

Social Representations and Images of Slum Tourism: Effects on Stereotyping

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Abstract

Slum tourism, referring to trips, leisure, and other activities conducted by wealthy people in spaces inhabited by disadvantaged populations, is highly controversial. On the one hand, there is the risk of exploitation and dehumanization of slum dwellers; on the other hand, it can help fighting stereotypes and stigmatization. We explore the images of slum tourism shared online on a popular tourism website, TripAdvisor, and test their impact on stereotyping. Using a mixed-method approach, in Study 1 we analyze a large corpus of images of slumming experience to explore the social representations characterizing three typical destinations of slum tourism (Brazil, India, South Africa). In Study 2, we focus on India images of slum tourism, centered on contact with the local populations. Specifically, we test the impact of photo framing (as Tourism, TripAdvisor, Volunteerism, or no label) on three key stereotype dimensions (sociability, competence, morality). Results generally revealed detrimental effects on competence and morality by images framed as Tourism or TripAdvisor (but with also positive effects on sociability), and positive indirect effects (via more positive photo category evaluation) of images framed as Volunteerism on the three stereotype dimensions.

Key words: Social Media, Slum Tourism, Social Representations, Favelas, Township, Slum, Photos, Reviews.

Slum¹ tourism can be broadly defined as a variety of “activities undertaken by people of wealth, social standing, or education in urban spaces inhabited by the poor” (Koven, 2004, p. 9). The breadth of this definition stresses the variety of ways in which it is possible to cross into “other” spaces, without a priori distinguishing between more or less moral activities. In this sense, slumming includes a whole spectrum of activities such as leisure, voluntourism (voluntarism+tourism), charity, investigative journalism, or cultural and heritage tourism (Huysamen, Barnett, & Fraser, 2020).

What is common to these activities is the relationship of (power, economic, status) inequality between visitors and locals, and the diverse forms of contact among them. So defined, slum tourism is highly controversial (Frenzel, Koens, & Steinbrink, 2012). On the one hand, the zoo metaphor is often used to underline the risks of voyeurism, consumerism, exploitation, and dehumanization of slum dwellers; on the other hand, the eye-opening function is evoked to underline the possibilities that slumming offers to enter into contact with otherwise “invisible others” and to engage with social inequality and injustice (Burgold, Frenzel, & Rolfes, 2013). Slum tourism can thus be considered as a specific case within the reflection on the tourist-local reciprocal gazes: a set of expectations which tourists project on places and locals in the search for an ‘authentic’ experience (Urry, 1990) and, vice-versa, the expectations and control practices which residents project onto visitors (Maoz, 2006). These reciprocal gazes, once again, are two-sided. They can activate a destructive process in which only the expected expressions of ‘authenticity’ that can be commodified and staged survive

¹ Despite there is no single definition of slums, we follow UN Habitat operationalization, which identifies slums referring to their legal and physical characteristics found in overcrowding, poor, illegal or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and basic sanitary infrastructure and insecurity of tenure, social and economic marginality (UN, 2003).

(MacCannell, 1984). Alternatively they can create new spaces to shape group images, mutual awareness, and cultural exchange (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005).

Social media have further complexified the power relationship embedded in viewing and being viewed, making the boundaries of authenticity even more blurred. Today, the e-mediated gaze consists in the common and individual practice to instantly create countless images and narratives that can reinforce, violate, or even subvert existing imaginaries of places and persons (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Transferred on dedicated platforms, these images constitute the mediascapes in which an indefinite number of prosumers (tourists, companies, locals) are engaged in a continuous process of intertextuality.

Such e-mediated gaze clearly amplifies both negative and positive aspects of slum tourism (Muldoon & Mair, 2016). However, research has yet to provide direct evidence for the role of online images of slum tourism in shaping stereotypes of local populations. In this article, we take into account the crucial role of social media in the slum tourism phenomenon (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), focusing on a popular travel social media, TripAdvisor².

Following a mixed-method approach the article presents two studies. The first study presents at the best of our knowledge one of the most extensive analysis of images spontaneously used by tourists to describe their slumming experience. The second study is experimental, aimed to examine exposure to slum tourism photos on perceptions of locals. Specifically, we examine whether photos related to slum tourism in India

² TripAdvisor is the largest online network of travel consumers that works with user-generated content and a comparison between shopping websites. It provides guidance on where and how to organize tours and which experiences to try, providing a scoreboard for all tour and mentioned activity companies, through the travelers' reviews. Furthermore, it offers online reservations and bookings for different services. It therefore is a point of reference for travelers.

determine differential stereotypic perceptions of the local population depending on the label with which they are presented.

The Many Faces of Slum Tourism

The origins of slum tourism are traditionally set in the Victorian London and early twentieth century United States (Frenzel, Koens, Steinbrink, & Rogerson, 2015), despite similar experiences are reported in diaries and accounts of Grand Tour in Italy. In its contemporary forms, slum tourism started in the late 20th century and is now a global phenomenon, which involves millions of tourists every year (Frenzel et al., 2012). Initially targeting South African townships, Brazilian favelas, and Indian metropolises as principal destinations (Rolfes, Steinbrink, & Uhl, 2009), it nowadays involves growing number of destinations (e.g., Chege, & Mwisukha, 2013; Hammad, 2021). Being slums themselves contested and multifaceted objects, the differences described between and within the same destinations come as no surprise (Rolfes, 2010). For example, in Brazil, the phenomenon exploded in conjunction with the mega events of the '90s including the Earth Summit and sport events, moving from so-called jeep tours toward current consideration of community ownership and environmental fragility (Fagerlande, 2022). In South Africa, the trajectory has been different: tourism involves political, heritage, and local nightlife aspects, and it connects urban and rural tourism dimensions, as well as internationals and locals in innovative and creative tourism dynamics (Booyens & Rogerson, 2019). Still different is the experience in Indian destinations, which has been linked to pro-poor initiatives, volunteerism, and the experience of movies such as *Slumdog millionaire* in the global imagination (Gantait, Mohanty, Singh, & Sinha, 2021).

Despite these differences, there is a common aspect that characterizes slum

tourism: the relational experience and the role played by slumming in constructing what a “real slum” is (Frenzel, 2018). In this perspective, the diverse forms of slumming call for a reflection on the ways images and experiences are created, re-mediated, used and contested by the actors involved. Studies that place the gaze and voice of locals at the forefront show different results from case to case. Research collected locals’ positive expectations and attitudes as well as their critical visions and oppositions (e.g., Freire-Medeiros, 2012; Kieti & Magio, 2013). Local ownership and participation – which are also key for developing responsible tourism (O'Brien, 2011) are fundamental. Furthermore, emphasizing the centrality of place, authors have noted that slum tourism itself can be an imposed etiquette. Taking Vilakazi precinct, Soweto, as an exemplar case, it has been shown that locals (as well as tourists) mainly link their experience to aspects of struggle heritage more than to poverty issues (Hoogendorn, Letsatsi, Malleka & Booyens, 2020).

Given the importance that movies have for tourism destination, it is worth mentioning research that put under a critical lens the globalised visions constructed by movies and media more generally, their political use and their effects at local levels (Banaji, 2010). Finally, taking a self-reflective stance, the academic gaze has also been analyzed, for example showing the role that underlying epistemological paradigms play in informing the academic gaze on the object of study (Tzanelli, 2018). Authors also reflected on the permanence of two main academic discourses named “slums of hope” and “slums of despair” (Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2013) and on how the gaze of researchers vary according to the specific slums examined (Freire-Medeiros & Moraes, 2022).

For the purposes of the present study, the tourists gaze on locals is pivotal. On the one hand, slumming may foster positive contact with locals, promote cultural

encounters, and challenge the isolation and the stereotypes that threaten slums dwellers identity (Inversini, Rega, Pereira, & Bartholo, 2015). On the other hand, authors stressed the risk of perpetuating stereotypes: by making poverty an attraction, its visual representation is often expressed through images of infringements to moral foundations (e.g., dirt, lack of care for children), which however also include ascription of positive traits that neutralize the negative traits (e.g., “poor but happy”). These representations can act as barriers that prevent an intimate engagement, leading instead to objectification and stereotyping (Crossley, 2012). These processes can be promoted by local guides and business, that act as mediator and actively orient the perspective of tourists (Altamirano, 2022), and even by self-stereotypization processes activated by the locals in the attempt to show that “authenticity” required by tourists (Frenzel et al., 2015).

In the attempt to define basic mechanisms underlying the diverse experiences Frenzel et al. (2012) refer to two alternative processes that should favor the encounters between tourists and locals: “othering” through which tourists place value in someone who is different and a source of new insights, and “sameing,” through which similarity among visitors and locals is stressed. These two processes can also have unintended negative effects: othering, by defining slums through absence (*not* caring, *not* wealthy); sameing, as a form of denial, by making social inequalities invisible to the eyes of the dominating group (Holst, 2015).

Social representations approaches suggest that sameing and othering processes can be understood as forms of social construction, through which outgroup members are placed into “otherness” by depicting them as carriers of different values, moral norms, and/or rights and duties (Sarrica, Grimaldi, & Nencini, 2011). Shared representations of

‘who we are’ *and* ‘who they are’ (Oyserman & Markus, 1998) could lead to veritable “stigma theories” which maintain social inequalities, exclude and marginalize outgroups also using moral considerations. But they can also activate virtuous intergroup dynamics, empower communities and orient political action for change (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011).

Within this overall framework, there is still a dearth of studies on the images of slums circulating online, and on the impact of these images in fostering or reducing prejudice. Research on the textual part of online reviews published on TripAdvisor shows that tourists tend to reproduce a kind of post-humanitarian narrative genre (Ekdale & Tuwei, 2016). Research on reviews of experiences in Langa and Imizamo Yethu, in Cape Town (Huysanen, Barnett, & Fraser, 2020), Rocinha, in Rio (Wise, Polidoro, Hall, & Uvinha, 2019), and in other main destinations in South Africa, Brazil, and India (Sarrica, Rega, Inversini, & Norton, 2021), coherently identify representational processes that act as a form of soft power and sanitization discourses. Through their online discourse, tourists present themselves and slumming as a positive and ethical move, yet making extreme poverty invisible and removing any awareness of structural and political dimension and thus any quest for structural change.

Studies on images have been conducted mainly with qualitative in-depth analyses based on tourist reports (Duffy, 2016; Muldoon & Mair, 2016). Relevant to the present research, Dürr (2012), in her study on Mazatlán rubbish dump, stressed the impact that circulation of images through the internet has in anticipating the slumming experience and transforming slums into theme-parks. Linke (2012) showed that, as in a game of mirrors, reified in stereotypical images, slums are taken out of their context,

reproduced elsewhere, respecting specific aesthetics, symbolic, and affective tropes that merely serve artistic exhibitions, fashion, consumption purposes.

Our research is specifically aimed at addressing these aspects, by deepening the contents and effects of images (re)produced by slum tourists.

The Stereotype Content Model

The stereotype content model identifies two main dimensions to stereotype groups: competence (focused on skills and intelligence) and warmth (based on friendliness and kindness). These two dimensions, considered by individuals as prerequisite for survival in the social world, guide social judgments of groups (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011). The dimension of competence refers to the ability to act according to one's intentions (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Generally, low-status groups are defined by warmth rather than competence, being primarily attributed traits such as kindness and goodness, along with traits indicating low competence (unintelligent, unskilled). These attributions allow to justify the subordination of low-status groups (Fiske et al., 2002).

Recent research has differentiated warmth into two distinct dimensions: sociability and morality. While sociability (e.g., friendliness, likeability) concerns cooperation and connections with others, morality (including traits such as honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness) informs how (un)trustworthy and threatening others are (Brambilla, Biella, & Freeman, 2018). Morality has been shown to be more relevant than sociability and competence in determining impressions of other individuals and groups (Brambilla, Hewstone, & Colucci, 2013). There is evidence that morality plays a key role in the global evaluation (Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, & Yzerbyt, 2012) both to define whether somebody is beneficial or harmful (Van Lange &

Kuhlman, 1994) and to evaluate the intentions of others (Willis & Todorov, 2006).

Research has therefore recognized a primary role to the moral component in the process of evaluating others (Brambilla et al., 2011).

The Present Research

The aim of the present research is to evaluate the phenomenon of the slum tourism, in terms of the contents and effects of images that are shared via the social media. To achieve this goal we conducted two studies.

In the first study we explore the iconic dimension of social representations of a typical slum tourism setting. The aim is to identify the shared iconic components that contribute to define the representation of slum tourism, that is the figurative nucleus that capture the essence of slums and its inhabitants. To examine peculiarities of the main slum tourism places, the first study was conducted on a large set of photos posted online on TripAdvisor from Indian, South African, and Brazilian destinations.

The second study uses results from the first study to evaluate the impact of online images of slum tourism on stereotyping. In this study we decided to focus on India as slum tourism destination: consistent with previous research (Sarrica et al., 2021), the analysis conducted in Study 1 suggested the Indian slum-tourism to be the ‘by the book’ experience. Photos about Indian destinations include diverse typologies of contact with locals, from selfie with children in the streets, to visits to local craftsmen, to engagement with social and care centers. In the other sites, a narrower experience of contact seems to emerge: photos in Brazil are mainly about landscapes and buildings, whereas in South-Africa they mainly depict cultural and heritage sites (even if local nightlife could represent an additional setting of contact). The aim is to test, for the first time, whether and which typologies of images (i.e. the figurative nucleus identified in

Study 1) contribute to reinforce or reduce intergroup stereotypes. We further manipulated conditions of presentations, to examine whether framing images differently affects stereotyping.

Study 1

Site Selection and Data Collection

Brazil, South Africa, and India are the main destinations for slum tourism, with intra-country and inter-country differences among sites (Frenzel et al., 2015). We thus chose to focus on the 20 most popular slum destinations of these three countries using official tourism data as a source. A preliminary manual search in TripAdvisor was conducted to identify which slums were sufficiently represented in the social media platform. The resulting list was used to automatically search the platform using the name of the slum or general definitions (e.g. ‘slum’, ‘township’, ‘favela’) as the search word, the city as the location, and English as language. A manual screening of the data was performed to further clean the data. We analyzed all the photographs attached to the selected reviews, to examine the iconic dimension and the figurative nuclei of the shared representations of slums circulating online (Loizos, 2000). Table 1 reports the details of the dataset.

Data Analysis

The corpus was investigated through content analysis inspired by polytextual thematic analysis for visual data (Gleeson, 2011; Sarrica & Brondi, 2020; Sarrica et al., 2015). The content analysis, following Moliner’s (2016) considerations, focused on explicit structural features, and analytically coded shapes (i.e. basic visual patterns), motives (e.g. persons), and themes (e.g. commerce, learning, etc.). The coding grid included the following categories: 1. People in the picture (children, men, women); 2.

perspective (indoor, outdoor); 3. activities (religious activities, leisure or sport, volunteering, educational, commercial, handicraft, other jobs, housework); 4. customs (music, dance, street art, food or drink, traditional costume); place (religious, educational, commercial, factory, cultural, historical, leisure and sportive, other social, residential, landscape); other elements in the picture (landmark, infrastructure, weapons, sign, tourists, close up and details). Three independent judges conducted the content analysis. In the rare cases of disagreement on coding, the photo was re-analyzed by the three judges together until consensus was reached.

To summarize the information and to identify recurrent patterns in the analyzed dataset, a hierarchic cluster analysis (Ward method) was applied on the contingency table derived from the content analysis.

Results

The cluster analysis identified nine main clusters, that correspond to recurring combination of motives and themes, and that characterize the visual representation of slum tourism experience in India, South Africa, and Brazil (Table 2).

Looking at the total counts, the majority of photographs refer to indoor activities that have been identified as related to social or volunteering (e.g., children in a classroom, care workers), followed by outdoor photographs related to buildings and details, commercial activities or landscapes (e.g., panoramas, architectural details, markers and panoramas); landmarks related to street art or to historical sites, as well as photos with children outdoor (e.g. children playing football) or cultural and leisure activities, are relatively less present.

The slums of the three countries are characterized, as expected, by different images. The image of South Africa is related to historical, cultural, and leisure

activities. Brazilian favelas are depicted as picturesque and colored landscapes, through iconic landmarks and – interestingly – by photos showing tourists enjoying their staying without further explicit reference to the context.

Different is the case of India. Images significantly associated to Indian slums represent commerce, children, and social activities and are thus especially relevant to our purposes, showing different typologies of contact with the locals. We thus present these three clusters in greater detail.

In the cluster “commerce” most photographs show markets, shops and commercial streets, men working on what seems to be the preparation of what is going to be sold. In general, this cluster shows pictures of commercial activities, men and women at work, selling their products (like food), sometimes in contact with the tourists. The impression is that photographers aim to show the way “things we are used to” are done in a different country, the traditional foods, how people work, what are the products sold.

The cluster “children” associated with India includes almost half of the photos of the whole dataset in which children are depicted (47.8% of the total photos including children). Most photographs portray happy moments: kids smiling, with the locals or with tourists. Children depicted in the photos are mostly dressed in ordinary jeans and t-shirts and sometimes with school or sport uniforms. In many photographs children are aware that the picture is being taken and participate actively, smiling, making grimaces, and having fun along with the photographer. In some cases, children simply conduct their activities, like playing or eating.

Finally, the cluster we interpreted as “social and volunteering” includes the large majority of photos depicting indoor activities (84.6%). Photos in this cluster also

represent children (30.6%), but often in groups and with adult men and women. We interpreted this cluster as related to social and volunteering activities due to cues in the context (e.g., a blackboard) or to the activities depicted (e.g., music, dance, education). Photos in this cluster also include handicraft activities and food.

Discussion

Taken together, the results of this study confirm the relevance that images posted by tourists have in constructing the imaginary of slum. The analysis of photographs suggests what could be considered a culturally appropriate depiction of slumming in South Africa, Brazil, and India, and which are the elements of the figurative nucleus of the representations of these specific others. The South African experience is connected with the history of apartheid and cultural activities, confirming the specificity of these destinations, which make them questionable examples of slumming (Hoogendorn et al., 2020). The cluster of images significantly associated with Brazil (e.g., the prevalence of landscapes, the focus on leisure) is more related to self-presentation (e.g., “I’ve done,” “I’ve seen”) than to self-other encounters. This is consistent with the geographical specificity of Rocinha, and of the way it has been commodified, sold by tour guides, and represented by tourists as a beautiful location, a personal and a safe experience (Freire-Medeiros, 2008; Wise et al., 2019)

In India, the tourists gaze is closer to locals (the pictures are in full shot or medium full shot) and their experience has more to do with visiting the disadvantaged rather than a cultural or a leisure trip. Representations follow the processes identified in literature, namely, the ambivalence of othering and sameing processes, the beautification of poverty. The figurative nucleus of the Indian slums and of its inhabitants is thus polysemic including for example shops or children at school, which

could potentially activate a sense of closeness between tourists and locals, but also a patronizing stereotype and/or a removal of extreme poverty and a normalization effect (Crossley, 2012; Huysanen et al, 2020; Wise et al, 2019).

Images from India best represent a form of mediated contact, intended as exposure to a social outgroup as well as its culture via the media (Harwood, 2021), in our case photos from TripAdvisor. Mediated contact has been shown to increase prejudice and stereotyping (Sensales et al., 2016), but also to reduce them (Vezzali et al., 2022; for a meta-analysis, see Banas et al., 2020). Whether the images from India contribute to stereotyping, or they represent instead a mediated form of contact that can reduce stigma, remains an empirical question which we address in Study 2.

Study 2

The second study aimed to investigate the effects of stereotyping of the different typologies of slum tourism photos from India posted online and identified in Study 1. We included four categories of photos (children, selfie, outdoor activities, tradition/education), selected on the basis of a pilot study (see below). We also manipulated the photo labels, to understand whether labels could change the photo impact, with the idea that it is not the photo per se, but the way this is contextualized that determines its effect. Effects were tested on three dimensions of stereotyping identified by research as relevant, that is morality, sociability, competence (Brambilla et al., 2018) attributed to Indians. We also tested whether differential evaluation of photos depending on photo label would mediate the effect of experimental condition on stereotyping.

The experimental design included three conditions where photos were differently labeled, and a no-label control condition. The first label we used is

“Tripadvisor,” which is the social media from which we collected the photos. We expected the label Tripadvisor to make salient the commercial use of images, reinforcing the zoo metaphor and potentially leading to detrimental effects on stereotyping and to reinforce the perceived subordination of Indians. The second label was “Tourism.” Although this label is similar to the former, it should be less characterized by the commercial aspect, with potentially lower negative effects on stereotyping. Its inclusion allows us to disentangle the mere effects of presentation of photos for tourism purposes from the additional effects that can be expected when commercial purposes are more explicit. “Volunteering” was included as the third label. Volunteering was shown to increase solidarity, empathy, and social support, this way promoting a more equal society (Faiz, 2020). We expected this label to foster positive engagement with the otherness, with a supportive approach that challenges social inequalities. Finally, we included a no-label control condition against which to compare the other conditions.

We make the following predictions:

H1: (a) morality should be boosted in the Volunteerism, and reduced in the Tripadvisor and Tourism conditions. In fact, Volunteerism should activate the representations of Indians as individuals who need help because they are disadvantaged, and therefore are moral since they are helped by volunteers; in contrast, Tripadvisor and Tourism should highlight the commercial aspect of tourism, inconsistent with a moral image of the outgroup; (b) to the extent that disadvantaged groups are generally stereotyped as sociable (Fiske et al., 2002), we predict effects of all experimental conditions on greater sociability. In fact, sociability can be activated both as a paternalistic response to photos (more likely in Tripadvisor or Tourism conditions) or as

true appreciation of the outgroup (more likely in the Volunteerism condition); (c) given than all experimental conditions imply subordination of the Indian group, we expect a negative association between all conditions and competence.

H2: (a) we expect indirect positive effects of Volunteerism on the three stereotype dimensions: Volunteerism should increase positive evaluation of the photos presented for the different categories, and positive evaluation should in turn be positively associated with the three stereotype dimensions; (b) TripAdvisor and Tourism, due to their commercial nature, should be nonsignificantly associated with photo evaluation; we acknowledge however that, since they portray a positive image of the Indian group, they also might be positively associated with photo evaluation and in turn with the three dependent variables.

We exploratory test whether there are differences in the effects of TripAdvisor and Tourism conditions, but we do not make specific predictions, since it is difficult to anticipate the extent to which the two of them are differentially attributed to the commercial nature of tourism. Similarly, we do not make specific predictions about the potentially different mediating effects of photo category evaluation.

Pilot study – photo selection

Starting from Study 1 results, we decided to use only photos from clusters that represent commerce, children, and social activities. These images represent the most prototypical slum tour experience in India, showing different typologies of contact with the locals. The photos from these three cluster were submitted to a qualitative screening which helped us identify further sub-typologies: selfie with locals, children, market and commerce, tradition/education activities, other outdoor activities. These photos were submitted to 84 participants, who were asked to indicate how representative each photo

was for each category on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). For each photo, we averaged responses, so that higher values indicated more representative photos of the selected category. We selected fifteen photos emerged as the most representative of children (3), outdoor activities (3), selfie with locals (3), and tradition/education (6, since this category included prototypical photos with different characteristics).

Main study

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were asked to fill out an online questionnaire presenting some photos to assess their evaluations on the set of images and collect information on their outgroup stereotypes. Participants provided informed consent for the study, presented as a research aimed at investigating intergroup relationships. Participants were 1,146 adults (47% male and 53% female); they were aged between 18 and 69 years ($M = 27.4$, $SD = 7.29$). They were randomly allocated to one of four conditions: Tripadvisor ($N = 347$), Tourism ($N = 258$), Volunteering ($N = 312$), Control ($N = 229$).

Procedure

Participants were first presented with the 15 photos selected in the pilot phase, under three different conditions aimed to manipulate the context of evaluation by adding above each photo a descriptive label, depending on experimental condition: Tripadvisor, Tourism, Volunteering, Control (no-label).

In each condition, participants first evaluated each photo; then, they were presented with measures of stereotypes toward Indian people. Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

Measures

Photo category evaluation. Participants were asked to evaluate each photo on six bipolar adjectives (*negative-positive; disgusting-likeable; dangerous-not dangerous; dishuman-human; dirty-clean; undesirable-desirable*). Participants responded to the six items for each photo using a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The scale showed good reliability for each photo category as identified in the pilot study (children, $\alpha = .91$; outdoor activities, $\alpha = .94$; selfie with locals, $\alpha = .93$; tradition/education, $\alpha = .95$). Items for each of the photo categories were averaged in an index corresponding to that category (children, outdoor activities, selfie with locals, tradition/education), with higher scores reflecting a more positive evaluation.

Stereotypes. Participants were presented with eight traits (Brambilla et al., 2011) including two sociability traits (helpful, warm), three competence traits (intelligent, competent, capable), and three moral traits (honest, moral, responsible). They were asked to which extent Indians were characterized by each trait, by using a response scale ranging from 1 (*completely false*) to 5 (*completely true*). Items were combined in three reliable indices of sociability ($\alpha = .68$), competence ($\alpha = .82$), and morality ($\alpha = .78$) attributed to Indians.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and differences between conditions for all variables are provided in online supplementary material.

To test H1, relating to the effects of the independent variables on the three dependent variables (social, competence, and moral traits), we used linear regression. As independent variables, we used dummy-coded experimental conditions: we created three dummy variables, with each dummy contrasting one experimental condition

(*Volunteering, Tourism, TripAdvisor*) against the other three conditions. Results are presented in Table 3. Volunteering and TripAdvisor conditions were positively associated with sociability. Tourism was negatively associated with competence; both Tourism and TripAdvisor were negatively associated with morality. H1 has therefore received partial support for all three stereotype dimensions.

To test H2, we used linear regression, by using the PROCESS macros by Hayes (2013, Model 4). The four photo category evaluations were included as mediators. As shown in Table 4, Volunteering was positively associated with the four photo category evaluations; the other two experimental conditions were positively associated only with one photo category (children). When experimental conditions and mediators were simultaneously included in the regression equation, photo category evaluations were positively associated with all stereotype dimensions (Table 5). Specifically, both the categories selfie with locals and tradition/education were positively associated with all dependent variables; outdoor activities were positively associated with sociability.

Inspection of the direct and indirect effects (Table 6) revealed that the Volunteering condition was indirectly associated with greater sociability (via selfie, outdoor activities, and tradition/education), competence (via selfie and tradition/education), and morality (via selfie and tradition/education). We also found an indirect effect of Tourism on greater sociability via outdoor activities (note however that tourism was nonsignificantly associated with outdoor activities). No other significant indirect effects emerged. These findings generally support H2.

Discussion

Results showed that slum tourism photos affect stereotyping, and their effects crucially depend on the framing of the photo. When photos are framed in commercial

terms, that is when it is salient that they are for tourism reasons (framing: Tourism, TripAdvisor), they negatively affect competence and morality attributed to slum dwellers. In contrast, positive effects can be found for the dimension of sociability, when there are presented in terms of both volunteering or tourism. Results additionally revealed as expected that volunteering had indirect positive effects on all stereotype dimensions, via more positive evaluations of the photos; results for the other framings were inconsistent and basically nonsignificant.

General Discussion

We conducted two studies with the aim of investigating the phenomenon of slum tourism, in terms of its social representations and effects on stereotyping of slum populations. To explore social representations, we relied on TripAdvisor as the most popular international travel platform.

Theoretical implications

Results from the first study confirm the different figurative nucleus of social representations of the three tourism destinations examined (Brasil, India, South Africa). As far as the images of favelas are concerned, they seem to correspond to the processes already highlighted, concerning favelas in the cityscape for the purposes of symbolic taming (Steinbrink, 2013). On the positive side, the beautiful landscapes into which tourists project their experiences could provide the symbolic basis for engaging tourists in participatory projects of environmental recovery and environmental education (Fagerlande, 2022). Images from townships confirm the historical narrative connected with the visited places, reinforcing the idea that the representations shared by tourists are more about a heritage and cultural visit than a slumming experience (Hoogendorn et al., 2020). At the same time, however, images from Brazil and South Africa foster a

type of marginalization of the inhabitants already emerging by others research on the web: dwellers are distanced, excluded from sight, replaced and silenced, leaving no room for nuanced discourses of hope and despair (Huysanen et al., 2020; Wise, et al., 2019).

In the case of India, the figurative nucleus of social representations corresponds more closely to the processes of othering and sameing and of moral infringements (Frenzel et al., 2012). These slumming representations could easily confirm patronizing stereotypes, in a self-reinforcing mechanism of selection, neutralization, and reproduction of an otherwise threatening “object”. Likewise, these images could modify the representations of individuals exposed to them, by reducing anxiety and providing examples of positive contact (Burgold et al., 2013; Crossley, 2012; Frenzel et al., 2012; Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2013).

Results from Study 2 showed that it is not the slum tourism per se that changes observers’ stereotypes, but the context in which the photos are reported, that is, the label accompanying the photo. Framing photos in terms of tourism (labels ‘Tourism’ and ‘TripAdvisor’) increases the patronizing image of the slum population, by strengthening its perceived sociability. We suggest that these labels make salient the commercial exploitation and the disadvantaged situation of the slum population. Images of tourism can increase stigma, lowering stereotype dimensions that are generally attributed to advantaged groups, like competence and morality. When framed in terms of volunteerism, the same images revealed positive indirect effects on sociability together with competence and morality. Therefore, although they may reinforce a patronizing stereotype (sociability), they also improve perceptions of the outgroup in a non-patronizing way, ascribing to its members valued and positive stereotype characteristics

such as competence and morality (Brambilla et al., 2018; Fiske et al., 2002). We suggest that this may be at least in part because of the different nature of power relationship between photographer and subjects suggested by the label. Interestingly, although experimental condition was associated with evaluation of photos on children, they did not mediate the effect of condition. Possibly, this is due to elements like clothing, expressions and behaviors, more in line with images of children in general than with specific Indian stereotypes, with therefore less likelihood to affect stereotypes of Indians.

To the extent that slum tourism photos are typically framed in terms of tourism and are often viewed via platforms like TripAdvisor, it follows that they can contribute to the stigmatization of the slum populations by tourists, further lowering tourists' perceived competence and morality attributed to individuals living in the slums and therefore justifying the status quo or social inequality in tourists' perceptions. In our case, it can justify the experience in the slums – if with tourist connotations – thus the instrumental use of the poverty and discomfort of the premises for commercial/touristic purposes.

Vezzali and Stathi (2021) recently defined extended and vicarious contact as the knowledge or observation (respectively) of interactions of varying valence between ingroup and outgroup members. This definition allows the consideration of negative or vicarious contact, which typically increase prejudice (cf. Vezzali & Stathi, 2021). In the context of the present study, vicarious contact applies when photos display Western tourists interacting with the local population. Departing from existing research, vicarious contact is in this case positive, since it depicts friendly interactions. However, it produces negative effects because of the way it is, which can subtly contribute to

increasing stigma via lower attribution of competence and morality traits, and increased sociability (which we can associate with a patronizing perception). As such, it is even more insidious to recognize and therefore to fight.

Practical implications

This study has important practical implications. Slum images typically populate TripAdvisor and similar websites on tourism. Although tourism is important to improve the economic conditions of economically weaker populations, it should not negatively impact on their social subordination. Working on image frames, characterizing them not (only as) tourism, is therefore important to avoid stereotyping. Although tourist websites have not the aim to reduce stigma towards disadvantaged populations, they should have at least the moral imperative to *not increase* it.

Limitations

We acknowledge some limitations. Firstly, considering the polysemy of the object of study and of images in particular, it is necessary to clarify the authors' positioning in the "global north" (although this category may be debatable). Our is – like all views – a biased gaze. For this reason, we have chosen a systematic procedure of analysis, aimed at limiting interpretations. It should be noted that our perspective is close to that of the potential tourists, reproducing their possible interpretative processes. However, further gazes by other perspectives (e.g. locals, guides) are desirable to further deconstruct the cultural aspects embedded in the images that are circulating online. In the second study, the explicit nature of measures may have induced socially desirable responding (but the absence of direct effects of volunteerism frame in Study 2 on key stereotype dimensions indirectly rules out this possibility). The specific focus on one country in Study 2 represents a limitation to generalization. Furthermore, in this

study we did not explore the differences among locations within the same countries (e.g., different favelas, townships, slums).

Despite these limitations, we showed that images of slumming that involve locals, like in India, may change stereotyping dimensions in a patronizing way or promote a positive stereotypic image. Stereotyping is therefore not (only) in the eyes of the beholder, but also in those of who “labels.” We encourage practitioners to consider the potential detrimental, but also beneficial effects of slum tourism representations, so to make it a real empowering experience also for those who are “observed.”

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Table 1. Selected images dataset, Study 1.

	South Africa		Brazil		India	
Reviews	3,455		2,290		2,381	
Photographs	1,067		736		592	
City	Johannesburg	675	Rio De Janeiro	734	Mumbai (Bombay)	341
	Cape Town	358	Sao Paulo	2	New Delhi	251
	Durban	21				
	Port Elizabeth	13				
Location	Soweto	616	Favela	454	Slum	356
	Township	161	Rocinha	218	Dharavi	215
	Langa	155	Santa Marta	23	Kathputli	21
	Multiple	85	Multiple	16		
	Alexandra	25	Vidigal	13		
	Masiphumele	14	Babilônia	8		
	Khayelitsha	10	Cantagalo	3		
	Kwamashu	1	Alemão	1		

Table 2. Cluster analysis, Study 1

Clusters	South Africa			Brazil			India			Total	
	Count	%	Std. Res.	Count	%	Std. Res.	Count	%	Std. Res.	Count	%
Outdoor commerce	139	13.0	-1.6	57	7.8	-5	160	27.1	7.7	356	14.9
Landmarks and Street art	107	10.0	0.6	103	14.1	4.1	15	2.5	-5.5	225	9.4
Outdoor buildings and details	142	13.3	-1.6	129	17.7	1.7	93	15.7	0.3	364	15.2
Historical landmarks	130	12.2	9.1	1	0.1	-6.2	3	0.5	-5.2	134	5.6
Children outdoor	84	7.9	-0.6	30	4.1	-4	87	14.7	5.3	201	8.4
Indoor social & volunteering	224	21.0	1.9	47	6.4	-7.6	172	29.1	6	443	18.6
Tourist leisure	59	5.5	-2.3	100	13.7	6.1	20	3.4	-3.7	179	7.5
Indoor cultural	115	10.8	7	18	2.5	-3.6	2	0.3	-5.4	135	5.7
Residential landscapes	67	6.3	-7.2	245	33.6	13.3	39	6.6	-5.1	351	14.7

Table 3. Regression of condition on dependent variables. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported (standard errors in parentheses), Study 2 ($N = 1,146$).

Condition	Predictors to dependent variables		
	Sociability	Competence	Morality
Volunteering	.06 (.02)**	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
Tourism	.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)*	-.06 (.02)**
Tripadvisor	.04 (.02)*	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.02)**
<i>F</i>	3.74*	3.31*	6.68***

Note. Condition was operationalized with dummy variables: for each of the three independent variables, the focal condition (e.g., Volunteering) is contrasted against the other three conditions).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Regression of condition on hypothesized mediators. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported (standard errors in parentheses), Study 2 ($N = 1,146$).

Condition	Predictors to mediators			
	Children	Selfie	Outdoor Activities	Trad/Edu
Volunteering	.14 (.02)***	.04 (.02)*	.05 (.01)*	.04 (.01)***
Tourism	.05 (.02)*	-.02 (.01)	.03 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Tripadvisor	.04 (.02)*	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.01)
<i>F</i>	26.82***	9.86***	4.48*	9.07***

Note. Condition was operationalized with dummy variables: for each of the three independent variables, the focal condition (e.g., Volunteering) is contrasted against the other three conditions).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Regressions evaluating the association of condition and hypothesized mediators in dependent variables. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported (standard errors in parentheses), Study 2 ($N = 1,146$).

	Dependent variables		
	Sociability traits	Competence traits	Moral traits
Volunteering	.02 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.03 (.01)
Tourism	.03 (.01)*	-.03 (.02)*	-.06 (.02)***
TripAdvisor	.04 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	-.04 (.01)**
Children	.03 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.01 (.04)
Selfie	.28 (.04)***	.32 (.03)***	.30 (.04)***
Outdoor Activities	.14 (.04)**	.02 (.04)	.06 (.05)
Tradition/Education	.11 (.06)*	.19 (.06)***	.15 (.06)**
<i>F</i>	36.12***	32.25***	31.80***
<i>R</i> ²	.18	.17	.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6. Direct effects and indirect effects of condition on dependent variables via hypothesized mediators. Only significant direct and indirect effects are shown, Study 2 ($N = 1,146$).

Experimental conditions	Mediators	Dependent Variables	Indirect effect on dependent variable	Bias-corrected confidence interval (95%)
Volunteering in India	Outdoor Activities	Social traits	.007	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Selfie	Social traits	.01	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Trad/Edu	Social traits	.007	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Selfie	Comp. traits	.01	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Trad/Edu	Comp. traits	.01	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Selfie	Moral traits	.01	[.00, .02]
Volunteering in India	Trad/Edu	Moral traits	.01	[.00, .02]
India Tourism	-	Social traits	.03	[.00, .06]
India Tourism	Outdoor Activities	Social traits	.004	[.00, .01]
India Tourism	-	Comp. traits	-.03	[-.06, -.00]
India Tourism	-	Moral traits	-.06	[-.09, -.02]
TripAdvisor	-	Social traits	.04	[.01, .07]
TripAdvisor	-	Moral traits	-.04	[.01, .07]

Note: Mean bootstrap estimates are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Photo evaluation (Study 2)

Data were submitted to a 4 (Condition: Volunteering vs. Tourism vs. Tripadvisor vs. Control) \times 4 (Photo category: children vs. selfie vs. outdoor activities vs. tradition/education) repeated measures ANOVA with the first variable serving as between-participants variable. Results are presented in Table S1. Main effects of conditions emerged for all photo categories. Regarding differences between experimental conditions, children's evaluations significantly differed between conditions $F(3, 1136) = 28.82, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .07$. Specifically, children's evaluations were more positive in the Volunteering than in the other conditions. Differences between conditions were also found for the outdoor activities category, $F(3, 1136) = 4.36, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .01$. Specifically, outdoor activities were evaluated more positively in the Volunteering compared to the other conditions, except that the Volunteering condition did not differ from the Tourism condition.

Concerning the selfie category, the main effect of condition was significant, $F(3, 1136) = 9.86, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .02$. The selfie evaluation was more positive in the Volunteering than in the remaining conditions. Similarly, the examination of the condition effect emerged for Tradition/Education, $F(3, 1136) = 9.07, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .02$. revealed that evaluations were more positive in the Volunteering compared with to other conditions (Table 3). These results provide full support to our first hypothesis.

Table S1. Mean ratings (standard deviations in parentheses) of photo evaluation per category, Study 2 ($N = 1,146$).

Variables	Conditions				<i>F</i>
	Control	Volunteering	Tourism	Tripadvisor	
Children	3.03 _a (.80)	3.60 _b (.85)	3.21 _c (.64)	3.20 _c (.72)	28.8***
Outdoor activities	3.40 _a (.86)	3.60 _b (.82)	3.53 _{ab} (.68)	3.41 _a (.82)	4.31**
Selfie	4.20 _a (.66)	4.37 _b (.61)	4.10 _a (.60)	4.16 _a (.65)	9.86***
Trad/edu.	3.28 _a (.66)	3.53 _b (.65)	3.36 _a (.56)	3.29 _a (.73)	9.07***
Sociability	3.37 _a (.92)	3.60 _b (.71)	3.50 _{ab} (.79)	3.52 _b (.79)	3.74*
Competence	3.60 _a (.85)	3.66 _a (.71)	3.46 _b (.77)	3.58 _a (.75)	3.31*
Morality	3.56 _a (.84)	3.55 _a (.74)	3.32 _b (.77)	3.38 _b (.75)	6.68***

Note. Different subscripts in the same row indicates that the two means are significantly different, * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.