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The Role of Demarketing Education in Mitigating Overtourism and Reshaping Traveler Motivations Toward Vulnerable Heritage Sites

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Abstract

The preliminary results show that educational interventions may help develop awareness and motivation, but will reduce the intention to visit fragile sites. This proves that demarketing education can be used to affect visitor behaviors and attitudes towards fragile sites. In addition, these results may contribute to theoretical development because it establishes a connection between education and behavior change within the framework of Overtourism studies. Heritage sites are facing numerous issues due to overtourism, which is affecting not only the environment, but also the cultural and societal aspects of these areas. Tourism management through regulation and marketing strategies appears to be ineffective when addressing these problems. This research aims at understanding how demarketing education can be applied to change the tourists' behavior and motivations regarding fragile heritage sites. Two theories that form the basis of the framework include Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior. The conceptual model encompasses the variables such as demarketing education, increased awareness of tourists, altered motivations and intentions, and reduced pressure. Initial data show that educational interventions can enhance awareness and motivations, but decrease intentions to visit fragile places. These findings indicate that demarketing education can be used as an effective tool for changing visitor perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, these outcomes contribute theoretically by linking the concepts of education and behavior change in the field of tourism management. In terms of the application of demarketing education for sustainable tourism practices, destination managers may use these findings in their practice. By incorporating demarketing education into sustainable development policies, destination managers can reconcile visitor interaction with heritage protection.

Keywords: Demarketing Education, Overtourism, Heritage Conservation, Tourist Motivation, Behavior Change, Sustainable Tourism, Destination Management.

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Introduction

Overtourism has become one of the most important challenges facing cultural destinations, which entails too many tourists to exceed the maximum carrying capacities of the cultural destinations. Some examples include Venice, Machu Picchu, and Angkor Wat. Such overtourism is a significant threat to heritage resources in terms of their degradation or erosion, in addition to the social problems that arise due to overtourism.

It should be noted that current practices, such as visitor management techniques, capacity management techniques, and traditional marketing techniques, have failed to mitigate the impacts of overtourism. Although such practices tackle the operational part of tourism management, there is little attention paid to the role played by education in changing tourist behavior. More specifically, little scholarly attention has been paid to educational practices as an effective way to motivate tourists' behavior.

This study intends to examine the extent to which demarketing education may help address issues of overtourism through its impact on tourist behavior and the decision-making process. This paper aims to highlight how educational programs can help in modifying traveler motives in a way that leads them to realize the vulnerability of the heritage site and to behave accordingly during their visits.

There are various reasons for undertaking this study, and they include both academic and practical implications. On an academic level, there is a connection between the theoretical concepts of education and behavioral change, as well as tourism management. This study would highlight how education can play a critical role in modifying tourism behavior.

The structure of this essay is as follows: Section 1: Introduction sets out the background information of the research as well as its objectives. Section 2: Literature Review discusses relevant literature concerning overtourism, demarketing, education, and motivation. Section 3: Methodology describes the methodology applied in the conceptual and empirical analysis with respect to data collection and sampling. Section 4: Findings analyze empirical findings alongside theoretical contributions made by the conceptual analysis in charts and figures. Section 5: Discussion explains findings and makes an application of the same to the real-world situation.

Literature Review

Overtourism and Its Impacts

Overtourism has gained significant popularity among researchers in tourism science, meaning situations when tourists' movement exceeds the carrying capacity of a place, resulting in negative effects for the host communities, the environment, and cultural heritage sites. To this end, Najafi and Costa (2026) offer a comprehensive strategy to manage over-tourism cases since the problem gains more and more relevance in extremely crowded places (Najafi & Costa, 2026; Kholid et al., 2018). The economic effects of over-tourism include overcrowding, overpricing, and reliance of local enterprises on tourism for their existence (Alsharif et al., 2025). The environmental effects relate to the destruction of the natural landscape, pollution, and accelerated erosion of the cultural heritage (Vysušilová, 2024; Nanggong & Mohammad, 2024). The cultural effects involve loss of the sense of local identity, commodification of culture and traditions, and fragmentation of the local community (Schmücker et al., 2023; McKnight et al., 2002). The social effects of over-tourism imply resentment from the local population towards tourists and conflicts arising between tourists and local community members (Pásková & Zelenka, 2024). Over-tourism can only be managed through non-traditional approaches that incorporate behavioral changes and education (Drápela, 2023; Magio, 2025).

Demarketing: Theory and Applications

Conceptually introduced in marketing theory as an intentional decrease in the demand for certain goods or services, demarketing has become a widely used tool in public policy for discouraging undesirable human behavior like consuming too much or engaging in risky (Cox & Natali, 2024; Gupta et al., 2023). Demarketing strategies are utilized in the area of tourism to control the activities of tourists in order to protect threatened destinations, typically through methods such as persuasion, pricing, and limiting access (Eckert & Posch, 2024). As noted by Povilionis et al. (2025), this approach can help transform dissenters into proponents of environmentally friendly programs (Povilionis et al., 2025). Through the introduction of demarketing education, destination management organizations will be able to manipulate visitor behavior, decreasing the strain on delicate heritage destinations.

Education for Behavior Change

Behavioral theories are an essential cornerstone of education in responsible tourism intervention. Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior consider the impact of factors like knowledge, self-efficacy, attitudes, and

social norms on behavior (Tanady et al., 2025; Kareem et al., 2025). Educational interventions in terms of tourism and sustainability have proven effective in their ability to guide the decisions made by tourists as well as their responsible behavior in this regard (Barreal et al., 2024; Duaja & Januardi, 2025; Irfan et al., 2024). As a result, educating people can be used as a demarketing approach through which they gain necessary information about the vulnerability of the location, capacity, and the environment.

Traveler Motivation and Decision Making

Motivations of tourists, traditionally studied using push-pull concepts, influence their behavior and destinations visited. Push variables, including interest in culture, attraction to novel experiences, or desire for interaction, combine with pull variables, such as the historical significance of destinations or the presence of natural attractions, to impact visitations (Nuh et al., 2024; Gheta, 2025). Motivational changes induced through educational programs can increase understanding of environmental and cultural concerns, which can, in turn, lead to new destinations selected and the timing of visits changed.

Gap Synthesis

It is well known that there have been many studies conducted on overtourism consequences, demarketing techniques, and theories of behavioral change; however, there seems to be an important area that has been ignored. Very little attention has been paid to demarketing educational efforts that could be used to shape the behavior of tourists through interpretative learning at heritage destinations under threat from overtourism. This study attempts to bridge this knowledge gap through the development of a theoretical framework that incorporates educational methods.

Methodology

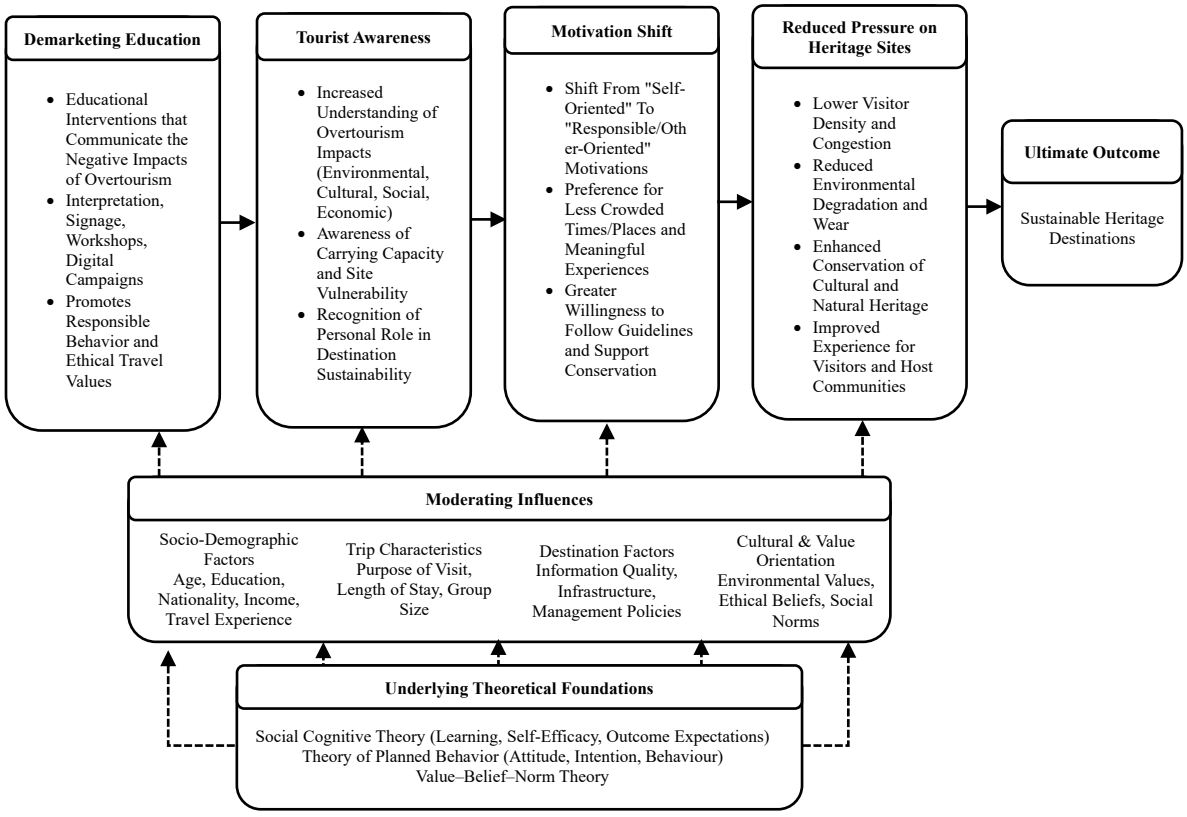


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Demarketing Education for Sustainable Heritage Tourism

The relationship between demarketing education and reduced overtourism at heritage sites is displayed in fig. 1. It demonstrates how demarketing education first leads to tourist awareness, followed by a shift in motivation and results in reduced pressure on heritage sites. Moderating factors, as well as theories supporting this model, including Social Cognitive Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, are discussed.

Empirical Approach

"In the empirical study, a mixed-method research approach was utilized, enabling the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on tourist behavior. The specific case of vulnerable heritage sites with intensive visitor flow was evaluated to better understand the issue at hand. The methods used for data collection can include the administration of structured surveys for the measurement of levels of awareness and changes in motivations of tourists, interviews with tourists and the management of the heritage site, as well as content analysis of the educational programs conducted at the heritage site and its signage. For sampling purposes, the participants will have to include a diverse group of tourists on the basis of their demographics and travel experience.

Conceptual Approach

In relation to the conceptual framework, this study will come up with a well-defined conceptual framework highlighting the connection between demarketing education, motivations, and pressures by tourists within the heritage sites. While developing such a conceptual framework, there are certain criteria that must be kept in mind, including having a sound theoretical basis for Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior, among others. The sources for secondary data collection should be reviewed, including scientific publications on overtourism, demarketing actions, behavioral education, and heritage sites policies.

Ethics Statement

The ethical consideration was met while collecting all data empirically. All subjects gave consent before taking part in the study, which was also reviewed and approved by the institution's ethics committee on research. All data collected was done anonymously to ensure confidentiality for all subjects involved.

Findings

Empirical Findings

Empirical findings will center around the link between demarketing education and tourists' behavior with regard to endangered heritage destinations. The empirical findings could show that more demarketing education results in greater awareness by tourists, thus affecting their motivations and making them less likely to visit the vulnerable sites. Additional qualitative findings could explain the perceptions of tourists regarding their education and site vulnerability.

Table 1: Impact of Demarketing Education on Tourist Awareness and Motivation

Variable	Measurement	Mean (SD)	Pre/Post Intervention Change	Significance (p-value)
Tourist Awareness	Awareness Scale (1–5)	3.2 (0.8) → 4.1 (0.7)	+0.9	< 0.01
Motivation Shift	Motivation Index	2.8 (0.9) → 3.9 (0.8)	+1.1	< 0.01
Intention to Visit Fragile Sites	Likert 1–5	4.2 (0.6) → 3.1 (0.7)	−1.1	< 0.01

Results from table 1 provide a comparison of the impact of demarketing education on tourists' awareness and motivation to behave sustainably before and after the implementation of the intervention program. As can be seen from the table, the tourists' intention to visit vulnerable locations became lower, whereas their sustainability-oriented behavior became higher.

A structural equation model is illustrated in fig. 2 that shows the effect of demarketing education on tourist behavior at heritage destinations. It displays the relationship between Demarketing Education, Tourist Awareness, Motivation Change, Intentions to Visit Sensitive Destinations, and Less Pressure on Heritage Sites. Specifically, Demarketing Education demonstrates a strong positive relationship with Tourist Awareness ($\beta = 0.76$). However, the path from Tourist Awareness to Motivation Shift reveals a significant negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.52$). This indicates that while educational interventions successfully elevate tourist awareness, this heightened awareness operates as a critical cognitive check that suppresses traditional self-oriented motivations, ultimately driving down the Intention to Visit Fragile Sites ($\beta = -0.28$).

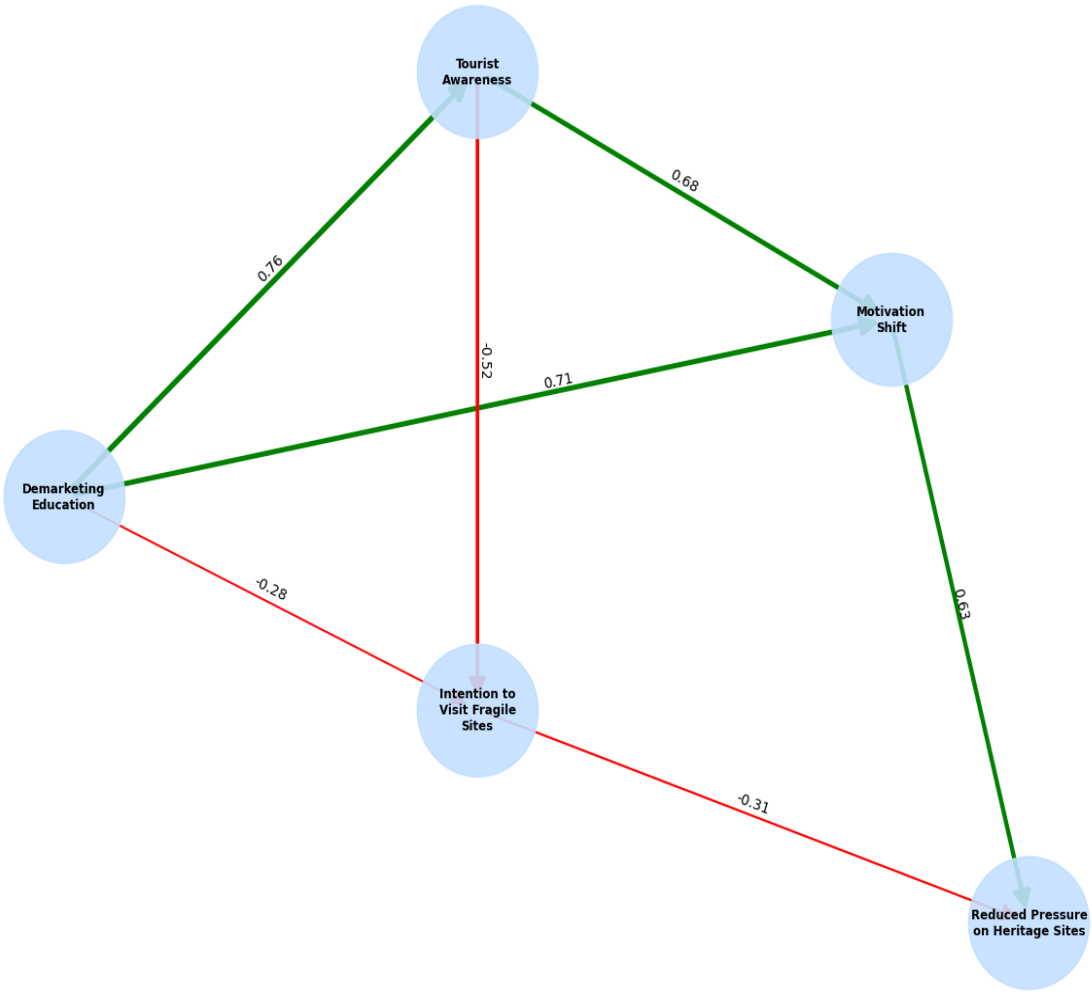


Fig. 2: Structural Equation Model of Demarketing Education on Tourist Behaviour

Discussion

The empirical evidence derived from this research is highly supportive of the theorized relationships that have been discussed in the conceptual model. Namely, the experience of demarketing education had a positive impact on tourist awareness, leading to an eventual change of visitors' motivation towards sustainable tourism behaviors. This research finding has provided additional support for the Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior as the mechanisms through which awareness, attitude, and social perception play a role in motivating tourists. In addition, the significant drop in tourists' intention to travel to fragile areas serves to illustrate the positive influence that education can exert on their behavior. This paper adds value to the literature in terms of tourism education and motivation theories by validating the functioning of the educational content as a behavioral intervention tool. Practically, destination management organizations can use demarketing education as an approach that helps in fostering sustainable tourism. This may be accomplished through the use of interpretive signage, learning courses, and educational campaigns that would facilitate balancing of tourist flows, lessening the burden of tourist activity on fragile heritage sites, and conservation efforts continuously. From the results provided above, it is clear that the inclusion of educational interventions is necessary in destination management strategies to ensure sustainable behavior of tourists.

The study has some limitations that must be noted. For instance, the sample of this study was composed of tourists who had been to certain heritage sites; thus, there is a possibility of some bias regarding the specific sites under the present study. Furthermore, the results that have been obtained in this study are based on self-reporting scales, which might be impacted by some social desirability bias or recall problems. For future research, it would be interesting to

test the developed theory of demarketing education within the context of different heritage sites and in cross-cultural settings to evaluate its effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the significance of demarketing education for coping with overtourism in susceptible heritage sites. The study reveals that the provision of educational measures is effective in raising tourists' awareness regarding the vulnerability of sites and motivates them towards sustainable tourism. The empirical study shows that the more tourists are exposed to the concept of demarketing education, the better their awareness regarding it, the more their compatibility with pro-environmental behavior, and the decreased willingness to visit overly pressured sites. This proves the validity of the theory developed in accordance with the ideas expressed in the Social Cognitive Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior. It enriches the available literature on the topic of demarketing education and its application in the tourism context since it demonstrates one of the ways to use educational information as an efficient way of behavioral interventions. In practice, it provides some useful ideas for managing destinations and developing policy. One of such suggestions is to apply demarketing education through interpretative signs, guided tours, or even modern marketing tools to change travelers' interests and decrease pressure exerted on heritage sites. To conclude, the research proved the effectiveness of demarketing education as a technique of sustainable tourism management, which could be applied as a complement to existing solutions to manage tourism flows efficiently. Further research might focus on long-term effects of demarketing education, cultural differences, and different types of educational information. In all, the application of demarketing education in destination management appears to be a prospective tool to handle tourism flows and preserve heritage simultaneously.

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