mausoleum (Thomas and Westcott, 2018).

A vantage point to view the Taj Mahal was opened by Agra Development Authority (ADA) in November 2019. Shortly after opening, there was a hike in the ticket price. Originally, the ticket price was INR 20 (US$ 0.26) for both foreign and Indian national tourists. In December (within a month of

opening) this was raised to INR 50 (US$ 0.66) for Indian nationals and INR 200 (US$ 2.63) for foreign tourists.

The increase in the price of the entry tickets is not the only measure adopted by the authorities. In 2018, entry to the Taj Mahal was also timed. This means that tourists are not allowed to stay longer than three hours. If they exceed the three-hour time cap, they have to pay the equivalent of another ticket at the checkout (Thomas & Westcott, 2018)

In addition, scaffolding was put over the minarets and the mausoleum to apply a mud pack, cleaning treatment. However, this did not result in the reduction of footfall. The tourism guilds were apprehensive of the measures being adopted since they believed it would negatively impact the income of the state and reduce foreign arrivals to India.

With crowd management being a global issue, several sites are employing demarketing measures to curb overtourism. However, such measures are not an accurate science an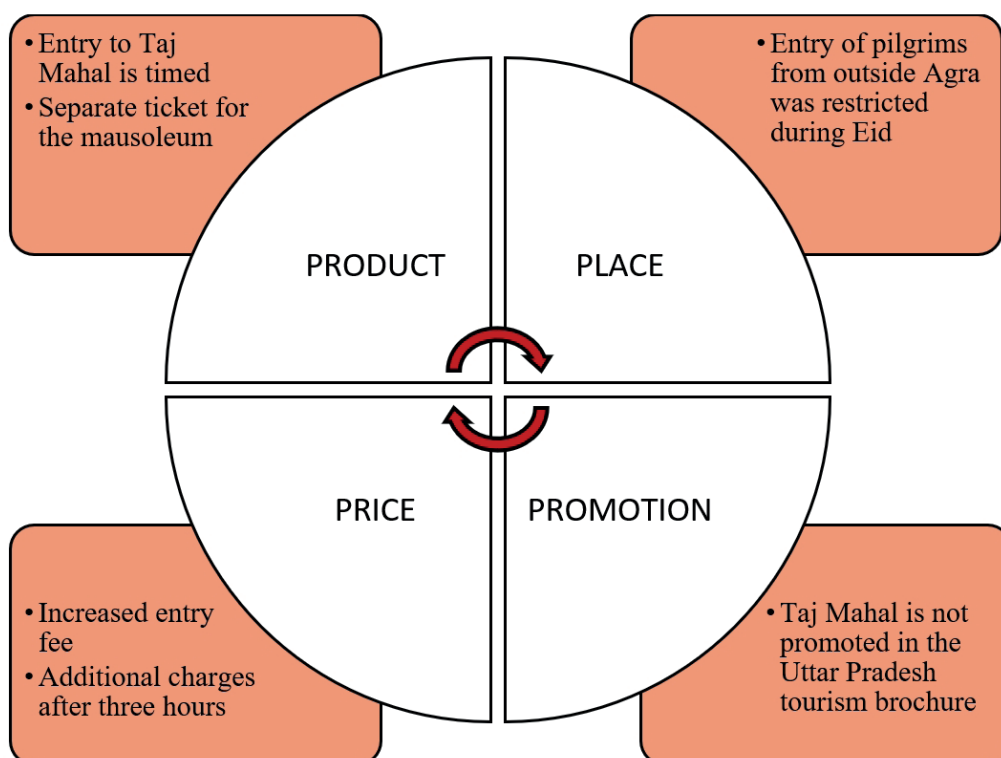d there is a need for efficient implementation of strategies for it to succeed (Little *et al.* 2019; Miklos-Thal & Zhang, 2011; Soliman, 2010).

Demarketing is just one of the tools of marketing which is only effective when it is combined with an overall marketing framework. The authorities can steer demand for a product via demarketing through the appropriate balancing of the marketing mix. All the Ps of the marketing mix can help with the demarketing a monument (Tiwari *et al.* 2020). Amongst the 7 Ps of tourism marketing mix, the strategies used to demarket Taj Mahal have focused mainly on product, price, promotion, and place. Figure 2 depicts the various demarketing techniques in Taj Mahal under this framework.

Tourist Guides and Their Role

Guides are the frontline service providers and perform diverse roles in the process of tourism that are often influenced by their working conditions, environment and government rules and regulations (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2008). Efficient in transforming tourist experiences (Irimiás *et al.* 2020), tourist guides are

Figure 2: Demarketing strategy at Taj Mahal within the Marketing framework (4P's)

PRODUCT
- Entry to Taj Mahal is timed
- Separate ticket for the mausoleum

PLACE
- Entry of pilgrims from outside Agra was restricted during Eid

PRICE
- Increased entry fee
- Additional charges after three hours

PROMOTION
- Taj Mahal is not promoted in the Uttar Pradesh tourism brochure

recognised to be of utmost importance in designing and delivering the tourism experience (Enongene & Griffin, 2018; Weiler & Black, 2015; Weiler & Walker, 2014). Tour guides have the power to mould the interpretation presented to the tourist, being the key information providers, altering the information as per their desire; they can hide some facts, dramatise the narrative and selectively apprise the chronicle (Brito, 2012). Over the past few years, researchers have examined the role of tourist guides in creating, communicating and brokering an experience for travellers (Parsons *et al.* 2019); they are the mediators of tourist experiences (Barbara, 2020). Tourists are bound to the tourist guides, who are responsible for their safety and security, while they simultaneously expect them to deliver a rewarding travel experience (Prakash *et al.* 2011). Guides have to maintain a fine line between creating rapport with the tourist while being professional and imparting intimate knowledge about the destination (Cohen, 1985). Tourist guides co-create the experience for the tourists in four categories namely physical access, intellectual access, encounters and emotional access (Weiler & Black, 2015).

As per the traditional notion, guiding is considered a one-way communication. Guides in ancient times directed people in geographical terms rather than for fun or leisure, by assisting them in finding the way, while protecting them from thieves and animals (Brito & Farrugia, 2020). Since the earlier reasons to travel were for trade and commerce, the primary activities of guides centred on the task of protecting goods and travellers. However, in the contemporary world, this is not completely true, as the role of guides has evolved with the activities of the tourists. With co-creation, the relationship is more interactive than ever before (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015). Tour guides are now seen as enablers of experience who assist the tourist to experience the reality of what they want to encounter rather than giving them ready-made artificial experiences (Räikkönen, 2014). They can help to create the experience for the tourists as per their actions (Prakash *et al.*, 2010). For instance, tourist guides helped in mitigating the negative evaluations of crowding or congestion with their knowledge and story-telling skills, thus resulting in

overall tourist satisfaction (Sanz-Blas *et al.*, 2019). Research related to tourist guides demonstrates that they are crucial in building the destination brand (Brito, 2020) and experiences of the tourist (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, contemporary research acknowledges the role of guides in creating sustainable outcomes such as creating awareness regarding the value of the site, influencing positive tourist behaviour in a destination, and helping tourists to adopt pro-conservation attitudes (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2001; Weiler & Kim, 2011).

When a government implements policies that affect tourism, all stakeholders are somewhat affected by it, and so is their livelihood. The measures adopted by the authorities to check overcrowding in the Taj Mahal are directly felt by the tourists and have reverberations on the tourist guides. While the tourist guides are considered to play a salient role in the return intentions of tourists (Brito, 2009), they can also monitor the behaviour of the visitors to protect the culture and heritage of the destination (Zammit, 2020). For tourists, guides are the face of the industry and, therefore, it is crucial to understand how state-driven measures affect their performance and livelihood. Furthermore, it is necessary to comprehend their perspective of the entire scenario as they are the ones working on the front line; they are the destination experts who can influence tourists' experiences (Seyitoğlu, 2020).

Methodology

This investigation utilised purposive sampling to identify tourist guide subjects with whom to conduct qualitative interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The respondents were consciously chosen to represent diversity and were selected on the criteria that they had worked as a tour guide for at least the past seven years in the Taj Mahal. The interviewer identified and approached the guides outside the monument. The guides that matched the criteria for the study were shortlisted, and an extensive thematic interview was conducted. The interviewing took place over ten days in the third and fourth week of October 2019. The sample consisted of twelve male tourist guides licensed by the Ministry of Tourism.

Women tour guides were not included in the sample as they are very few in number and the researchers did not come across any during the data collection. Out of these twelve tour guides, seven were natives of Agra, two came from the neighbouring city of Meerut; and only one from the capital city Delhi who has been living in Agra for over a decade. The guides worked on a group basis and have a dynamic income.

The reason for undertaking a qualitative study was that no similar study has been conducted so far (Haq *et al*. 2008). A thorough in-depth inquiry was conducted as this approach is suitable while investigating new research areas and feasible when the sample size is small (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013; Vaismoradi *et al*., 2016). The face-to-face interviews lasted 40 minutes on average. The questions asked to tourist guides were open-ended and facilitated by the interviewer to allow meaningful responses.

Exploration of the interview findings used thematic analysis. The most rigorous use of thematic analysis in tourism research has been its application to the interpretation of written documents such as interview transcripts (Walters, 2016).

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviewer raised questions about the measures adopted by government to curtail overcrowding in the Taj Mahal and its relative impact on tourist guides. Sample questions included:

'Does a three-hour time cap for the tourist changes the style of your guiding?';

'How would you describe your role in managing the monument?'; '

Do you think overcrowding is actually present in the destination?'

An audio recording was made of the interview and translated verbatim from Hindi to English in some cases. Two professionals conducted the translation. The translation was then recorded and corroborated by the guides after the data were prepared. A complete thematic analysis was then undertaken in the semantics of the transcription (Nowell *et al*.

2017; Walters, 2016). The analysis incorporated the identification of commonalities in the words used, coding of the words and phrases, exploring their relationship, addressing differences in thoughts, investigating patterns, and consolidating the organising themes (Parsons *et al*. 2019; Vaismoradi *et al*. 2016).

Findings and Discussion

The guides presented similar views when discussing the strategies of demarketing implemented at the monument. The broader perspective was that they are welcoming of crowds in the Taj Mahal. They believe that the crowd in provides an icing to the experience of the tourist, which is supported by existing literature that human crowding has a positive influence on crowding perception (Kim *et al*., 2016; Li *et al*., 2009; Sanz-Blas *et al*., 2019). The tourist guides reported that visitors feel it inconvenient to buy tickets from the counter due to long queues, and during the peak season the entry time is even longer. However, the wait builds up the tourists' excitement to witness the beauty of the Taj Mahal. Even though the tickets are available online, this could be a reason behind domestic tourists' choice to buy the tickets from the counter.

The study resulted in four broad themes in relation to the guides' perspective of demarketing strategies undertaken to curb overcrowding concerns at Taj Mahal, namely- historical or cultural value, management of monument, management of people, and quality over quantity.

Historical / Cultural Value

The discussion with the respondents showcased their affection for the monument and their contribution in emphasising the historic value that the Taj Mahal carries for Indians. One respondent proudly stated that:

> *It gives me immense pride and pleasure to work as a tour guide in Taj Mahal. People travel thousands of miles just to see our monument* (R7).

The sense of belongingness to place influences their perception of crowding (Arnberger & Brandenburg, 2007). In this case, tourist guides are happy that because of their profession, they are capable of sharing each and every detail of the monument with foreign tourists. When they were asked about their opinion on increased prices of the ticket, a respondent replied:

> *The inbound guest will most likely visit the Taj Mahal since it works as a major pull factor for India. It is the jewel of our country and its presence makes golden triangle one of the hottest selling product. So, even if the ticket prices increase, the demand of tourists would remain the same. This is the charm of the beautiful Taj* (R11).

This theme emphasises that when destinations are popular or have significance cultural and historical value, demarketing measures don't significantly influence the tourists' decision to visit the place. Demand remains inelastic and thus, this measure has negligible negative impact on the income aspect of tourist guides. However, to avoid degradation issues at other cultural or historical places, a pricing demarketing strategy might not be suitable; this depends on the popularity of the site and the elasticity of tourist demand.

Management of the Place

In spite of the historical significance that the Taj Mahal possesses, participants felt that management of the monument is imperative. There are issues on the part of the management authorities which cause crowding concerns. The guides believe that if the authorities utilise their resources to full potential, they can resolve the problem of overcrowding in the Taj Mahal. They believe a centralised mechanism to counter the problem of the place is essential.

> *Management and administration are integral to any society. Therefore, there is no debate in a need for policies to save the livelihood that Taj Mahal provides us. We with folded hands welcome any strategy that can save the Taj Mahal from getting yellow* (R3).

When asked what one thing they would like to change with regard to management, a respondent stated that:

> *Often ... entry to the monument is open from only one side ... In my opinion, I would ask the authorities to open all gates and employ more staff* (R6).

All tourists evidently welcome the management of monument guides in the Taj Mahal. It highlights that stakeholders realise the importance of managing a popular tourist destination. The managing authorities should consider the perspectives of local stakeholders while designing policies or implementing a strategy as this would help the policymakers in knowing the pros and cons of a plan. Furthermore, the local guides should be provided with frequent training sessions in collaboration with industry experts and government officials. This could help them in understanding the implication of policies and the significance of sustainable practices at the destination (Weiler & Walker, 2014).

Management of the People

The main aim of implementing a demarketing strategy was to control the excessive flow of tourists at the Taj Mahal. The respondents shared mixed views such as a tourist guide who caters to group tourists and speaks proficient English, French, and Spanish - this individual criticised the demarketing strategy which aims to limit the number of people at a specific time:

> *I generally guide a group of 12-15 foreign tourists at a time. Now the authorities have limited the number of people that can enter the monument at a specific time. This cause my clients to wait and sometimes they get irritated. The need is not to limit the tourist influx in the monument but to manage the footfall efficiently* (R9).

Conversely, some participants elaborated that the three-hour time cap has not affected the guides or the tourists. As per their opinion, this measure has discouraged the intentions of the locals to keep revisiting the monument.

> *It is the local guests that have been affected by the three-hour time cap. The guides*

hardly take one hour to finish the tour and this guiding experience can be expatiated in case the tourists have less time. Once we are done with guiding, we move on to the next group leaving the tourists behind to click pictures. Three hours are more than enough for a tourist to explore Taj Mahal (R1).

When asked about their suggestions, each guide had their own unique idea to manage the Taj Mahal. One of the guides pointed out that the use of technology and the opening of all the entry points to Taj Mahal could help in managing footfall.

The entry for the Indian tourists from one gate and the foreign tourists from the other can divide the footfall and may reduce the length of the queues. Further, the guides who specifically cater to the Hindi speaking tourists can be on one side and the ones particularly working for the inbound guests can stand on the other (R14).

This theme is broadly related to demarketing of place. According to the guides' responses, it could be inferred that in the Taj Mahal, demarketing is adopted more as a skimming strategy which aims to restrain the local city population to visit the monument frequently. They suggest that this is a tactical policy, however, if locals' are denied access to their own resource, it may lead to the situation of anti-tourist ideologies in the long run (as discussed by Hughes, 2018).

Quality over Quantity

The guides believe that most of the strategies are aimed at lowering the footfall of local guests and the focus is to increase the number of tourists who provide more revenue for the state. When asked about the need for intervention by the authorities to reduce the tourists' footfall, one of the participants answered:

The heavy footfall in Taj Mahal is a source of income for us. If we have to deal with a little bit of inconvenience for the extra money that we can get in our pockets, then we are happy.

When asked about the impact of increased ticket prices on guides, the participants considered this as a favourable move, stating that:

It is the domestic guests that are demotivated with the hike in prices. More of them are avoiding the visit inside the mausoleum which is better preserving the delicate art inside. Earlier the locals used to visit Taj Mahal frequently even if one of their outstation relatives came to town. Now the number of locals visiting the monument has filtered which currently seems to be a favourable move. Such local guests hardly took the services of the guides anyway (R4).

The guides seem to appreciate the policies adopted by the authorities to limit the footfall. They unanimously believe that this has not impacted their guiding directly and are welcoming of any changes which can increase the quality of experience for the tourist. The profit comes from the inbound tourists as the locals hardly spend in the destination and they prefer to guide inbound groups for better tips:

The strategies and the policies that have been implemented have not affected us per say actively but we can see that the crowd is being filtered. The locals are visiting the monument in comparatively lesser numbers than before. We have never considered the locals of the city as our main target audience. We as guides would like the visitor experience improved but at the same time our income should not get affected (R10).

The responses for this theme highlight that demarketing is a favourable move for the destination which is focusing on quality tourism practices. It is contrary to the fundamental notion of measuring the growth of a tourist destination which considers the number of tourist arrivals at a specific time. This notion would gradually change, and re-invention in the tourism sector is a pre-requisite in the post-COVID-19 phase (Brouder, 2020).

Implications

The guides have a strong perception that the local tourists have reduced which is favourable for them as those tourists do not opt for their services. They appreciate the measures taken by the government

and emphasise that they are getting more quality tourists at the monument. However, the claim cannot be corroborated since the outburst of Covid-19 has decimated the number of tourists worldwide and countries have faced lockdown for months. The aim of the authorities is unclear while implementing their strategies. Were they looking to discourage the local visitors to enter, or were the strategies uniform in preventing the arrival of non-serious tourists who will not just stroll into the premises and contribute only minimally to the economy. It is imperative to note that the guides are celebrating the fact that the arrival of locals to the monument has reduced, however one must question if this is ethically good or not. The locals, who earlier used to spend their evenings or holidays in the vicinity of the Taj are now discouraged to visit the monument due to the increased prices. They have been suffering the brunt of overcrowding in their daily lives, yet they cannot freely enjoy the monument as per their desires. The community level success is dependent on the involvement of the local stakeholders and their support defines the success of the overall project

(Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2012). This study throws light on the nostalgic challenge faced by the locals of Agra who used to visit the monument frequently when the entry fee was lower. The implementation of new strategies has restricted the visit frequencies of locals, which gives rise to discussions on tourism as a luxury. The study raises the importance of being stakeholder friendly, as this is imperative for the government and the tourism boards - this investigation provides them with contemplative questions regarding their target audience, and their moral obligation towards the host population.

Conclusion

A UNESCO world heritage site, the Taj Mahal is the crown of Indian culture and its tourism. It is one of the most visited places in the country owing to its popularity. However, the beauty of the Taj Mahal is being tarnished owing to industrial pollution and the large volume of tourists. To curb the negative repercussions of tourism at the monument, several demarketing measures were implemented by management, such as increasing ticket prices, time-

Concern	Recommendation	Responsibility
Historic / Cultural Value	1. Price demarketing not suitable if demand is inelastic 2. Time Limit is preferable 3. Guides should be trained to enhance tourists' experience by story-telling techniques giving each possible small detail about the place	ASI
Management of Place	1. Regular visits and audit of the site 2. Promotion demarketing is preferable 3. Interaction with Tourist Guides and other local stakeholders 4. Bottom-up participation approach 5. Using technology and smart applications	ASI or Destination Management Organisations
Management of People	1. Segmentation is highly recommended 2. A guide to behave responsible at destinations to be provided to all tourists 3. Time Limit is recommended 4. Dispersing marketing technique can be suitable	Local Destination Authority
Quality over Quantity	1. Price demarketing is preferable 2. Segmenting tourists based on the type of tourism offered is suitable 3. Selective demarketing of destination 4. Re-invent destination image	Destination Management Organisations and Tour Operators

Table 1: Recommendations for each theme

capping, and promoting other monuments in the city. Though the effectiveness of these strategies has not yet been studied, this paper attempts to analyse the impact of adopted measures on the guides of the Taj Mahal. The study recorded the responses and synthesised the guides' perceptions of demarketing into four major themes namely historical/cultural significance of the monument, management of the place, management of the people, and quality over quantity tourism.

The positive responses from the guides illuminated that demarketing is an effective measure for historical monuments which are being deteriorated due to excessive tourist footfall. The tourist guides at the Taj Mahal appreciated the measures because they do not directly affect their income and instead, demarketing has promoted quality tourism by deterring tourists who do not opt for guiding services and rather create inconvenience for other tourists and tourist guides. Even though tourist footfall is managed with the help of demarketing measures, without adversely affecting the local stakeholders, mainly guides, the long-debated question of host community engagement with the monument still remains a question for authorities to answer. Future studies can focus on exploring demarketing measures and their impact on tourists, and the destination through empirical data, carry out sentiment analysis of the host community or tourists with respect to the adoption of similar measures to curb overcrowding, measure the effectiveness of demarketing strategies as a responsible tourism practice, and the result of adopting strategic marketing policies or measures for the mitigation of impacts.

This study is limited to the perspective of tour guides at one heritage monument and doesn't include the other aspects of crowding or effects at the destination. Demarketing as a measure was seen as a positive initiative regarding the quality of tourism and was seen as economically viable by the tour guides. However, the study does not acknowledge other social and environmental aspects of sustainable tourism development through the adoption of demarketing strategies at a crowded destination.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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