Lost in digital world: Chinese tourists in Morocco

A qualitative research on tourists' post-travel perception of UGC credibility

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ABSTRACT

Currently, travel-related UGC is widely used in tourists' decision-making process. These contents are perceived as credible sources since they are customer-oriented and independent, furthermore, have significant influence on travelers' buying behavior. Multiple studies concentrated on discussing UGC credibility in travelers' decision-making, namely "pre-consuming" process, However, tourists' perception of UGC credibility is permutable as they might experience something different or unexpected during the trip. Therefore, it is then important to unravel the relationship between tourists' perceived credibility of UGC and their actual travel experience. This exploratory research focuses on discussing consumers' post-travel perceptions of UGC credibility based on one practical case about Chinese tourists in Morocco. And the research question of this study is "*How tourists' actual travel experiences affect their perceptions of the travel-related UGC credibility?*" In order to answer the question, this study employed a combined research method of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interview. By coding 40 user-generated articles on Chinese Internet and interviewing nine Chinese tourists, research found that the travelers with dissatisfied and mismatched travel experience showed less perceived credibility on UGC, whereas the ones with satisfied and matched travel experience showed their consistent attitude towards UGC. Another finding is that travelers still accept the reference value of UGC and choose to use them in future trip planning, even though they show less perceived credibility on UGC. Meanwhile, they decide to adjust their UGC consuming behavior in the future. Additionally, in line with the previous theories, the study discovered travel-related UGC helped destination build three kinds of image: "Cognitive", "affective" and "conative", while the first two were more salient than the third one. Such contents described travel destinations in five angles, "natural resource", "attractions", "amenity", "accommodation" and "cultural activities". For travelers' consuming behavior on UGC, research found consumers paid attention on the content quality in four dimensions: "Completeness", "accuracy", "authenticity" and "objectivity". Lastly, travelers' two information needs from UGC, "functional" and "hedonic" were also proved by this study, furthermore, the "functional" information needs was the most important element.

KEYWORDS: *User-generated content (UGC), perceived credibility, online tourism, travel destination image, Chinese tourists*

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1. Introduction

According to ChinaDaily's (2018) report, Chinese tourists made 130 million overseas trips in 2017. This accounted for more than a fifth of the money spent by outbound tourists in the world, twice as much as the next-biggest spender, the U.S. Still only five percent of all Chinese citizens hold passports currently, which implies the spectacular potential of tourism market in Chinese oversea travelling. To seize this chance, in 2016 Morocco implemented a visa-free policy for all the Chinese tourists, effectively loosening restrictions for Chinese visitors (Morocco World News, 2016). After this message spread online, numerous travel influencers started writing recommendations and articles about Morocco. All the beautiful pictures and texts attracted Chinese tourists' attention, and Morocco became a desired destination among Chinese tourists. But one year later in 2017, as more and more Chinese tourists traveled to Morocco, they gradually found out that the reality of the travel experience in the country was not particularly attractive comparing with the travel-related user-generated contents they had read before. Consequently, some negative comments and articles appeared on social media and online travel communities.

The web 2.0 world has empowered people in creating contents online to express their feelings, experiences and opinions (Luo & Zhong, 2015), in the form of user-generated contents (*hereafter: UGC*). Relevant studies indicate that the advent of online platforms like social media, make the travel-related UGC available at any phase of consumers' trip (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). Moreover, UGC also have high visibility in both search engine and online travel agency (OTA) websites, and from the prospective of potential travelers, it is extremely hard to avoid (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). That is to say, consumers nowadays no longer only count on official sources provided by organizations, but also have the chance to obtain knowledge from the contents posted by other tourists (Safaaa, Housni & Bédard, 2017).

According to recent statistics, over 70% independent travel product bookings were done online, including hotels, airlines and day tours (Schuckert, Liu & Law, 2015). Internet brought the convenience into customers' purchase: Tourists might conduct their whole consuming process online, from the pre-consuming information gathering to the post-traveling opinion sharing.

Distinctively, travel products are experience commodities without clear quality guidelines, which means that the potential tourists have extremely high barriers to evaluate travel destinations prior to their actual consumption (Klein, 1998; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Therefore, vacationers reduce the consuming risks by searching information before making the final choice of their destination and figure out what to do in the journey (Jacobsen &

Munar, 2012). Meanwhile, the abundant review contributors generate the aggregated pieces of information, which were widely deemed as up-to-date, accessible and consumer-oriented sources (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). Such attributes enhance consumers' tendency to trust the information, therefore, make these contents become influential electronic word-of-mouth (*hereafter: eWOM*) among the travelers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Phocuswright's (2008) research shows that over 80% of the tourists are influenced by travel-related UGC, and more than half of them claim that they have made final trip decisions based on travel-related UGC. Additionally, online buyers show significant preferences on the reputable platforms, especially the ones with large-scale of reviews. These visible inclinations have indicated that consumers care about the trustworthiness of the travel-related source, and already make some prejudgments before they actually use those (Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

Tourists believe travel-related UGC mainly because relevant official information about the travel destinations or services is rare, especially the structured customer-oriented judgements of the destination (Bobur et al., 2015). Senecal and Nantel (2004) explored that consumers were normally cynical about the information which obviously had the promotional characteristics. Therefore, tourists deem the traditional information as the reflections of travel company's promotion strategies. To reduce the purchase risk before actual consuming behavior, potential tourists accept UGC more favorably since these comments are more consumer-friendly and noncommercial (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007; Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

As the travel-related UGC has significant influence on consumers' buying behavior, the travel products' sales can be strongly affected by those comments (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). A good reputation in the travel-related UGC could help increase the corresponding product's profit. Such phenomenon has been noticed by some travel organizations, and they start to mingle travel-related UGC with their own promotion strategies (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Hence, some tourists start having concerns about the UGC credibility, since the content could be easily manipulated in the form of distorted rankings, for example (Burgess, Sellitto, Cox & Buultjens, 2009).

During the travel planning process, consumers evaluate the UGC credibility based on their previous experiences, requirements and expectations of the specific travel products (Mkono, 2012). But the anonymity of the content creators has weakened the accuracy of these tourists' pre-evaluation (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Once tourists have been at a destination, they might feel differently from their previous expectation, which was influenced by the travel-related UGC. Therefore, evaluating post-travel perception of the UGC credibility is necessary, as these new perceptions could influence their general attitude of

travel-related UGC and the searching behaviors in the future (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

Research problem and research question

The purpose of this Master Thesis is to explore tourists' evaluation and perceived credibility of the UGC after they have taken their holiday. People's perceived credibility of the same UGC is permutable as tourists might experience something different or unexpected during their trip. Like the phenomenon mentioned in the Morocco case, some tourists already criticize travel-related UGC. Mismatched experiences arouse consumers' concerns about credibility of such contents. It is then important to explore where specifically these doubts or criticism come from, to unravel the relationship between tourists' perceived credibility of UGC and their actual travel experience. In order to achieve this objective, this study would like to answer the research question:

How tourists' actual travel experiences affect their perceptions of the travel-related UGC credibility?

The main concepts of this research are perceived credibility of UGC and users' actual travel experiences. This research will discuss this research topic based on the above-mentioned practical case. In order to better answer the research question, three sub-questions have been designed. Firstly, as travel-related UGC can affect tourists' decision-making, it is necessary to figure out how the relevant comments portray the travel destination. Such results, namely the destination images built by UGC, could lay the foundation for discovering tourists' preconceptions of Morocco. Furthermore, tourists' expectations may also influence their actual feelings during the trip:

Sub-question 1:   How does the travel-related UGC describe the travel destination "Morocco" on Chinese Internet?

Previous studies discovered that travel-related UGC helped tourists to form the preconception of the corresponding destination, therefore, their judgements on the actual travel experience would be influenced by the UGC they read previously. Tourists might involve the opinions came from the previous UGC in forming their true feelings and attitudes (Filieri, Alguezaui & McLeay, 2015) and, sequentially, create the post-travel perception of the same travel-related UGC they gathered before. Therefore, this study employs other two sub-questions to explore tourists' actual travel experience. These sub-questions are presented below:

Sub-question 2:   How do Chinese tourists who previously read travel-related UGC of

Morocco portray their travel experience after their trips to this country?

Sub-question 3: After their trip to Morocco, how do Chinese tourists perceive the credibility of travel-related UGC they previously read?

According to Ayeh, Au and Law's (2013) research, once the tourists use the travel-related UGC in their decision-making process before travelling, they should have an overall positive attitude to the corresponding information. With the evaluation of the post-travel perceived credibility, the study could discover the new changes from tourists' initial expectations.

Scientific & social relevance

Current academic researches mainly concentrate on the effect that UGC has in consumers' decision-making process. Particularly in the field of tourism, the inherent attributes of travel products force prospective tourists to search external information to build their travel plan (Litvin et al., 2008). However, these papers limit the discussion of the travel-related UGC credibility to the pre-travel phase. This inaccurately equals the term "perceived credibility" to the tourist' preconception of the travel-related UGC (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Hence, there is still a research gap in the consumers' perception of UGC credibility after their purchase/experience, especially in the realm of tourism. Additionally, even though the travel-related UGC has uncontested influence on tourists, travelers still have concerns and doubts on these contents while consuming them. It is also necessary to elaborate tourists' suspicions and their future UGC consuming behaviors, because these factors would reflect the development of travel-related UGC towards the future.

This research will mainly unravel tourists' post-travel evaluation and perception of the UGC credibility, which would also foresee challenges to travel-related UGC in a long run. Besides, the study will also describe the relationship between tourists' actual experience and their perceptions of the UGC's credibility. By involving this new factor, the research could add value to UGC credibility with a broader definition, while urging future studies to generate new assessment mechanisms for the creditability of travel-related UGCs.

From the side of business, travel organizations already deal with UGC platforms as online reputation-making systems. Some travel companies, for example, pay platforms to delete online negative reviews. The platforms themselves use algorithms and ranking mechanism to help some clients polish their pages'. Such strategies jeopardize the authenticity of the contents, and tourists might have mismatched experiences comparing to the information they gathered from online sources. Even with this actions from the business or platform sides, travelers will evaluate the trustworthiness of the UGC relying on their actual travel experiences. And for any company it is impossible to manipulate tourists' post-

travel perceptions of UGC credibility. Therefore, these online marketing strategies would likely to backfire in the end if they are excessive and inappropriate. That is to say, over-manipulated online contents will be easily suspected by consumers after their own trip experience.

Relevant findings of this research could provide a direction for practitioners, such as tourism companies and online platforms, to set up sustainable reputation management mechanisms. Understanding UGC credibility from the tourists' perspective will help companies to effectively protect the source credibility (Ayeh et al., 2013). In addition, such findings would also shed light on tourists' future UGC consuming behavior after they accumulate travel experiences, which will in turn reflect on the evolution expected for this kind of content.

2. Theoretical framework

Web 2.0 empowers internet users by allowing them to pass from passive consumers to content creators. In the tourism realm, travel-related UGC is currently ubiquitous (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013). Amateur content creators are widely perceived as destination brand builders, since their opinions could affect potential tourists' expectation of a chosen travel spot. Travelers collect information from UGC sources both for reducing their purchase risks but also as a broader preparation for the trip. By employing travel-related UGC in the decision-making, tourists can find more relevant knowledge about their destination before their trip.

Travel-related UGC contents are perceived as more consumer-oriented and independent, more credible among the public than the traditional media. Although the inherent traits of UGC help those contents stand out in the digital world, the public also recognizes the vulnerability of such credibility.

Since tourists basically use UGC as part of their travel planning process, most research concentrate on consumers' perceptions of UGC credibility previous to the decision-making process. Such perceived credibility is travelers' own evaluation instead of the objective fact. Therefore, these discussed UGC credibility cannot be treated as the contents' inherent attributes, it is just the reflection of the readers' personal sensations based on their temporary experience. To be more specific, tourists' perception of UGC credibility would change after their actual experience of the travel service. To associate with the Morocco case mentioned above, this study will focus on the concepts that related to tourists' perceived credibility of UGC and discuss the users' attitude of UGC in the whole travel process instead of merely concentrating on the decision-making phase.

2.1 Under the context of web 2.0: the advent of UGC in tourism industry

From the emergence of the notion of Web 2.0, consumers have realized that they now have many chances to participate in online content creation and influence others. Instead of being the passive consumers, nowadays, they could be generators of content while consuming it (Beer & Burrows, 2010). Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) describe this participatory web culture as one in which consumers have the ability to participate "both (in) production and consumption rather than focusing on either one or the other" (p. 14). Multiple researchers have then turned to the use of the term "prosumers" to illustrate this phenomenon (Toffler, 1970; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Chu & Choi, 2011). The possibilities of online participation result in the advent of user-generated content (UGC). With various forms of the content, such as pictures, posts and videos, users have the unprecedented power to express themselves and influence others in a virtual world (George & Scerri, 2007). In addition, relevant platforms,

like social media or online communities, have gradually empowered consumers and triggered countless reviews, which is also defined as electronic word-of-mouth (Safaaa et al., 2017).

The eWOM is universally considered as new information transformed from the traditional WOM, but with some differences. The information in traditional WOM is normally generated by small groups and only appears in the private dialogs (Dellarocas, 2003), whereas, eWOM has higher speed of diffusion and numerous ways to exchange the information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Research also shows that both traditional WOM and eWOM are the specific evaluations about products or services, remarkably, from the perspective of consumers (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004).

Ideally, everyone in the digital world would have chance to participate in creating contents online, or in other words, become a UGC contributor. However, Nielsen (2006) has described a 90-9-1 rule for user participation online, which said 90% of users only lurked online without any participation, 9% created content from time to time, and only a 1% highly participated and could be deemed as contributors. Even in this limited area, it is also clear that not all contributors or pieces of UGC actually get to the audience or effect they want. The contributors with wider exposure, that is the numerous followers or high reputations, have been described as "influencers" by some scholars (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). These influencers are more capable to affect viewers' attitudes through the generated contents, such as posts, pictures and blogs (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). For these small-scale active contributors, the antecedents of their eWOM generating behavior have been discussed as well. Chu and Kim (2011) and Ho and Dempsey (2010) uncovered that altruism, self-efficacy, individuation and self-enhancement were perceived as the main factors related to the production of materials by influencers. Unlike materials produced by brands or commercial entities, contents produced by influencers are considered as information from independent third-party in the digital world (Freberg et al., 2011). Consequently, UGC readers trust such contents strongly, and can be significantly affected by them (Chari, Christodoulides, Presi, Wenhold & Casaletto, 2016).

In the field of tourism, consumers' trust in UGC is even more obvious. Tourists tend to collect information from UGC, since the intangible travel products are impossible to evaluate comprehensively before the actual consumption (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Klein (1998) has mentioned in his study that travel products are widely presumed as an experienced good. In the pre-consumption period, travel products are hard to evaluate in terms of the value and quality because of the missing standards and criteria (Huang, Lurie & Mitra, 2009). For consumers, any extraneous information is extremely useful in their pre-buy evaluating process, especially the user-generated contents that are considered relevant. According to previous research, "official" information that is been provided by travel suppliers is not

sufficient to help tourists, especially in their travel product selecting and planning process (Bobur et al., 2015). In the pre-internet era, travelers could only use mass media (e.g., television shows, newspapers and books) and traditional WOM as materials for travel plan. Now, thanks to the appearance of online UGC platforms, where tourists have discovered so many conduits to express their true feelings and attitudes about the travel destinations and services, they can also actively collect information (Luo & Zhong 2015; Xiang, Wang, O'Leary & Fesenmaier, 2014). Such evolution fulfills tourists' information requirements and help them to gather the travel-related information posted by other similar customers. After that, purchasers would obtain the clearer cues to assess the quality of travel destinations and service suppliers (Chung & Koo 2015). Therefore, the travel-related UGC has won most consumers' trustiness and stands on the uncontested crucial position comparing to other sources.

The online reviews and comments created by travelers, namely the travel-related e-WOM are important sources for tourists to make their decisions. Different from the traditional WOM which is generated by the acquaintance of receivers, it is not necessary for eWOM viewers to know the content creators in person (Jalilvand, Esfahani & Samiei, 2011). Without the social circle restrictions, people would have a greater likelihood to find relevant eWOM online, and the choices of the sources also increase significantly (Lee & Youn, 2009). Tourists think official advertisements and information might be supplier-serving and untruthful, because of their commercial goals (Eccleston & Griseri, 2008). For this reason, consumers prefer to believe in eWOM, as it is considered more understandable, relevant, objective and credible (Sen & Lerman, 2007). All these features make tourists regard the eWOM as reliable sources and create a huge market for the travel-related UGC platforms (Prebensen, Skallerud & Chen, 2010). Currently, there are plenty online tourism platforms related to this, and examples can be TripAdvisor, Booking, Qyer and Busabout (Schaal, 2015; Gollan, 2016; Zhu, Song, Ni, Ren & Li, 2016).

To sum up, the online platforms give consumers the capability of creating content and affect other consumers. Even though not all the contributors and information of UGC will touch the audience, the volume of these contents is still quite big (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013). Consumers tend to believe in eWOM, which is even more prominent in the tourism domain. The intangible traits of travel products force tourists to collect external information to evaluate the product quality before their actual consuming behavior. As a result, travel-related UGC becomes the important information source for travelers. Meanwhile, the travel-related UGC *per se* is perceived as independent and noncommercial sources, which means it is reliable and widely trusted by tourists.

2.2 Destination image: UGC affect tourists' expectation

In this context of dynamic information, tourists are no longer merely deemed as the passive recipients by the travel service providers. In contrast, they are considered as partners who help build the tourism destinations through eWOM (Safaaa et al., 2017). Fournier and Avery's (2011) study also indicates that consumers nowadays serve as creators and disseminators of branded content for the products they have or intend to consume. Prospective travelers could obtain necessary information about the intended destination from travel-related UGC posted by the fellow tourists (Schmunk, Höpken, Fuchs & Lexhagen, 2013). Such relevant contents, including but not limited to local knowledge, pictures and emotional expressions, may all influence the end-users' attitudes toward the specific destination, and then help them to form their perceived image of destination before their actual trip (Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang & Chen, 2015). Therefore, it is obvious that travel-related UGC with subjective interpretation of the trips can also build a clear destination image to potential vacationers (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sanz, 2009; Bosque & Martín, 2008).

In order to figure out how travel-related UGC affects tourists' expectations of the tourism destinations, it is unavoidable to clarify in what ways the destination image has been built by eWOM. Relevant literature pinpoints three fundamental types of content that build a destination image: cognitive, affective and conative (Gartner, 1994; Dann, 1996; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). The cognitive content is related to the destination knowledge, which is further explained as the description of what exists there. The affective image is built by the contents related to contributors' emotional expressions about the destination, and the conative image represents the relevant contents that could directly affect readers' decision-making and future behaviors (Safaaa et al., 2017; Marine-Roig, 2015). Gartner (1994) explained in his study that these three dimensions of destination images were interrelated with each other and indivisible (*Figure 1*). On other perspective, Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis (2005) also state in their research that the online sources normally describe the destination from these angles: "natural resource", "attractions", "amenity", "accommodation" and "cultural activities" (*Figure 2*). Mostly, the travel-related eWOM would contain corresponding texts or pictures, and then shape the destination image in these areas.

Figure 1: *Gartner's destination image model*
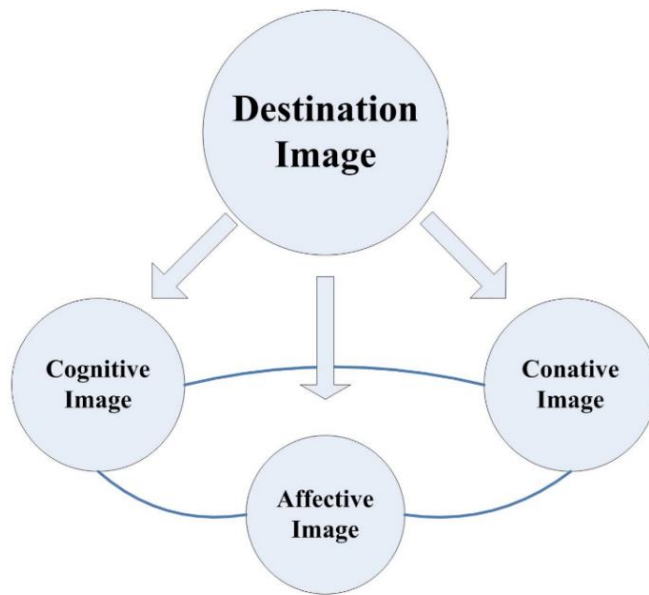
Figure 2: *Pike and Kavaratzis's combined model – five angles to describe destinations*
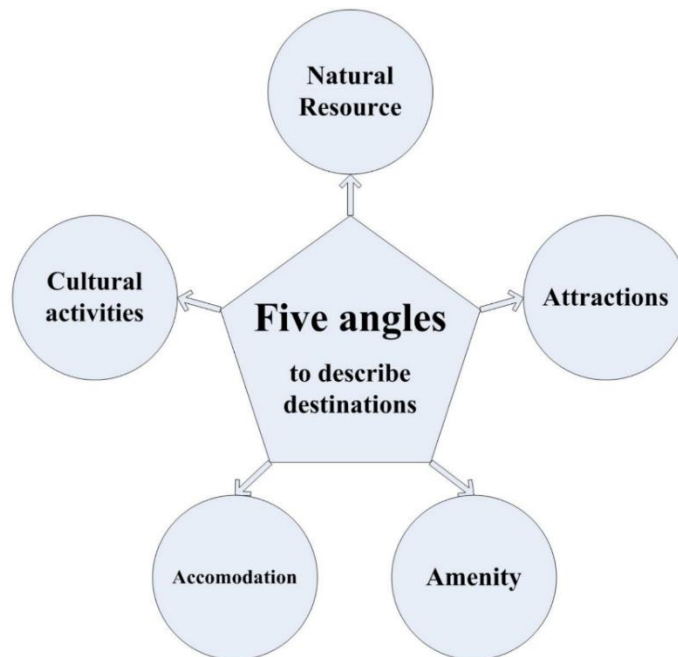
By exposing themselves to travel-related UGC, tourists acquire relevant local knowledge and increase their perception of such destination, in other words, form the image and

expectations of this target spot (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). The destination image built by travel-related UGC has strong influence on tourists' expectations. Galí and Donaire (2005) discuss in their research that travelers built their mental perceptions of the destination image in three phases of the whole travel period respectively: *prior*, *in situ* and *posteriori*. The *priori* phase represents the decision-making process of searching for destinations, when travelers form the mental image of the place without having actual connections with the destination. The *in situ* phase means tourists create mental comparisons of the expectations with their actual travel experience. Gali and Donaire (2005) further explain the *in situ* phase as "a key moment in the tourist experience, because it contrasts what we have imagined with what we are perceiving" (p. 778). Finally, the *posteriori* phase indicates that travelers continue evaluating the destination image even after their journey ends. Such post-travel attitude and final judgements are also important in the realm of the destination image. These findings underline the important role which the destination image has on tourists' expectation, ongoing trip feelings and post-travel behavior (Cai, Wu, & Bai, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Moreover, some studies also argued that all different components of destination image should be perceived as predictors of tourists' behavior and attitude in their whole travel process (Agapito, Oom do Valle & da Costa Mendes, 2013; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chiou & Cheng, 2003; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). In addition, Költringer and Dickinger (2015) found that both the graphic and textual content in travel-related UGC could affect tourist' expectation, while the graphic ones have more significant power on vacationers.

Therefore, the travel-related UGC is widely portrayed as a tool to build destination image for the prospective travelers in their pre-purchase period. The aforementioned models from other research discuss that eWOM is written in different ways (Gartner, 1994; Pike, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2005). These different kinds of information intertwine with each other and jointly form tourists' perceived destination image. Such relevant knowledge of the destination image will affect travelers' expectation of the spot as well. Nevertheless, travelers' expectation before the trip is not the only one influenced by these travel-related UGC, tourists' ongoing travel feelings and their post-travel perceptions are also determined by the UGC, which has been explored by Gale and Donaire's (2005) study.

2.3 Stand out in the digital world: Why people use travel-related UGC

Recent studies show that travelers are more and more willing to use travel-related UGC during their travel planning and decision-making process (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). It is also highly available for users to gather such information, as they can simply type the destination name in search engine and obtain multiple corresponding UGC online (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). All the information would help tourists to build

their expectation and prejudgment about the travel destinations and services (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011). Because of these more accessible sources, tourists tend to search for the information and make travel plans all by themselves instead of relying on the travel agencies which was quite popular previously. Yoo and Gretzel's (2011) article indicates that more than 80% of the travel consumers are influenced by the various travel-related UGC in terms of their purchase decision, and over half of them used UGC as an effective approach for the trip planning. Furthermore, a majority of them showed high trust towards these contents, since they tended to trust the fellow tourists more than the advertisers and organizations (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006).

As travel products and services are experiential products with an intangible nature, there is no clear criteria for consumers to evaluate the quality of travel products, especially in the phase of pre-purchasing (Loda, Teichmann & Zins, 2009). Therefore, tourists' cost of decision-making is extremely high in terms of time and financial area. Nonetheless, the interpersonal communication with other tourists would help travel planners better understand the quality of relevant destinations and services, meanwhile, also help them to make relevant decisions like the choices of destination, hotel and local tourism attractions (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). By reading travel-related UGC, such as reviews and comments, potential tourists will gather the relevant knowledge and reduce the risk of their decision-making. Additionally, for prospective travelers, UGC has one of the most reliable inherent features: it is non-commercial. The paper of Gretzel et al. (2007) shows that online users prefer to read UGC because of the creators are the actual travel consumers as opposed to travel service providers. The opinions in the UGC come from a consumer's perspective, and potential travelers treat these contents as more trustworthy and reliable sources for their pre-purchase choices (Jin & Phua, 2015). Once tourists choose to trust in the content they read and make the trip decision, their expectations of such destination would also be certainly affected (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). The correspondingly adopted information have provided travelers a deeper awareness of the determinate destination or service. With these presumptions, prospective tourists could enhance the quality of the trip and maximize their journey enjoyments (Litvin et al., 2008; Cho & Jang, 2008). Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) portray tourists' searching behavior on the travel-related eWOM as the "purposeful" and "functional" actions in nature.

Since the main purpose of reading UGC is to gather related knowledge for decision-making, online tourists have paid a lot attention on collecting useful information. However, several studies also indicate that travelers search information from UGC not only for practical decisions, but also for gratifying their hedonic, innovation and aesthetic needs as well (Cho & Jang, 2008; Vogt, 1993). Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) find that the tourism information

fulfills vacationers' five different kinds of demands: "functional, hedonic, innovation, aesthetic and sign" (p. 555). First, some contents concentrate on functional and practical materials, which is goal-directed for users to reduce uncertainty of the trip and increase the knowledge of the destination. Second part, the called hedonic construct, represents travelers' needs for pleasure and experiential information. Third, the innovation, means the end-users have the requirements of creation, and propensities to consume novel products or information. The other two are aesthetic and sign, which explain the fantasy pictures need and symbolic expressions need respectively *(Figure 3)*. On other study, Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt (2017) discuss consumers' perceptions and conclude that functional information is the most important material that tourists consume through UGC. However, travelers pay every time more attention to other elements like the experiential or hedonic codes (Choe et al., 2017). The experiential contents with positive or negative comments could generate readers' positive or negative expectations for the destination. Travelers will then start comparing their ongoing trip feelings with such pre-travel expectations of the destination. Consequently, they form their own judgments of the travel spot, like satisfaction or dissatisfaction, after their actual journey (Narangajavana et al., 2017).

Figure 3: Vogt and Fesenmaier's tourism information needs model
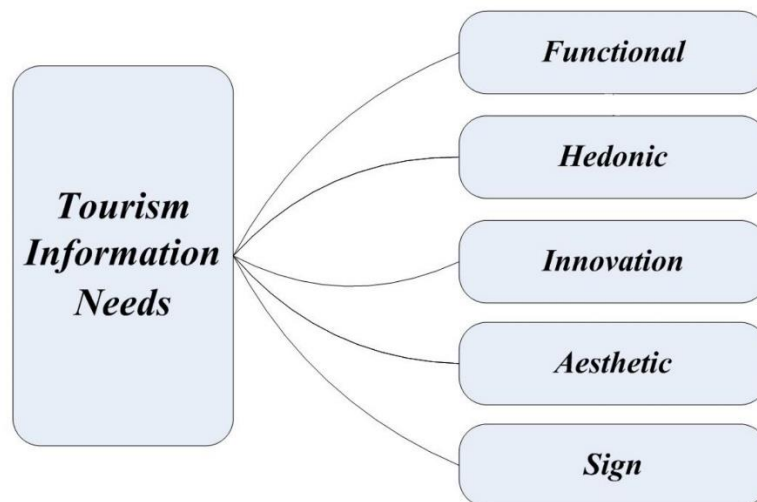
In summary, the high accessibility and convenience of travel-related UGC make tourists start collecting relevant information from these kinds of sources now. Whereas, such inherent characteristics of UGC are not the only reason for tourist to use it. In the pre-travel stage, the high difficulty in evaluating travel destination quality also forces travelers to search eWOM. Potential travelers have strong needs for information in order to reduce their purchase risks,

and such clear goal is the main reason for consumers to collect UGC. Knoll and Proksch's (2015) research describe that the tourists' perceived credibility of UGC would be determined by their desire for relevant knowledge. Similarly, Filieri et al. (2015) also explained that users preferred to believe in the travel-related UGC which were more likely to satisfy their needs. Therefore, the source credibility has stable relation with tourists' specific requirements.

2.4 Opportunities and challenges: UGC credibility in tourism industry

When the content receivers evaluate the UGC credibility, they would take the information quality into the consideration, but at the same time, also have to do with their attitudes on content creators' features and UGC platform's reputation. Researchers generally agree that UGC credibility is defined through the dimensions of trustworthiness and authoritativeness (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Some inherent attributes of the UGC, such as real-time update, consumer-perspective, non-commercial and good structure, make them more credible to the public. Prospective tourists show strong preferences on the more recent sources. Besides, some online reviews are designed in a user-friendly way, to help tourists effectively obtain the relevant insights about the travel products, which has further encouraged tourists to use UGC more frequently (Prebensen et al., 2010). Relevant studies also mention that travelers' perceptions of UGC credibility are reflections of their judgments on the source quality (Pan & Chiou, 2011).

In order to discern consumer' perceptions of information quality, Wang and Strong (1996) identify six dimensions of the information quality: "completeness", "timeliness", "accuracy", "relevancy", "understandability" and "value addition". In the domain of travel-related UGC, the completeness represents the extent to which information is sufficient in both width and depth, and timeliness means the up-to-date characteristics created by various contributors. Meanwhile, accuracy refers to the precision and correctness of the local descriptions, and relevancy is related the extent to which such contents are helpful for consumers. Lastly, understandability refers to content viewers' interpretability of the information, while the value addition indicates which benefits and advantages the readers could collect from such information (Wixom & Todd, 2005; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Filieri and McLeay (2014) also report in their study that: "accuracy, value-added information, and information relevance strongly predicted travelers' adoption of information… timeliness was less important… while other dimensions like information understandability and information completeness did not have a significant influence" (p. 53).

Figure 4: Wang and Strong's information quality dimensions model
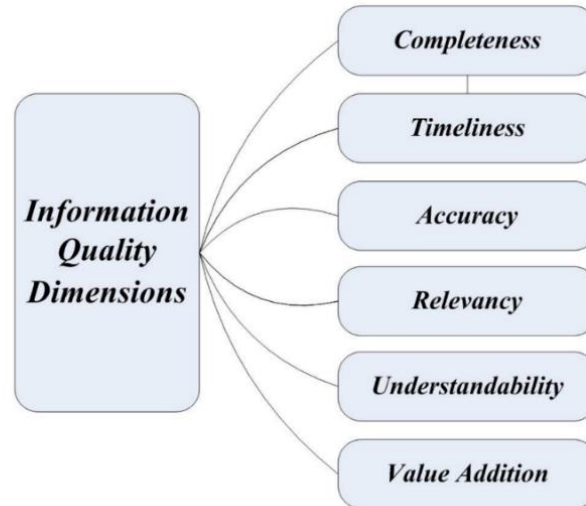
Apart from UGC's inherent characteristics, the content reviewers are also important factors to influence the tourists' perception of UGC credibility (Burgess et al., 2009). As stated in previous researches, potential travel customers evaluated the UGC credibility in terms of the creators' interests as well (Jonas, 2010). Although some content providers are anonymous online, they can still provide more information about themselves, to make prospective tourists trust them more. Readers' attitudes can significantly influence their information adoption. For example, if the UGC viewer perceives the content has the similar interests to them, they would favor this information since they should have same attitude to one specific travel product or destination (Del Chiappa, 2011; Halliday, 2016). The term "homophily" has been adopted by scholars to describe such tourists' attitude toward the authors of the reviews (Wang, Walther, Pingree & Hawkins, 2008). Additionally, UGC readers also show the strong tendency to use information created by experienced travelers. Such authors have higher reputation and professionality among the public, who consider their travel experience relevant (Arsal, Backman & Baldwin, 2008). With their consumer-perspective reviews, potential travel consumers could have a more precise overview of the travel product or destination (Ayeh et al., 2013).

When tourists search travel-related UGC online, the online platforms also play vital roles in their choice. Prospective travelers are inclined to believe or trust more the UGC contained on popular platforms. The study conducted by Ayeh et al. (2013) found that online users trusted more content from websites that were easy to use. This result indicates that a platform's positive reputation could affect their UGC credibility as well. Related to this, Wang, Zhang, Suomi and Sun's (2017) research shows that since the user comments were the life and blood of tourism platforms, the quality and perceived credibility also influence people's attitude on the specific websites. Nevertheless, tourists' perceived credibility of

UGC is not changeless: consumers start showing some concerns on the authenticity of travel-related UGC as well.

Although multiple researches have mentioned the unprecedentedly important roles of UGC in the travel industry, consumers still have some doubts and concerns on UGC's credibility (Burgess et al., 2009). Park, Lee and Han's (2007) study has discussed the downside of eWOM. Unlike the traditional WOM, online reviews are generated by strangers. Such intrinsic traits result in consumers' concerns over the credibility. Similarly, some studies also explained traditional WOM is perceived as more credible than eWOM, since the information comes from acquaintances (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017).Ayeh, Au and Law's (2013) paper indicates that the Web 2.0 environment particularly lacks of content contributors' identity verification, and this leads to tourists having no clues on how to identify the authors' background. These missing clues are extremely important for readers' attitudes and adoptions of the eWOM. The aforementioned "homophily" has already indicated customers' intentions in finding the extent to which these authors are similar in the realm of tastes and interests (Wang et al., 2008; Ayeh et al., 2013; Halliday, 2016). The task in evaluating the strangers' opinions is extremely tough, as some tourists would obtain a very different attitude to the same travel destination in their actual trip (Park et al., 2007). Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009) also discuss the concerns are mainly about "how the consumer can be assured that the reviews they are viewing are in fact independent and hence trustworthy" (p. 750). In addition, some scholars also explain that there is no explicit quality standard for eWOM. The almost nonexistent entry barrier of generating content online leads to the tremendous gap of contributors' professionality (Burgess et al., 2009). Apparently, in Web 2.0 era, every traveler has the right to write reviews online, even the amateur or non-experienced travelers. Therefore, some online viewers start to criticize the travel-related UGC's credibility because of their nonprofessional nature. It is obvious that the essential of travel-related UGC are the contributors' own opinions. This attribute enhances tourists' suspicions on the information credibility, since all kinds of eWOM only reflect the subjective attitudes according to the creators' own experiences (Schmunk et al., 2013).

On the other hand, tourism organizations also start integrating UGC into their online promotion strategies. More and more, tourism company practitioners and travel service providers notice that travel-related UGC can significantly affect tourists' decisions, thus, they abuse these UGCs by creating commercial deception. For instance, they could provide monetary benefits to entice content creators to write commercial recommendations (Freberg et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the platforms might promote the manipulated UGC or delete negative comments for some organizations in order to receive commercial benefits as well (Beer, 2009). It is also worth to mention that travel organizations can also post reviews as

independent travelers and deceive the public (Burgess et al., 2009). Such tactics might help them increase their reputation or destroy competitors' fame in the end (Litvin et al., 2008). All these latent tricks show the vulnerability of UGC's credibility as both the creators and platforms could be manipulated for financial advantages (Ibrahim, 2008). As a result, dishonest and fake UGC has widely appeared online in the form of promotional attributes and exaggerated texts, which jeopardize both travel-related eWOM's authenticity and content platforms' fairness (Gartner, 2012). Furthermore, customers gradually realize that not all the UGCs are honest and authentic. From the perspective of UGC readers, the travel-related content contributors might be anonymous. It is quite hard for prospective tourists to find clear evidences and recognize whether the creators are manipulated by organizations or not (Schindler & Bickart 2005). Therefore, we can see that all these phenomena bring the challenges to UGC, as their credibility and reliability start being vulnerable and hard to evaluate. (Ayeh et al., 2013).

As a summary, it is possible to assert that content readers' perception of UGC credibility is affected by content quality, creators' characteristics and the platforms on which the content displayed. Although the intrinsic traits of UGC, like being non-commercial and up-to-date, makes them more trustworthy for tourists, consumers still have concerns about the information. A missing gatekeeper for online contents might wreck the professionality of UGC, as everyone could generate travel-related content no matter how experienced they were in this area. Furthermore, content creators' anonymity arouses difficulty for customers in evaluating information quality. The advent of organizations' manipulations in both platforms and influencers has brought severer challenges for UGC credibility as well.

2.5 UGC Credibility: the perception instead of inherent attribute

When tourists adopt travel-related UGC in their decision-making process, their judgments on the credibility of corresponding contents are subjective and estimated, since they have not been to the actual destination yet (Kang, 2010). Johnson and Kaye (2009) explain in their study that the credibility of UGC is not the inherent characteristic of the content *per se*, it is judged by the message receivers in terms of their temporal experiences. Xie, Miao, Kuo and Lee's (2011) study interprets that tourists' booking intention or decision is strongly related to their perceived credibility of the reviews. To be specific, in their study, Xie et al. (2011) argue tourists' perceived credibility of online reviews "should amplify the online review's persuasiveness and impact on consumers' booking intention" (p. 179). Therefore, it is obvious that once tourists decide a specific destination based on the eWOM they read before, it would imply that they have higher perceived credibility of the corresponding articles. However, such tourists' perceptions of the UGC's credibility or their

interpretations of the contents are only limited in the decision-making process, that is to say, the pre-purchase period. Remarkably, tourists do not merely dispose and interpret the travel-related UGC before their purchase decision; they also evaluate the same information both during their travelling and after their practical trip experience (Pearce, 1982). If scholars only investigate consumers' attitude in their decision-making process, such perceptions of the UGC credibility will be merely pre-decisional (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2008).

As discussed by Bagozzi (1981), people's encountered experience could change their intentions and judgments toward an object. For the travel-related UGC, travelers' actual trip feelings might influence their perceived credibility of the sources they used before, and change their information searching behavior in the future (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). For instance, if the tourists have encountered something dissatisfying during the actual trip, their attitudes and perceptions of the relevant UGC would turn more negative, whereas, tourists' positive attitudes on the relevant UGC could be higher if they enjoy the trip (Lehto, Kim & Morrison, 2006; Agapito et al., 2013). Consequently, relevant studies indicate that the people's pre-purchase perception cannot comprehensively represent the UGC credibility. It is necessary to evaluate tourists' perceptions of UGC credibility after the actual travel as the post-travel ones might change significantly comparing the pre-decisional ones. In addition, the post-experienced perception of UGC credibility would further affect tourists' attitude and intention towards travel-related UGC utilization in the future (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

3. Methods and research design

In order to research tourists' post-travel perception and attitude of eWOM and answer the main research question *How actual travelling experiences affect people's perceptions of the UGC credibility?* this Master Thesis employs qualitative research methods. Bryman and Burgess (1994) discuss that "a qualitative study (is) to cover a more limited area of the same ground but in more depth". Associate to this case-based study, such method would provide deeper insights, like in what ways the eWOM brands Morocco as a destination, the tourists' post-travel attitude on the UGC they read, or even their preferences of different information in such articles. The study's main research question and the corresponding sub-questions all intrinsically contain the explicative traits and mainly focus on describing the nature of the problem. Agee's (2009, p.434) proposition that "…good qualitative questions should invite a process of exploration and discovery", has further confirmed the reasonability of choosing qualitative research method. Additionally, another strength of applying qualitative research method in this study is that basically the method would help to obtain subjects' perceptions and explain the occurred phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The tourists' perceived credibility of UGC and their behavior-changing phenomenon could be clarified because, normally, the qualitative research method closely associates with interpretative goals (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

This study adopted a method combination of qualitative content analysis and in-depth semi-structured interview to analyze the data based on the practical case. By using qualitative content analysis in the first step, this study would acquire the rich explanation of the patterns in which travel-related UGC portray travel destination (Schreier, 2013). Furthermore, discover in what ways the information affects tourists' expectation of this specific travel product. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued in their article that "themes or patterns within data can be identified … in thematic analysis" (p. 83), thus, this study chose thematic analysis in analyzing the travel-related UGC. Since this Master Thesis aimed at exploring tourists' post-travel perceptions of UGC credibility, collecting tourists' own interpretations of the real trip and previous read contents is important. Kvale (2007) explained that the semi-structured interview had the purpose of obtaining people's interpretation in some specific phenomena. Hence, this study also used in-depth semi-structured interview as a research method to collect relevant data. By analyzing the interviews, the research would better understand how tourists perceive the credibility of UGC after their actual travel experience and figure out their post-travel UGC searching behavior (Rosenthal, 2016)

3.1 Research design

This research employed qualitative method to understand people's post-travel perceptions of UGC credibility, as Creswell (2007) suggested "… conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (p.40). To answer the main research question in this study, it is necessary to investigate what the travel-related UGC has described about Morocco at the beginning, and then test whether the tourists' expectation matched with the UGC descriptions. Such results would help form the questions in the interview to see what subjects remembered about the image of Morocco. Subsequently, to examine subjects' judgments on real trip and their post-travel perception of UGC credibility. The findings would be unclear if the research directly started interviewing tourists without any clear knowledge about the Morocco-related UGC before. Therefore, employing the combined methodology with qualitative content analysis followed by in-depth interview is more sensible.

The whole procedure of the research was examining the three sub-questions step by step. First, analyzing the travel-related UGC on Chinese websites through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The study could detect the underlying patterns of how the UGC described the travel destination Morocco (sub-question 1). Second, following the result of the thematic analysis, the in-depth interviews' topic list was created. Some relevant questions were aimed at figuring out whether the tourists were influenced by the travel-related UGC they previously read. In subsequent interview process, subjects were asked questions related to the other two topics: their judgements of the real travel experience (sub-question 2) and their post-travel perceptions of the UGC credibility (sub-question 3). After recording and transcribing the interviews, the research adopted thematic analysis again to code the transcripts. Such corresponding findings in the latter part of the thesis could give an answer to the main research question.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The whole sampling and data collection procedure was segmented into two main phases in terms of the chosen methods.

Phase 1: Qualitative content analysis of travel-related UGC

All sample articles and comments for qualitative content analysis concentrated on describing the travel experience in the destination "Morocco". Therefore, the study applied purposive sampling to collect online travel-related UGC for the first phase of the analysis (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Relevant articles were collected by searching the query

word "Morocco travel" on five popular Chinese travel platforms: Qyer.com (Travel community), Sina Weibo (Social media), WeChat (Messaging social media), Toutiao (News aggregator) and Mafengwo.com (Travel community). These chosen platforms were different from each other in the realm of their business model [1], and the reason to select them was because of their currently predominant roles in Chinese Internet information market, especially in online tourism industry (Safaaa et al., 2017; All Tech Asia, 2017; Li, 2014; Spencer, 2018; Ouyang & Yang, 2017).

The volume of the dataset was 40 articles in total with approximately 550 words per article on average. Their distribution per platforms was shown in Table 1. The articles were posted in the period from 1st June 2016 to 30th June 2017, since Morocco announced they exempted the visa restrictions from all Chinese tourists on 1st June 2016, which made this country become the most popular travel destination among the travel-related contents.

Table 1: The platform distribution of chosen articles

Platforms	Type of website	Number of chosen articles
Wechat	Messaging social media	10
Sina Weibo	Social media	6
Toutiao	News aggregator	6
Mafengwo.com	Travel community	9
Qyer.com	Travel community	9
Total	-	40

All the chosen contents had over 10,000 unique viewers; which indicated the data had

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[1] These platforms are all significant popular in Chinese Internet market. Although their business positions are distinctive, consumers predominantly create the contents on these platforms. Travel-related information is high accessible on these platforms as well, which influence subjects' expectation of the destination.

· **Qyer.com** is a travel community contains numerous professional outbound tourism UGC. In 2016, Qyer.com had over 60 million accumulated users.

· **Sina Weibo** is a social media platform, which well-known as "Chinese Twitter", focusing on short posts. In September 2017, the company's monthly active users were over 376 million.

· **WeChat** is the biggest Chinses messaging social media with over 1 billion monthly active users. WeChat only focusing on mobile devices and its news feed function also widely accepted by public to collect UGC.

· **Toutiao** is a content platform and news aggregator. The content recommendation strategy is mainly based on algorithm from machine learning techniques. In 2017, Toutiao had over 120 million daily active users.

· **Mafengwo.com** is the biggest Chinese travel community focus on both inbound and outbound tourism. Apart from the PC website, their app has over 60 million monthly active users.

high accessibility among the end-users. In addition, the various sources of the texts made the study results be more reliable (Tongco, 2007). Nevertheless, the nature of the case brings some limitations to the research results as well mostly based in language. Chinese tourists had strong tendency in using native language contents instead of others and so, all the evaluated pieces of eWOM were written in Mandarin.

Phase 2: In-depth semi-structured interviews with tourists

In the second phase, the study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourists to gather their actual perceptions of both Morocco trip and UGC's credibility. The interviewees should have travelled to Morocco and read Morocco-related UGC before their trip. Because of these detailed and specific informants' criteria, we used a purposive sampling method to find subjects (Elo et al., 2014). Rosenthal (2016, p.511) mentions that purposive sampling could help recruit informants who had the specifically required experiences for investigation.

The research recruited nine interviewees in total as the subjects. These nine people varied from occupation, gender and age. They had all travelled to Morocco and read several UGCs online before their real trip. Detailed information on the interviewees is shown in *Table 2* below. As part of the limitations of the study, we understood that some inherent attributes of the informants, like their social class or educational background, might bring related bias to the study results, since they can only represent one specific small group. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and was semi-structured, leading to saturation and full information on their perceptions of the destination Morocco and UGC's credibility (Fusch & Ness, 2015, McCracken, 1993).

Table 2: Interviewees

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
Interviewee 1	Kaidi Sun	Female	24	Blog Freelancer & Master student
Interviewee 2	Jiaying Li	Female	25	Psychologist assistant
Interviewee 3	Rui Zhang	Male	26	Human resource specialist
Interviewee 4	Zhongke Xie	Male	28	Photographer
Interviewee 5	Jingya Peng	Female	24	Master Student
Interviewee 6	Ruiyuan Cui	Male	25	Bachelor student
Interviewee 7	Zhiyu Zhang	Male	24	Master Student

Interviewee 8	Ting Sun	Female	24	Master Student
Interviewee 9	Qian Xiao	Female	25	Accountant

3.3 Operationalization and data analysis

Since this research employed a method combination of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interview, the whole implementation and analysis process were tailored into two sections.

Section 1: Qualitative content analysis

In order to answer the first sub-question, the study applied grounded theory lite to conduct the thematic analysis on the online articles and comments (Wells, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the open codes are directly coming from the dataset, which will uncover the implicit patterns on how UGC promoted the travel destination (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

To implement the coding and analyzing process, it is necessary to employ some relevant sensitizing concepts for the whole research data (Bowen, 2006). Academic articles on tourism destination branding used different concepts to define the factors that were included in the communication. After the review, the following were selected: Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis (2005) identify the dimensions "natural resource", "attractions", "amenity", "accommodation" and "cultural activities" which represent the way online contents describe the tourism destination. In addition, Gartner's (1994) destination image model also unravels three dimensions "cognitive", "affective" and "conative" in destination image. These terms will be used as sensitizing concepts for discussing how the travel-related UGC build the destination brand, and bringing the starting points for the thematic analysis coding process.

During the analysis, the study strictly followed grounded theory lite. According to Charmaz and Belgrave (2015), a grounded theory approach should include factoring in emergent categories, which have been divided into three main parts – open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1277) indicated in their study that the qualitative research aimed at discussing the "subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns". The collected data should be divided and reassembled in view of the research problem (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, firstly, the study would open code the data directly to get literal meanings of these texts. Secondly, categorized all the open codes based on their inherent attributes and sensitizing concepts to obtain axial codes. All the axial codes should be comprehensible in terms of the destination's description. Then, final selective codes would be designed, and explore the underlying patterns, which could unveil in what ways the dataset

have described this corresponding destination: Morocco (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boeije, 2010).

Section 2: In-depth interview

Subsequently, to answer other sub-questions, relevant data were collected by means of in-depth semi-structured interview. Nine interviews were conducted face-to-face or through video phone (Bowen, 2006). As the interviewees are all Chinese, their native language would be the most adaptable tool to conduct the interview. As a result, nine in-depth interviews were conducted and transcribed in in Chinese to reduce the translation bias (Dearnley, 2005). However, considering the readers of this thesis would have obstacles in understanding Chinese, each transcript would be attached with an English summary of the main ideas translated by the researcher.

The topic list of the interview was organized under three main topics: "expectations of Morocco", "actual judgments on the travel experience" and "perceived credibility of the previously-read UGC". A topic was considered as covered when there were no more new ideas, since the qualitative research method primarily focuses on the data saturation instead of data size (McCracken, 1993).

According to the previous theoretical framework, relevant questions were created in the first part of the topic list. The goal of the first part was to gather the data about tourists' expectation to Morocco. Litvin et al. (2008) found out that consumers' decision-making process strongly rely on the UGC they previously read and their pre-awareness of the product. Hence, to explore why tourists make such decision, questions like "Why did you decide to choose Morocco as your trip destination" would help to acquire relevant data.

In second part of the interview, the interviewer mainly investigated the subjects' feelings and judgments of their real travel experience. Subjects' attitudes and their satisfactions from travel consumption process could answer the sub-question 2 with positive (satisfaction) and negative (dissatisfaction) sentiment.

Moreover, the last part in the topic list primarily concentrated on tourists' current (post-travel) perception of the UGC credibility. Since tourists' perceived credibility of travel-related UGC would positively affect their consuming intentions, their post-travel attitude on UGC utilization could highly represent their perception of the information they read previously (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004). These new attitude and perception would be compared with the ones in their decision-making process, and showed in what ways that tourist' perceived credibility of UGC had changed. Therefore, this study designed the relevant questions to discover informants' intention and attitude of using UGC after their trip (Bagozzi, 1981; Lehto et al., 2006). The whole structure of interview, related questions and probes were all shown in the topic list in *Appendix C*.

By analyzing the interview transcripts with thematic analysis, this research explored the main themes of each interview and described the subjects' expectations of Morocco, their judgments on travel experience and their post-travel perceptions of the travel-related UGC. Similar to the first section, the grounded theory lite was also used in this part. Additionally, Kiousis's (2001) study on public perception of media credibility could provide a roughly direction with the sensitizing concepts "media use" and "interpersonal discussion", which would be useful for the thematic analyzing process. For the purpose of this research, only the discourses connected to the research topic of this thesis were coded (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). It is also worth mentioning that, although the transcripts were all written in Chinese, the whole coding procedure of relevant texts would be executed in English, and also supplemented with a clear English coding tree (Basit, 2003). All these results helped to answer the sub-questions above.

3.4 Validity, reliability and limitation

Since it is impossible to collect all the travel-related UGC on Chinese websites, this study has chosen five most popular travel platforms in China to gather the related data. By involving different types of online platforms, the sample would be more representative in general, which further increased the reliability and generalizability of the study results (Elo et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the intrinsic features of the case destine the data would be limited only in Chinese language; such accessible barriers of the Chinese tourists would influence the study result to some extent. During the application of qualitative content analysis, there was another limitation of the procedure. Only one researcher coded the data, which means the category definition and code rules were decided individually. However, the coder partly built the axial and selective codes based on relevant sensitizing concepts from previous literature and theories to try to rule out the subjectivity, furthermore, achieved high validity (Gubrium, 2012).

In addition, according to Mayring's (2000) notes on communicative validation (p.112), this study adopted in-depth semi-structured interview as the data collect method in order to achieve mutual consent. The recruited informants were diversified in the field of gender, age and occupation, to reduce the sample bias (Catania, McDermott & Pollack, 1986). On the other hand, the volume of informants was relatively small, and such condition could affect the study results, since the informants might have some similarities.

4. Results

4.1 Thematic analysis of the user-generated contents

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, to understand the Morocco image and reputation which was built by UGC towards the Chinese tourists (research question 1), 479 codes had been created directly from the articles. These open codes were collected and categorized into 13 sub-categories. After that, according to the sensitizing concepts and their intrinsic similarities, four final selective codes were designed during the whole study, which were "Cities and travel spots", "Local characteristics", "General perceptions of trip experience" and "Reference and testimonials". All the themes and axial codes were shown in *Table 3* below, relevant findings would be elaborated in the following sub-chapters.

Table 3: The selective codes and axial codes of UGC analysis

Selective codes	Axial codes
Cities and travel spots	Cities & regions
	Attractions & natural resources
Local characteristics	Local People
	Local culture
	Local Architecture
	The local delicacies
	The local life & environment
General perceptions of trip experience	Amenities and infrastructure
	Trip experiences & activities
	Feelings of landscape
References and testimonials	Celebrities
	Official media
	Honors and credits

4.1.1 The image of Moroccan cities and travel spots

Travel spots are the foundation of travel-related content, and every article build their judgment and description based on the "Cities & regions" or "Attractions and natural resources". However, in contrast to the short posts, the user-generated articles had longer paragraphs, and including more description of the relevant spots though they had several judgements as well. These descriptions were always based on facts or history, which were written in a neutral and common way. For example:

"Took the train and heading south, the plants by the side had become fewer and fewer. The view reminded me that we were already in the authentic African secret area!

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Unfortunately, we did not see any wild animals in the scenery, the only landscape was desolate." [2]

In the "cities & regions" sub-category, there are numerous similarities among different articles. Firstly, the described cities are predominantly centralized in *Casablanca*, *Chefchaouen*, *Fes*, *Sahara*, *Rabat* and *Marrakesh*. All these cities were high-frequently shown in the UGC, and occupied the most paragraphs. In the end, most branding and reputation building efforts were on these cities. Secondly, the descriptions and judgements of the relevant cities were also analogous with majorly positive attitude. It had been found that the adjective "Romantic" and "Ancient" were commonly used in different cities description, for instance, the open codes "Romantic Casablanca", "Romantic Chefchaouen", "Romantic Fes", "Romantic Sahara". Similarly, in the different articles, the open codes like "Ancient Fes", "Ancient Marrakesh", "Ancient Rabat" and "Ancient town" are also discovered. Different contributors used similar adjectives to depict the various cities in Morocco, especially the romanticism and history of the popular cities which had been fully elaborated in the texts. Therefore, the analysis unraveled that even though the contents were coming from different sources, a harmonious representation helped reinforce the specific Morocco image among Chinese tourists. And because of the most frequent discovered adjectives are positive, it is clear that the contents help to build a positive image of Morocco to the Chinese tourists in general. Here are the typical sentences in the articles:

"We rode camels to watch the sunset (in Sahara Desert), lay on the smooth sand to count the stars, the romantic and moving feel arose simultaneously..." [3]

"...(Chefchaouen) should be the popular destination among most tourists, because in their mind, this small blue town is a nice and romantic spot." [4]

"There are many couples dating at causeway (of Rabat) at dusk, I also notice that some young couples are kissing here. The phenomenon is rarely seen in Morocco, which

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[2] The original Chinese texts (same hereafter)：乘着火车一路向南，沿途的植被一点点变得稀疏，不停地提醒着，我们真正要进入非洲这片神奇大陆的内部了！有点可惜的是，沿途并没有野生动物相伴相随的画面出现，只有令人心悸的荒凉。

[3] 我们（在撒哈拉沙漠）骑着骆驼，也躺在了细柔的沙子上数星星，那种令人触动的浪漫之感油然而生。

[4] ……（舍夫沙万）应该是受到最多游客喜爱的知名景点了，在大多数人眼中这个小城是一个优美浪漫的地点。

makes this spot seems like a location of freedom and romanticism." [5]

Apart from the similar adjectives in the content, there are also some different descriptions of the related cities. The colors are highly mentioned in all articles, several open codes like "Blue city - Chefchaouen", "White city - Casablanca" and "Red city - Marrakesh" indicates the distinctions of each location. Though these open codes are explored from various articles, the matchups of colors with corresponding cities are identical. The consistencies shape clear color impressions of the cities among readers, in addition, generally brand the whole country "Morocco" as a travel destination with visualized colorfulness perception.

Similar to the cities, the UGC also predominantly depict a few attractions and natural resources in Morocco. Almost every article mentioned "Jardin Majorelle Garden", the text concentrated on the plants and color view in the spot and portrayed the garden as a tranquil and well-designed landmark. Besides, the city views have been elaborated in the chosen articles, mostly concentrate on the luxurious plants. In contrast to the desolated stereotype of African scenery, the uniqueness of the garden and green city scenery are the specific labels which have been promoted to the UGC viewers. For instance:

"Although Morocco has located at the edge of desert, the weather is mild. Green plants, luxurious flowers and numerous tranquil gardens are famous to the whole world… In Majorelle Garden, there are so many lively views, ubiquitous tropical plants are prosperous, the cactus and palms are extending toward the sky. Rumor has it that the cactus here are over 100 varieties…" [6]

"Sahara Desert" and "Hassan II mosque" are the other two most-mentioned attractions in the whole database. For the former, these pieces have characterized the desert as an alluring natural spectacle, which are found in the open codes like "shooting stars", "unique sand ocean" "colorful sunrise view" and "beautiful sunset". It is worth to mention that the contents are mainly praise the Sahara with the sunrise, sunset and the starry sky view. The latter one has been described in a more historical and cultural way, since the mosque is perceived as a typical representative for the local Muslim culture. Meanwhile, there are also several open

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[5] （拉巴特）郊区外面有一条长堤，傍晚时分，会有一对一对的恋人在这里约会，我还曾见到少男少女接吻，在相对保守的摩洛哥，这非常少见，长堤好像是被赦免的自由恋爱之地。

[6] 尽管摩洛哥位于沙漠边缘地带，但是气候温和，这里的绿色景象，繁茂的花卉和热带植物全球闻名……马约尔花园里到处都是青涩欲滴的热带植物，努力向着天空伸展的仙人掌和棕榈树，充满着蓬勃的生机。传说这里有一百多种不同的仙人掌，是马约尔寻遍世界各地搜罗回来的藏品。

codes have been detected from the contents, for instance, "the third-biggest mosque", "landmark of Casablanca", "luxurious interiors" and "well-preserved historical site". The relevant open codes have the consistent latent meaning which is to build the image "Grand and sublime attraction" for this famous landmark.

4.1.2 The local characteristics of Morocco

The second theme of the qualitative analysis is "Local characteristic", which contains 182 open codes and becomes the biggest theme. This selective code unravels that the Morocco-related UGC have used a lot of texts to describe the regional attributes of Morocco, accompany with the axial codes "Local people", "Local culture", "Local architecture", "Local landscape" and "Local delicacy". In these different domains, the contents create a distinctive cultural image according to both tangible (e.g. people, buildings) and intangible (e.g. culture, religion) materials for the foreign tourists, especially the targeted viewers Chinese tourists.

4.1.2.1 Local people in Morocco

An important part of the content is related to the local people. Most of it shows a general positive attitude on the Morocco citizens. This analysis found the codes "Hospitable Moroccans", "Friendly local people", "Nice local people", "Unadorned people", among others. The content contributors describe various local people like the hotel owners, waiters or handicraftsmen, but the feelings for the local people are similar. As a result, these congruent descriptions have built a positive reputation for the native citizens and stressed on their hospitality and amity. Some texts, especially, combine the affirmative evaluation along with several actual events, which have happened in the relevant creators' trip.

"The local people in Morocco are friendly and nice, especially for the east Asian tourists. When they saw you on the street, they would say hello to you passionately. I was eating the snail soup and lamb at the restaurant one day, and the local people there kindly asked me 'Do you like Morocco? Where are you from?'" [7]

Since the reviews on the local citizens are all based on the contributors' own experiences, their final judgments would be various according to their divergent subjective feelings. For instance, in this axial code, the study discovered some negative open codes

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[7] 摩洛哥当地普通老百姓还是很友善的，特别是中日韩，这些陌生的亚洲面孔出现时，他们会热情的打招呼。在一起吃蜗牛和羊杂的时候，他们就喜欢问你喜不喜欢摩洛哥，你是哪里过来的......

about the local people as well. Unlike the aforementioned ones, the adverse attitudes are concentrated on the local peddlers, chiefly the people who get their bread and butter from the tourists, such as the performers, souvenir retailers or taxi drivers. "Solicited peddlers", "Greedy performers", "Tricky local people" and "Tricky taxi driver" are the open codes which typically represent the negative comments on local people. As we can see from the codes, the unfriendliness is predominantly about the money-related issues. These texts disseminate the tricky and deceptive images of the local peddlers, and also describe their greed for money from foreign tourists. But comparing to the positive texts about the local inhabitants, the negative comments did not occupy too many paragraphs. The relevant content seems like a tip for the specific article readers, Chinese tourists. Here is an example from the initial data:

> *"It should be noted that the local peddlers or taxi drivers have the tricks for tourists. If you hire a taxi, driver will overcharge you a lot based on your foreigner Asian looks."* [8]

Apart from the descriptions of the local people which are accompanied with specific events, there are still some more neutral facts have been remarked in the UGCs. Such related contents shape a cultural figure for the local people, meanwhile, also provide a secret and fascinated Morocco brand to the readers. The discovered open codes "Berber people", "Moroccan artists", "Conservative local people" or even "Man in white robe" have indicated the totally distinctive Moroccan culture comparing to China, which create a huge sense of otherness and exoticism among the readers in the end.

4.1.2.2 The local culture of Morocco

Since the local culture in Morocco is totally different from the east Asian culture, the selected articles have mentioned a lot in this realm and help Morocco to build a unique and interesting cultural brand. Firstly, the Moroccan religion and their traditional customs were elaborated in the texts. Some contents mainly discuss the Islamic religion in general, and the open codes "Muslim religion", "Koran" or "Theology" would represent the *religious* culture. The relevant materials frame an image with richness of Moroccan religion and try to illustrate the importance of religion in Morocco by depicting different aspects. In the connection to this, several other open codes like "Prohibition according to local culture", "Conservative culture", "Cultural rules for mosque" and "Religious conventions" also help to form this religion image. Some other visual aspects of religion as on people's clothing, for instance, are

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8 需要注意的是，当地商贩或者司机会对游客下套。如果你打车，司机一定会因为看你是亚洲人而高要价格。

also coded on "Long robe" or "Traditional Berbers costume". But these related texts, meanwhile, spread the conservatism of Morocco as well, since readers would notice several strict local rules and conventions in articles. The following paragraph from one article is an example:

"This mosque (Hassan II Mosque) is the only one which open for the tourists. When you enter the mosque, you need to pay attention on your costume, the exposed and casual garments are illegitimate. Females need to wear long pants and long sleeves shirt, hair needs to be covered tool; Males need to wear T-shirt and long pants. The main shrine only open for Muslim." [9]

However, most of the chosen articles have interpreted the diversified cultures in Morocco. Although the majority of Moroccans are Muslim, the colonized history has brought the combined cultural heritages to this North-African country. Arabic culture is the most common ones here, the open codes "Arabic characteristic", "Arabic music" would represent the regional style. Besides, the open codes "Intertwined history and culture", "Multi-national culture" and "European colonized culture" portray a combined cultural Morocco icon to the content viewers. Although we can see the diversity of culture according to these UGC, the local culture still mainly focuses on North-Africa and Europe. This phenomenon means for the Chinese tourists, the cultural experience in this destination would be different from the native ones. Thus, an exotic image of Morocco has been detected in a macro-level, and correspondingly, an open code named "Exotic characteristic" would also justify this result. This piece of texts indicates the diversified culture in Morocco:

"The various Portuguese, French and Berber styled architectures are located harmoniously here. Moreover, in this small town (old town of Chefchaouen), the Berbers, Arabians and even Jewish, Europeans are living together corporately, though their religions are totally different..." [10]

Lastly, the relevant texts have also indicated the rich history of Morocco. Content creators tend to use specific numbers to underline the depth of the local history, like "600

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9 进入唯一一对游客开放的清真寺（哈桑二世清真寺）参观时要注意着装，不可以穿着过于随便、暴露的衣服。女士需要穿长裤长袖，头发也要用纱巾遮住；男士需要穿半袖长裤。进入清真寺时需要拖鞋摘帽，以示尊重，主殿神龛只对穆斯林开放。

10 各种葡萄牙、法国和柏柏尔风格的建筑，都能在这里（舍夫沙万老城）和谐共生；阿拉伯人、非洲土著、柏柏尔人、犹太人都能在这里和平共处。

years historical site" or "1000 years history". Therefore, we can see a general image of Morocco with ubiquitous religious conventions, multi-cultural attributes and history richness.

4.1.2.3 The local architecture of Morocco

Apart from the above-mentioned parts, the UGC also depict a lot of unique local architectures. The interesting discovery is that all the open codes in this sub-category are positive or neutral, which means no negative comments have been found in the chosen articles. Especially some overall ideas about the local buildings, the content creators tend to use rhetoric to describe them. Additionally, there are also some pieces of texts focus on Moroccan indigenous distinctiveness, which clearly describe the buildings' singularities. We can see this phenomenon from the relevant open codes, such as "Beautiful interiors", "Delicate and grand architecture", "Exquisite decorations", "Unique buildings" and so forth.

Similar to the previous sub-category "Local culture", in this axial code, the study found the combined cultural stuff in the architecture as well. "European styled buildings", "Spanish mosque" and "French fashionable design" have expressed the European colonized culture in Morocco. However, most texts in this part still concentrate on the local architecture genre, which can be seen from the identified open codes "Islamic architecture decorations", "Moorish architecture" and "traditional decorations". There are also some remarkable results that the typical design style "Mosaic" have been mentioned a lot in the relevant contents. These findings also justify that the articles have built the unique local cultural style image for these constructions to some extent. Morocco's mosaic decorations have been interpreted more broadly in various articles comparing to the relevant open codes mentioned before. For instance,

> *"(In Marrakesh Museum), there are diversified exquisite patterns that assembled by the mosaic tiles of different sizes. They look so harmonious with the traditional delicate wooden carvings; the whole view is variegated and catching the tourists' sights."* [11]
>
> *"... (Ben Youssef Madrasa's) colorful mosaic wall, exquisite arches and outdoor courtyard with sunlight, all these designs highlight the ancient people's wisdom."* [12]

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[11] （在马拉喀什博物馆），大小各异的马赛克瓷砖拼凑成了精致多样的图案，与传统的精致木雕和谐相依。整个斑驳的光影效果吸引着游客的注意。

[12] （本尤素福神学院的）色彩丰富的马赛克墙面，精致的拱门和阳光直射的露天庭院，所有这些设计风格完全凸显了古代人的智慧。

Related to the first theme, the study found another juxtaposition that the colorfulness had also been discovered in this category. Since the architectures are the main view of cities, the texts use different colors to demonstrate the beauty and charm of the local buildings which are similar to the results written in the first theme. Several open codes like "Color combination", "Blue architecture", "Red buildings" and "Various blue colors" are detected from the contents. Remarkably, an open code "Majorelle blue" has been found multiple times in the chosen contents. This "new term" represents the uniqueness of the Morocco blue color and strongly emphasizes the local colorfulness to readers. Consequently, form a colorful and exclusive image for the Moroccan architectures. Here is a relevant piece of text:

"The Jordin Majorelle Garden, is consisted of a garden and a villa completely painted with fascinating blue color. This building was left by the owner Jacques Majorelle. And this blue color is extremely popular because of its coolness and liveliness, thus, people named it with "Majorelle Blue" which is an exclusive African blue color." [13]

These contents help Morocco build an alluring reputation of the distinctive local buildings, meanwhile, impress the readers through the positive depictions and judgements.

4.1.2.4 The local delicacies

Local food always accompanies with the writers' true feelings in the articles. There are some characteristic local dishes or snacks have been indicated in the contents, most texts centralized in the typical local food: "Delicious Tagine", "Traditional snail soup", "Fresh mint tea" and "Good barbecue". The UGCs describe these food as unique and well-tasted cuisine, which disseminate positive image of the local dishes.

Although the positive comments have occupied most space in the relevant texts, a small amount of negative judgements on the local food are also detected. The open codes, "Tedious food" and "One-dimensional food" represent the different opinions and bring the contradiction in this realm, furthermore, show the subjectivity of the user-generated content somewhat. Here are two pieces of contents with totally different attitudes on local food:

"(At dusk) the street will saturate with the great flavor of Tagine, it is the delicious scent of the meat and vegetable with exclusive local secret spice. This is the traditional dinner

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[13] 马约尔花园由一个花园与一座独栋别墅构成，整座别墅被漆成诱人的蓝色。建筑是由前任主人马约尔遗留下来的，而这里的蓝色也因为其特有的清爽与活力之感，被人们称为"马约尔蓝"，这是非洲独有的一种蓝色。

dish for all Moroccan families." [14]

"...but the food here is really uncomplimentary, the weird flavor is so strong. And the French bread is hard as stone, the rice is even worse." [15]

4.1.2.5 The local life and environment

Apart from the above mentioned four axial codes, "The local life and environment" is the last sub-category in this theme. The chosen UGC have demonstrated various life and environment details in Morocco. First, some texts concentrate on building a dynamic and lively life scene for the Morocco local life. Such liveliness is concentrated on the local market, with the open codes "Busy traditional market", "Biggest night market" and "Sleepless square". It is worthy to notice that the nightlife here has been highlighted significantly in the relevant articles, which creates a substantial local nightlife image:

"Nobody will inform you when the night comes, but you can figure out the beginning of the night by noticing the crowded people in every streets and alleys. This is the time that local people start their serious activities. People gathered on the square to listen stories from the performers, or bargain with the daily necessities peddlers." [16]

Second, the leisure and loose local lifestyle are also promoted by the contents. Unlike the busy city life, the relevant texts try to construct a relaxed image of the local life and environment. Study found the related open codes like "leisure lifestyle", "Cozy local life" and "Dawdling" which would confirm this result. Besides, this leisure brand of Morocco does not come from some simple general sentences, some content creators use the specific descriptions of local inhabitants to spread this kind of local lifestyle, for example, the discovered open codes "Local people chatting", "Kids playing football" or even "Idle cats". The precise events have underscored this image to the readers:

"I steal a glance at the local males sitting at the open Café —— they just leisurely watch the football games on television, or gather around a table to play the crossword puzzle in

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[14] （傍晚）时候街头巷尾会传出塔吉锅的香味，那是一种肉类和蔬菜混合在一起的芳香，再加上些不足以为外人道的香料，便成为了千千万万摩洛哥家庭的一顿传统晚饭。

[15] ……但是这里的食物真的非常低劣，有着奇怪的气味。法式面包硬得像石头一样，米饭更是不忍评价。

[16] 没人会提醒你什么时候天黑，但你知道当大街小巷里人头又重新攒动起来，那便是当地人认真开始活动的时间。大家聚在广场上听说书的艺人讲故事，在日用品的小摊上讨价还价。

the newspaper" [17]

Lastly, research also found out several texts described the local weather. Since there are only a small amount of the related codes, no clear image of the local weather could be concluded. The one result is that the Moroccan sunny weather and big temperature gap has been mentioned, which is affirmed according to the open codes "Moderate sunlight" and "Cold morning and night".

4.1.3 The general perceptions of trip experience in Morocco

Here is the third selective code that has been created from the chosen UGCs, "General perceptions of trip experience". In this category, the research discovers three related axial codes, which are "Amenities and infrastructure", "Trip experiences and activities" and "Feelings of landscape". Unlike the previous themes are mainly concentrating on the descriptions of Morocco materials., this new theme has more personal feelings and expressions about the creators' actual trip life. Although, normally, UGCs are the texts intertwined with both cognitions and affections, the codes still reveal the different emphasis that the content has on the different topics.

4.1.3.1 The amenities and infrastructure in Morocco

This first sub-category, "Amenities and infrastructure", predominately focused on the facilities in Morocco, like the urban infrastructure, transportation or accommodations. First, the local road and public transportation have been elaborated in the contents. The open codes like "Broad street", "Convenient transportation" and "Clean and safe bus" provide a positive image of the local transportation. These positive comments are found in the texts of local road, train, bus and even taxi. On the contrary, some negative comments, for instance, "Zigzag alleys", "Unpunctuality of transportation" or "Inconvenient transportation" have spread a totally different idea about the local infrastructure and traffic. The finding, again, shows the disparity of these various sources which are written by different users. An impressive discovery is that the open code "Zigzag alleys" has been detected with high frequency from different articles. The relevant texts not only show the inconvenience of Morocco, but also propagate Morocco city's unique style in a latent way which should also belong to the cultural characteristics part. Here is an example that you can see these two underlying images:

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[17] 我偷瞄那些坐在露天咖啡馆里喝薄荷茶的男人们——他们可能正百无聊赖地看电视球赛，或是凑在一起玩报纸上的填字游戏。

"In the old town of Marrakesh, there are zillions of the zigzag alleys which are intertwining with each other. For tourists, it is really easy to get lost here, but at the same time, the strange style has attracted them to come and check it out as well." [18]

Apart from the local ones, the contents refer to the international transportations contain more consistent attitude, the open codes "Non-direct flight" and "Expensive air ticket from mainland" brand Morocco as a distant place for Chinese tourists. Second, the accommodation in Morocco has gained a lot positive review. Most contents try to describe the local accommodation in the realm of their price and decorations. The open codes "Cost-effective hostel", "Beautiful traditional hostel" and "Well-designed hotel" are the testimonies for this result. Third, the amenity of shopping has also been mentioned in the UGCs, but only concentrates on local stores and commodities. The codes "Exquisite handicrafts" and "Various commodities" build a diversified and delicate brand image for the local products. Similarly, the positive comments of the Moroccan weather are also worthy to notice, like the open codes "mild weather" or "sunny day" demonstrate this country with friendly climate. And last but not least, several negative open codes have been found which are describing the inconvenience of the other local infrastructure, for example, the "Language barriers" and "Incorrect GPS".

4.1.3.2 The trip experience and activities

Except the amenities and infrastructure of Morocco, these chosen UGC have also demonstrated the creators' own experiences and the activities they take during the trip. Most of the texts focus on their own judgements and affections of this Morocco journey. For instance, the study found out some positive judgments and expressions about the general travel experience in the articles. The open codes like "Deserve to visit again", "Memorable experience" provide a positive overall image of the journey in Morocco, which further spread the worthwhileness of traveling in Morocco. Within the affirmative texts, there is another remarkable discovery that we have got multiple open codes describing the leisure and easiness of the trip, such as "Relaxed experience", "Peaceful atmosphere" of "Cozy morning". Therefore, we can see the contents spread the leisure and relaxing affections of their Morocco trip to the UGC readers, which match most tourists' travel purpose – entertaining and relaxing. Apart from the uniqueness of Morocco and their famous attractions,

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[18] 在马拉喀什老城，有不计其数的弯曲的小巷子，互相交错。对于游客来说，这里十分容易迷路，但是与此同时，这种独特的风格也吸引着大家过来一探究竟。

online contents have positively increased the general travel image of Morocco as well. Here is a piece of texts that naturally represent the easiness and coziness of Morocco trip:

"The two weeks in Morocco, we never paid attention about the time. Sometimes, we went up to the roof to watch stars before go to bed. And also, sometimes, we would have several cups of the mint tea with hotel owner, then read some book before go to bed. Here, Morocco, had the perfectly ideal vacation that we imagined before" [19]

Nonetheless, there are still some negative experience for the Morocco trip mentioned in the articles. Open code "Tired travel experience" has a completely opposite expression to the easiness that we indicated before. Besides, most adverse expressions are centralized on the shopping experience. Some open codes like "Bargaining with peddler", "Forced sell", "Overcharged taxi fee", "Untrustworthy product price" transmit the similar images that we mentioned in the sub-category "Local people". The relevant contents describe Morocco as a travel destination which full of the shopping traps and express the related events in a more "cautions and tips" way for tourists. This is an example of the text indicates the shopping traps in Morocco:

"The local peddlers and taxi drivers all have the bad habits about overcharging on tourists. For example, if you want to take a cab to a quite near place, they would charge you fifty Dirham while the authentic price should be twenty Dirham. The overcharged price only happened when they saw your foreigner faces, so bargain with them is necessary all the time." [20]

On top of that, various creators have illustrated their experience of getting lost in the old town. The open code "Easy to get lost" has been detected in multiple articles and mostly accompanied with the "Zigzag alleys" that we elaborated in the previous axial code "Amenities and infrastructure".

The travel activities are also notable results in this category. The UGCs describe the travel activities in two domains. One is the photo shooting, justified by the open codes "Good spot for taking pictures" and "Humanistic photograph". As a result, the relevant texts build an

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[19] 在摩洛哥的两周里，我们从来没有在意过时间。有时我们会爬上天台看看星星再睡，有时我们会和老板要杯热乎乎的薄荷茶，坐在楼下看几本书再睡。这里有我们理想假期里所有的样子：

[20] 当地的商贩司机都有一个坏习惯，就是对游客要加颇高。比如说，一个很近的距离坐出租车，他们就会要50迪拉姆，但其实真实价格也就20左右。这种高要价现象基本上都是因为他们发现你外国人的长相，认定你是游客。所以要记得一路都要讲价。

alluring Morocco image that it is a great place to take fancy travelling pictures. The other one is the activities happened in the desert, confirmed by the open codes "Ride camel", "Desert day tour" and "Sand skiing". This part stress the uniqueness of Morocco by involving these uncommon and funny events in desert, which further demonstrate the exotic characteristic of this country.

4.1.3.3 The feelings of the Morocco landscape

The landscape of Morocco has gained a lot affirmative comments from the various content contributors. There are some highly occurred open codes like "Incredible view", "Astonishing desert scenery" and "Colorful view" which spread the beautiful and charming image of Morocco. In addition, some other descriptive words like "Unique", "Fairytale" and so forth have been found as well, the related texts underline the uniqueness and attractiveness of Morocco landscape and give the content viewers a great reason to visit. Generally, these contents show the diversified authors' positive impressions and pleasures of the Morocco landscape. Here is a common example from one article to represent this result:

"At Chefchaouen, you could be easily allured by the colorful view, the scenery would make you feel like living in a fairytale world. When the dusk sunlight sprinkle over the blue city and the faraway field, the incredible view would absorb all your attention all of sudden." [21]

4.1.4 The references and testimonials in UGCs

The forth selective code is "References and testimonials", which represents that the UGCs have involved multiple other media or credits to justify their own descriptions and expressions. The sub-category "Celebrities" contains a lot names of famous people to create the tourism value for Morocco or some specific attractions. For instance, open code "Yves Saint Laurent" has been found several times accompanied with the attraction "Majorelle Garden". Additionally, the code "San Mao (Chinese Author)" indicates that this country has so much value for Chinese people to travel, since this author is quite famous in China with her books about Sahara Desert.

The second axial code is "Official media", which contains various open codes represent different kinds of media that have mentioned Morocco. "Movie - *Casablanca*", "Book - *One*

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[21] 在舍夫沙万，你很容易被这里的色彩迷惑，仿佛生活在一个童话世界里。当日落余晖洒在蓝城之上、以及远处的田野上，越发让人沉迷其中。

Thousand and One Nights", "Travel magazines" or even "TripAdvisor" all justify the tourism value of Morocco. Famous movies or TV shows match the viewers pervious perceptions of Morocco, furthermore, more strongly attract the potential tourists by the peripheral reputations of Morocco. Although, the UGCs have been perceived as the content that tourists express their own feelings, the contributors still tend to use other official media to prove their judgements and make the content even more trustworthy. Here is an example that content creator used the movie to create Morocco's tourism value to the viewers:

> *"All people's imaginations of this North-African country, Morocco, are coming from the movie - Casablanca. To have a drink in the Rick's Café of Casablanca has been an unmissable activity for the tourists who hold the strong desirability of love. Maybe this is the one and only passionate thing in Casablanca for the romanticists."* [22]

Apart from above, the study also found out the axial code called "Honors and credits" which means the UGC have used official honors to create more credible values for this destination or even some specific attractions. The open codes like "World cultural heritage" and "United nations heritage" would represent this result. Such honors have been perceived as popular values among tourists, furthermore lure them to travel to Morocco. Below is an example from the texts which involved honors to justify the attractiveness of Morocco:

> *"Djemaa el Fna Square in Marrakesh is already enrolled in the list of World Cultural Heritage, it has over 1,000 years history! This square is the biggest Berbers open market in the whole Morocco, and also the busiest square in the whole Africa. Many local characteristics can be found here."* [23]

Content creators tend to employ these honors of the described destination, since all the "titles" are more familiar to readers. Unlike merely writing the personal feelings, the testimonials and honors make authors' content become more reader-friendly.

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[22] 对北非摩洛哥的幻想，源于《北非谍影》，去卡萨布兰卡的里克咖啡店喝一杯咖啡，成了很多对战争爱情无限向往的人的一种期盼。也许这就是一个浪漫主义者对卡萨布兰卡的唯一的激情。

[23] 马拉喀什杰马夫纳广场如今已被列入世界文化遗产，其历史可以追溯到一千年以前！是摩洛哥最大的柏柏尔人露天市场，也是整个非洲最繁忙的广场。此处极具当地特色。

4.2 Thematic analysis of the interviews

In order to answer the research question 2 and 3, this study also use in-depth semi-structured interview to gather various information. After transcribing and coding the interviews, this study followed the research design and questions to analyze the data, sequentially defined 196 open codes. In line with the interview topic list structure, the thematic analysis aimed at exploring subjects' attitudes on UGC from the decision-making process, the ongoing trip period to the post-trip phase. Therefore, all these codes had been classified into 10 sub-categories, moreover, three main themes. The final selective codes are "Planning and expectation before the trip", "Feelings of actual trip" and "Post-travel opinion of travel-related UGC". The first two themes would be used to answer the research question 2, and the last theme would answer the research question 3. The overview of the themes and subcategories are showing in *Table 4* below. Each axial code will be elaborated with examples in the following paragraphs.

Table 4: The selective codes and axial codes of interview analysis

Selective codes (Themes)	Axial codes
Planning and expectation before the trip	Factors that influence decision
	Information gathering before trip
	Memorable ideas from UGC
	Expectation and presumption of Morocco
Feelings of actual trip	Negative feelings and experiences in the trip
	Positive feelings and experiences in the trip
	Comparisons of actual trip and UGC
Post-travel opinions of travel-related UGC	Post-travel evaluation for the previous UGC
	Post- travel attitude towards UGC

4.2.1 Tourists' expectation and planning before the Morocco trip

To answer the research question 2 "*How do Chinese tourists who previously read travel-related UGC of Morocco portray their travel experience after the Morocco trip?*", this study would use two angles: "expectation" and "actual feelings", to describe the answer, since tourists' actual travel experience intertwined with their previous expectation. In this selective code "Planning and expectation before the trip", the findings would elaborate tourists' travel planning behavior and how they form their own presumptions for Morocco based on different media materials, especially the travel-related user-generated contents. The four discovered axial codes in this category are "Factors that influence decision", "Information gathering before trip",

"Memorable ideas from UGC" and "Expectation and presumption of Morocco". These relevant results demonstrate the Chinese tourists' travel decision-making pattern, their information searching behavior and their expectation of Morocco which coming from the UGC.

4.2.1.1 Factors that influence tourists' travel decision

The first sub-category, "Factors that influence decision", has only six open codes. The high frequency open code "Visa-free policy" indicated that most informants in the interview had mentioned that the convenience of the visa-free policy bring Morocco to their travel destination list. However, there are various factors that influence their Morocco choice in the end, for instance, Kaidi, the Interviewee 1 (hereafter: *I-1*) mentioned her decision was relatively impulsive just because she saw some beautiful pictures of Morocco online. Similar claims were also discovered in some other informants' interviews, as the open code "Photo of Chefchaouen" shown in this sub-category. Another recognized finding is that tourists' decisions tend to be less influenced by the negative comments online, comparing to the positive ones like the beautiful pictures. The following discourse from *I-2*, one of the subjects, has justified this result and been coded as "Less influence by the negative comments" in this study:

"(In the online articles,) there were some comments about the unsafety in Morocco, especially for single girls, some of them suggested that girls should not go there alone… Us three girls had concerns during the travel planning, since we had no male companies. But these negative comments did not make us give up the travel decision" [24]

4.2.1.2 Tourists' information gathering before their actual trip

The second axial code in this theme is "Information gathering before trip" with 24 open codes in total. The first finding in this sub-category is that Chinese tourists seldom find official sources about Morocco traveling in their planning process. The codes "Book of San Mao", "Movie Casablanca" and "TV shows" are the only ones related to official sources. Another high-frequent code "No official media" indicates the judgment before. Interviewees in this study were asked to recall their official information consuming related to Morocco traveling, the most answers were "No traditional media information".

Since the few official information about Morocco traveling in China, tourists

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[24] (网上文章中的)不太安全的就是指，额，如果你是女生单独出行的话，有的建议就是你不要去……其实我们三个女生制定攻略的时候，还是会担心。就是还是觉得不安全啊，没有男生啊……但是并没有让我们打消这个念头。"

predominantly gather the relevant data from the user-generated contents which are posted by the other tourists who went to Morocco before. The codes like "Gather information from travel community", "Grades on Booking" and "Friends' social media post" indicate that tourists' UGC consuming behavior is to involve various sources. There are different kinds of platforms with travel-related UGC that Chinese tourists would love to use. However, unlike the behavior of using versatile online platforms, nearly everyone in this study claimed that they only used Chinese UGC because of the language barriers. Only one informant mentioned that she used French source as well since one of her journey companies studied French before. Within the UGC domain, in addition to the various UGC using behavior, tourists have their own preferences of the data as well. Code "Search useful data" describes tourists' inclination of the specific useful information. The answer from another interviewee, *I-9*, is a typical example:

"(The online articles) are still useful, for instance, some information like ticket price, open hours of the attractions, or even someone recommended specific restaurants. (So, you like the detailed information?) Yes, I prefer the practical useful ones…" [25]

Her another statement represents tourists' desirability of using various UGCs as well:

"I would read many UGCs written by different people. That's why I said read online UGCs cost a lot time. Only one article is surely not trustworthy, since he or she cannot write down everything. Maybe only the things that he or she care about… So, I would love to read more UGCs and compare them before I get the final ideas." [26]

Additionally, tourists also intend to search traditional word-of-mouth in the travel planning period. Comparing to the travel-related UGCs on the Internet, they prefer to trust the traditional WOM more, especially the ones coming from acquaintances who are already in their own social circles. Therefore, the traditional WOM are more influential for people's decision-making and presumptions. *I-5*'s personal story would certify this phenomenon perfectly:

"I have a friend who already decided to go to Morocco, and she asked me about Morocco after my trip. I told her the unfriendly local atmosphere for female based on my

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[25] （网上文章还是）有用的，比如说有一些，像是门票啊，多少钱啊，开放时间啊，这些是有用的。还有万一谁说了好吃的。（所以你喜欢这种细节性的东西？）对的，实用性的……

[26] 我会多读，所以我说看攻略很花时间，就是我会看很多人发的。单独一个人的肯定不可信啊，而且那一个人它写的没有那么全面啊，万一它只写了他关心的那一部分呢，对吧……那每个人都有自己喜欢的，所以多看一点比较一下。

own experience. And she just gave up the whole travel plan because of my words, even though her flight tickets cannot be reimbursed…" [27]

Similarly, another interviewee (*I-2*) also mentioned that even though she read a lot UGCs during the travel planning, she still intended to search advice from friends who already went there before. But in the end, no one in her social circle had been to Morocco.

4.2.1.3 Memorable ideas from UGC

After gathering the Morocco-related information, which are mainly coming from UGC articles, tourists form their preconception of the destination. Similar to the online articles coding results, the interviews results have a lot related code. First, the positive memorable ideas, there are the codes like "Grand view in Morocco", "Colorfulness", "Exoticism" and "Impressive Sahara Desert". Tourists are impressed by Morocco's beautiful and colorful landscape, exotic culture and the famous Sahara Desert. Some informants stated that the online photos shot by other tourists gave them the most impacts. Unlike the texts in UGCs, photo works would provide a clearer image of the local view to the readers, furthermore, affect their decisions.

Although many informants said they thought the UGC about Morocco on Chinese website had a general positive attitude, they still had clear memories of some negative comments on Morocco. The negative texts are centralized on the "Local peddlers' tricks", "Unsafety" and "Conservatism for female", which match the previous result from online article codes. Apart from this the above ideas coming from UGCs, *I-5* and *I-6* also mentioned that they had received some negative comments about Morocco from their friends as well.

4.2.1.4 Tourists' expectations and presumptions of Morocco

The fourth axial code is "expectation and presumption of Morocco", which is strongly related to people's actual feelings about Morocco, since tourists tend to compare their true experience with their previous expectation of the trip. Similar to the memorable ideas from UGC, tourists have positive expectation of the local culture and view, which can be seen from the codes like "Historical Fes", "High expectation about exoticism" and "Expectation of desert view". Additionally, tourists have strong curiosity of this country as their presupposition of Morocco is secret and unique. Such a sense of otherness can be detected by the codes like "Uniqueness of Morocco" and "Secret country". Due to the limited amount of official

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[27] 就是我有一个朋友，她在我去过之后来问我关于摩洛哥的事儿，我和她说了当地对于女孩子不太友好的事情，她就是因为听我说完之后，她的机票都是不能改签的，她都直接放弃了……

information, interviewees mentioned their expectations and presumptions were mainly formed according to the UGC they previously read. Not only the texts affect tourists, the online pictures also influence their expectations, furthermore, it can almost say that pictures have even more power. *I-2's* statement describes her strong impression of Morocco's uniqueness and the high expectation of the desert view which are created by UGCs, both texts and photos:

> *"From my own perspective, I love traveling to a country with different views and culture. After reading online articles, I knew that Morocco is an Islamic country, which for me is quite mysterious, and I have never been to a related country. So, I have strong expectation and curiosity before the journey…*
>
> *I have the most expectations for the starry night sky of Sahara Desert before my trip. The ideas came from the beautiful photos that shot by other tourists, they impressed me with the gorgeous night sky view. I think the pictures still have more power than the texts, because photos are more perceptual. You can get a more specific image of the destination based on the photo that you have seen."* [28]

On the other hand, tourists' presumptions of Morocco are not all positive since we already know that tourists' have read negative comments in UGCs as well. Similar to the memorable ideas in the previous axial code, tourists have psychological preparation of the relevant problems in Morocco before their actual trip. The open codes "psychological preparation of local tricks" and "Precautions of harassment on women" would demonstrate the finding. However, even the tourists claimed they had preparations for the specific problems, they still considered that they neglected the seriousness of the problems, which means the negative comments have less influence in their travel planning process. This finding conformed to the one in the first axial code "Factors that influence decision", and study found the relevant codes like "Less expectation of problems" in this category.

4.2.2 Tourists' feelings of the Morocco trip

During the interview, all the subjects were asked to answer the questions with their authentic feelings of the actual trip. Therefore, the second theme "Feelings of actual trip" is

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[28] 我自己来感受的话，可能我就是比较喜欢去体验一些，这些不一样的风景，不一样的文化吧，然后就看网上觉得摩洛哥毕竟是一个

伊斯兰国家嘛，就感觉还是挺神秘的那种，也没有去过，以前。去的时候，还是挺满怀期待，挺好奇的……

行前我最期待的就是撒哈拉沙漠的星空。这个是我最期待的。然后看，之前去过的人拍过的一些照片，整个撒哈拉的星空就很美。因为

我觉得可能，图片还是比文字带来的冲击力更强大，更直观一些吧。就是你看图片，你就能知道，哦，这个地方是这个样子的。

discovered. There are 69 open codes in this theme and centralized into 3 sub-categories, "Negative feelings and experiences in the trip", "Positive feelings and experiences in the trip" and "Comparisons of actual trip and UGC". The findings in this theme would directly answer the research question 2 as people described their own journey with different sentiments. Each axial code will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

4.2.2.1 Tourists' negative feelings and experiences in the actual trip

Surprisingly, almost all the informants in this study have mentioned their own negative experience in their actual Morocco trip, and most of them have a general negative feeling about the country. The first axial code "Negative feelings and experiences in the trip" contains different angles of people's unsatisfied perception. First, there is a clear result that interviewees have bad feelings about the local shopping atmosphere and local people. Although the tourists have read some negative comments in this domain before the trip, they still think the severe problems there ruin their overall trip feelings. Some high-frequent codes like "Forced sales" and "Deceptive local people" would represent this finding. Besides, all the female informants mentioned the unfriendly atmosphere for Asian girls in Morocco. Here are two pieces of discourse from *I-3* and *I-8* which could describe the shopping and sexual situations in Morocco:

"When we got there, indeed, I have a strong feeling that the local people treat us as the 'walking wallet'… The attractions' locations were hard to find, so you must find local guides. But they will charge you with an insane price! They would tell you 'It's free!' at first, though in the end they definitely asked much money from you." [29]—— *I-3 (Rui)*

"They (local people) would flirt with females, maybe pawing you or touching you. One of my female trip partner was wearing short dress, and the males passing by all stared at her with bedroom eyes or even whistle to her like the film scenes." [30]—— *I-8 (Ting)*

Second, some informants also criticized about city views and cultural views. They complained about the relevant cities they went were not satisfied with their expectation. *I-7* thought Fes was over-commercialized comparing his presumption, meanwhile, *I-5* claimed the Chefchaouen was quite small and not deserved to visit which disappointed her a lot. Third, the

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[29] 去到那边嘛，真的，我们是明显感觉到对方把我们当作移动钱包的......他们的景点你不找本地人带路是去不到的......带路人呢，就是他会要一个比较离谱的价格。比较离谱的价格......然后你去到那边他刚开始跟你说是，用英文跟你讲It's free，但是真正把你带到的时候，就会问你要钱。

[30] 他们会占女生便宜，会上去摸你，搂啊，占便宜。同行的另一个女孩，穿的短裙......男生路过的都色迷迷的。就是路过的人都会看，然后就是那种电影里会出现的情节。然后就吹口哨啊。

criticism of the local amenities is also remarkable. Open codes like "Inconvenient infrastructure", "Unavailable GPS" and "Language barriers" represent tourists negative attitude about the travel difficulty in Morocco. *I-7* has mentioned the inconvenience of local transportation in the interview:

"There are note much choices for public transportation, some cities only have train, some only have bus. We went to Sahara and the only choice is to rent car, but this still costed us a lot time on the way. Basically, almost half of our trip time is on the road, which is super exhausting" [31]

4.2.2.2 Tourists' positive feelings and experiences in the actual trip

The second axial code is "Positive feelings and experiences in the actual trip" with 21 discovered open codes. Though most of the informants had generally negative comments on Morocco trip, they still stated that local distinctive culture, hotels and the famous Sahara Desert were worth to visit. The open codes "Astonishing cultural decorations" and "Impressive Distinctive culture" indicate interviewees' affirmative attitudes on the Morocco culture. *I-1* and *I-2*, on the other hand, compliment the cost-effective and exquisite hostel there. Moreover, the Sahara Desert view got the most praise from interviewees who said the experience there were totally satisfactory.

Besides, the study also found that people's attitudes were differ from each other as there were paradoxes in this axial code and the previous one. In contrast to *I-5*'s judgment, *I-7* and *I-8* love the coziness atmosphere in Chefchaouen and they also enjoy the blue color in this tiny city. Another difference had been found was tourists' perceptions of local people, since a discovered open code "friendly local people" in this sub-category contradicted to the code "Deceptive local people" in the previous subcategory. *I-4*, one of the subjects in this study who had an overall positive attitude about his Morocco trip, mentioned in the interview about the unsophisticated people there:

"At least the time when I went there, the end of 2015, the local people were unsophisticated and honest. They were really willing to help me, and showed a lot kindness to me" [32]

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[31] 他有的城市只能有火车，有的城市之间只能有大巴，就没有办法，因为我们还去了撒哈拉，撒哈拉就只能包车，包车的话我们估计也有一大半的时间在车上。基本上我们这么多时间，一半都在赶路吧。差不多，真的差不多。

[32] 至少我去的时候，15 年底的时候，是很淳朴的，原生态的。然后人也是非常愿意助人为乐。还帮我挺多的，大家也都挺友好的。

Similar to the tourists who said about the tricky local peddlers, the interviewees who complimented the local friendly people were all describing their feelings according to real happened stories. Therefore, the study discovered that people's actual trip feeling would be more personalized based on their own various encounters.

4.2.2.3 The comparisons of actual trip and UGCs

All the informants read UGCs more or less in their travel planning process. They all admitted that their expectations of Morocco journey were influenced by UGC which had already been mentioned in the first selective code. When informants talked about their actual feelings, the discourses were always accompanied with their presumption affected by UGC. Therefore, this axial code "The comparisons of actual trip and UGC" would unravel whether the informants actual trip fulfill their own expectation or not. First, there are some open codes represent the mismatched experiences from the descriptions in UGC, for instance, "Dissatisfy to expectation", "Mismatched Marrakesh experiences" and "Worse problem in actual trip". On one hand, the different actual feelings resulted in the negative judgments of tourists' Morocco journey, since they were not balanced with travelers' highly positive prediction. However, on the other hand, not only the positive expectation was not fulfilled, some actual problems turned out to be even more serious than their expectation, furthermore, also caused their negative overall image about Morocco. *I-9*'s and *I-2*'s answers implied these two phenomena respectively:

"Chefchaouen, the online pictures shot by other tourists were all full of blue color. But when I got there, I found out that it was not quite pretty. You can clearly sense that people intentionally painted the houses with blue coating… And the blue color is not pure, the photos online were all photoshopped. This city is a typical example whose real view did not fulfill my expectation." [33] —— *I-9 (Qian)*

"Us four girls walking on the street felt really creepy, because everyone stared at us, even they already passed by us, they still stared back. Although we have psychological preparations about the situation… We changed with normal T-shirts, they still gazed at us with bedroom eyes which made us feel scared. The first impression of Morocco was not that good." [34] —— *I-2 (Jiaying)*

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[33] 舍夫沙万。大家拍出来的都是那种蓝蓝的那种。去了之后发现，额，也没有那么好看吧。就是一看就是很明显的人，拿蓝色的颜料涂上去。......而且那些蓝色，其实没有那么蓝色，就是，是 P 出来的那种。舍夫沙万是一个比较跟现实，就是达不到期望的那种。

[34] 我们四个女生站在街上，所有人都会盯着看。包括他们走过我们之后，还会回过头来盯着我们看。虽然说我们在去之前，就是也有一点心理准备......换上了比较正常的短袖吧，但还是被大家盯着看。就看得我们心里有点发怵。可能到了摩洛哥的第一印象不是那么

As mentioned above, people's feelings would vary from each other's personal preferences and actual encounters, there are also some positive judgements coming out from the comparison with the previous read UGCs. Some informants concluded that, to some extent, the local view conformed to the description from UGCs, which was certificated by the codes like "Conformity of actual feelings and UGC" and "Matched experience about ancient town". One participant, *I-4* had even more positive attitude after the real journey, since he made more satisfactory photo works in Morocco than his expectation.

It is also remarkable that many informants claimed they found something new which were not seen in UGCs before but surprised them in the trip. Such revelations arouse their affirmative expressions, which can be seen from the codes "Unexpected impression in Meknes" and "Surprising discovery of hostel". *I-9* had a typical revelation in her own Morocco trip:

"My favorite part of Tangier was a beach in rural area, which was totally undeveloped but beautiful… (It's) not a planned trip, few texts online had mentioned it, and I did not find any specific articles about the beach. We just went there on the way and found it with unexpected astonishing view, oh my gosh, the most attractive beach I had ever seen. This was a totally revelation without any previous expectation but impressed me the most." [35]

Apart from the above findings, some interviewees also compared their actual Morocco trip with their previous travel experience. The juxtaposition of current and previous journey also affects their overall feelings about Morocco. For example, *I-1* mentioned that comparing her previous trip to other desert, the Sahara landscape was not quite astonishing. Meanwhile, *I-9* also discussed that the blue color in Chefchaouen was not as good as Greece she went before. Such expressions indicate the experienced travelers would be more difficult to pleased, as their psychological comparisons are not only coming from UGCs, but also their previous abundant travel experiences.

4.2.3 Tourists' post-travel opinions of travel-related UGC

The third selective code "Post-travel opinions of travel-related UGC" would help to answer the research question 3 "After the Morocco trip, how do Chinese tourists perceive the credibility of travel-related UGC they previously read?" Furthermore, comparing the findings in this theme with the ones in previous themes could also resolve the main research question of

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好。

[35] 丹吉尔，郊区那有个沙滩，那个沙滩都是那种完全没有开发过的。然后特别美……（这是）完全没有计划的，就是其实网上很少提到这种，没有文章特别的提到的。然后我们就想说顺路去看一下吧。然后就是意外发现的一个，我的天，巨美的一个地方。见过最美的一个沙滩。所以是完全没有什么期待的地方，反倒印象最深，特别好看的

the study to some extent. After employing grounded theory lite in coding process, there are 49 open codes in this theme in total. And they are categorized into three axial codes "Post-travel evaluation for the previous UGC", "Post- travel attitude towards UGC", "Post-travel behavior of using UGC". These axial codes would be interpreted respectively in the following paragraphs.

4.2.3.1 Post-travel evaluation for the previous UGC

After the actual Morocco trip, the interviewees were all asked to describe their evaluations on the UGC they previously read, since the actual experience would change their earlier assessment of the articles. Similar to the previous finding "Worse problem in actual trip" in the second theme, informants had strong criticism on the travel-related UGCs, they thought the sources overlooked the negative sides of Morocco. Comparing to their actual travel experience, the UGC were perceived as shallow and incomprehensive. Open codes "Abstract comments about transportation", "UGC neglect the negative side" could illustrate this phenomenon. *I-7* mentioned in the interview about the bias in UGCs that they overlooked the inconvenience of the local transportation:

"(About the transportation) there were no detailed information, they only mentioned how to go to the attractions, and what time will the bus start. No one said the bus interval will be 6 to 7 hours, and no articles mentioned you need spend very long time to go to Sahara. They wrote down the relatively positive texts and neglect the bad experiences." [36]

Correspondingly, since tourists had recognized UGC's indifference of bad experiences, they naturally considered that these sources they read before were significantly positive about Morocco, sometimes even over-praised. "Always positive posts on social media" and "Brag of Morocco in UGC" are the relevant codes. Besides, not only the texts in UGCs were deprecated, the photos were also perceived as untrustworthy sources. Such findings would be detected by the code like "Artificial beautiful pictures". After the mismatched real travel experiences, informants regarded the UGCs as one-dimensional sources with less credible. *I-1*'s post-travel judgments on UGC represent this result:

"I think the online UGCs all have the extremely positive comments on Morocco, they would intentionally avoid the realistic problems like the tricks and swindles, try to use a huge amount of fancy words to portray how great Morocco is. Besides, concentrate on the

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36 （关于交通方式)他们没有说具体的，只说了怎么去，而且也说了大概什么时候有车。也没有说一班要花六七个小时。也没有说我们

租车去撒哈拉的时候，一半时间都在赶路。就是还是会稍微偏正面一点，把那些不好的就提到的比较少。

exoticism in Morocco and include multiple attractive photos with over-photoshopped filters." [37]

4.2.3.2 Post-travel attitude towards UGC

Similar to the tourists' evaluations of the UGC they previously read, their attitude towards these online sources are also varied. Based on informants' own experiences in Morocco, the mismatched feelings influenced their post-travel attitudes about UGC as some of them mentioned the untrustworthiness of the online articles, even though they were quite trust the sources in their previous travel planning process. Some clear codes like "Unreliable online pictures" and "Criticize UGC credibility according to experiences" could represent interviewees' negative post-travel attitude towards UGC. *I-6* mentioned how his previous mismatched experiences changed his attitude towards UGC:

"If you have a bad image of UGCs, surely it would be caused by some bad experiences happened before. Previously, when I was not really experienced in travelling, I would love to read these UGCs and go on journey based on their suggestions. But then, I found that nearly every time my own experience dissimilated from the descriptions in UGCs, I would have doubts on the UGC's credibility. Moreover, denied the rationalizations of UGCs and tried to find my own way to search information" [38]

Meanwhile some other interviewees also had a strong sense of the commercialized attributes in UGCs, since they noticed that some travel agencies or even local hotels would give contributors' monetary benefits to help them in publicity. The influencers who got numerous followers could be easily manipulated by organizations, indicated by *I-1* and *I-4* who were not only the travelers but also the content contributors online. Additionally, the open codes like "Contributors please readers" and "contributors' self-branding" also uncover the latent goals of the contributors' behaviors, which is to build their own brand to get the sustainable business. Such phenomenon also undermined tourists' perceived credibility of UGCs, and *I-9*'s discourse could elaborate this attitude:

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37 嗯……我觉得他们对摩洛哥的评价都很高，特别是他们会着意的淡化那些坑蒙拐骗等等的一些现实问题。会用非常非常多的浮夸的语言来形容这儿的美好，和那种浓郁的异域风情。包括一些加了很多滤镜的，很好看的照片。

38 因为，你有这个印象肯定是你有什么不好的经历。我之前还比较，就是不怎么旅行的时候，还是很喜欢看这些东西。然后你会根据它的这些去旅游。然后你会发现它表现出来的和你实际的旅游体验，每一次都不一样，每一次都不一样。那你就会怀疑，怀疑之后你就会否定，然后你就会开始想，怎么样才能找到自己的方式找信息。

"Don't you think the UGCs are always intentionally positive? Who could post the ugly and disgusting photos online? Only when your contents are attractive, there would be more people to give your content a like or save it… Sometimes the influencers did not sincerely recommend in their contents, they just wanted to continue producing works which would help them to sustain their fame." [39]

However, tourists' negative attitudes are not restricted to the influencers' content only, the normal posts on social media which created by friends are also criticized. *I-6* indicated that even his friends who travelled to Morocco before only posted positive contents on the personal social media account, which means the contents are more like self-brand tool instead of the authentic feelings. He figured out the difference from E-WOM and traditional WOM:

"To be honest, I think my friends' posts on their own personal social media accounts were also a kind of untrustworthy UGC. One of my friend who had been Morocco before posted a lot beautiful pictures and the positive expressions. But when I asked him in person, he told me that the journey was really bad. Thus, you could get more authentic information by asking in person, but the expressions in the online posts were not true." [40]

Apart from the above findings, there is another remarkable discovery that nearly every informant has explained that they think the UGCs are subjective, which is represented by the high-frequency code "Subjectivity in UGC". All interviewees had already realized that UGCs were significantly varied based on contributors' own preferences. *I-5* and *I-9* did not totally blame their mismatched experiences to the untrustworthiness of UGCs, they indicated that the dissimilarity could also come from the UGC's subjectivity as everyone had their own requirements of the trip.

4.2.3.3 Post-travel behavior of using UGC

After gathering the data related to tourists' post-travel evaluations and attitudes on UGCs, the informants were also asked to express their future behavior of using UGC. Therefore, this

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39 嗯嗯,你不觉得嘛,这种东西本来就是往好了说,那谁会把不好的照片放出来呢?只有你拍的好看了,才有人会看,给你点赞,给你收藏……对的,因为有一些知名的网红,他们很多时候不是真的想要推荐,因为他们要持续产出内容,才能维持他们的地位,所以有些时候只是完成工作量的那种,为了写文章而写。

40 因为,说实话啊,朋友在朋友圈里发的那些东西,可以说也是游记的哪一种。就是我的那个朋友他也是。他在朋友圈里发的星空好美啊,好快乐啊之类的。但是实际问他,他就说摩洛哥玩得特别不好。就是从个人上问,你会问到一些更真实的东西。但是他在朋友圈里表现出的并不是真实的。

axial code "Post-travel behavior of using UGC" has been discovered in the study to see if people's behavior changed, furthermore, to elaborate their new perceived credibility of UGC based on their actual psychological tendency. The findings in this part could be generalized into two main ideas. On the one hand, informants who had an overall positive feeling of the trip did not changed their UGC consuming behavior. Whereas, on the other hand, the ones who had negative overall trip feelings would adjust their information searching behavior but still choose to consuming UGC.

Firstly, *I-2*, *I-4* and *I-5* had a satisfactory trip in Morocco, most of the experiences were matched with the previously read UGC. Correspondingly, they expressed their confidence about searching information in UGC, and they would use the same method in their later trips. Such relevant discourses in the transcripts were coded as "Same online behavior in the future". Typically, *I-4* indicated that his behavior of using UGC had changed long time ago. Nowadays he had a clear goal of searching information in UGCs instead of only for entertaining which was his previous intention of reading UGC.

Secondly, the other interviewees who had negative feelings about Morocco trip indicated their adjustments of UGC consuming behavior. Since their attitudes of UGCs changed to more negative, they tended to not believe the sources, or partially believe them. Unlike the previous reading behavior, some informants said they would quickly scan the peripheral texts and pictures in their later trip planning, and only concentrated on the useful and practical information. *I-9* mentioned that she would not pay attention on the artificial pictures and abstract affections in UGCs anymore, since her mismatched experiences were mainly because of the high expectations that built by these contents.

Meanwhile, the informants also concluded that diversified UGCs should be read in the travel planning process, as their perceptions of the UGC's subjectivities and bias were powerful. To avoid the incomprehensive information, they would read more UGC when planning their next trip, especially the contents coming from various platforms and contributors. *I-1* had explained in the interview about her future preferences of UGC:

"I think I will not only concentrate on the contents from the key opinion leaders, namely, influencers in the future. Maybe just try to find some highlights from their articles, like the photo shooting spots, hotels or unique experiences. Meanwhile I will also read some negative comments written by the normal tourists, and their non-photoshopped pictures to see the authentic views." [41]

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[41] 我会看，有可能不会专门去看那些，KOL，旅游大户写的那种游记了。就是看这种游记主要是找一些他们那个游玩的亮点。比如说

The other finding is that although tourists have a lot mismatched experiences in the Morocco trip, they still think the UGCs have reference value and continue to use them in later trip plans. Such tolerance in the credibility of UGCs has been discovered in many informants' answers with the codes "Tolerance to the UGC" and "Some reference value in UGC". Nonetheless, tourists' show more strict attitudes on the official media, like traveling TV shows. *I-8* and *I-1*'s responses reflected the different attitude towards different sources respectively:

"I would use the same logic to read the UGCs in the future, consuming various comments from different people. If the actual experiences differ from the articles, I would still use UGCs and choose to read even more. I think these contents were written by people, it is common that they had bias and subjectivities." [42] —— *I-8 (Ting)*

"I had seen the beginning of a TV show which related to travel in Morocco. I remembered that the celebrities in the show chose a wrong attraction instead of Mosque in Morocco which showed their unprofessionalism…… I felt the show would not help me much in my travel planning, so I just gave up watching it." [43] —— *I-1 (Kaidi)*

On top of the above discoveries, tourists also expressed their strong intentions of searching traditional word-of-mouth in the future. Similar to the results in the post-travel attitudes on UGCs, tourists believed in WOM more than the eWOM. Despite the multiple travel-related UGCs online, informants still showed their tendency to search traditional WOM in their social circle, since the traditional WOM was not distinctly influenced by the self-branding purpose, comparing to eWOM.

Finally, interviewees indicated that their actual trip experiences affected their perceived credibility of the platforms they used before. Tourists had their own fixed platforms or preferred channels when searching UGCs. Since they have read numerous articles in travel planning, their perceived credibility of some specific content was not quite sensible. That is to say, tourists' perceptions of the platforms they used before were more impressible. *I-2* claimed in the interview that based on her satisfactory trip experiences, she preferred to recommend to her

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他们更会找酒店，更会找拍照的地点。有一些独特的玩法，我会看这个。然后同时也会看一看普通游客踩到的那些坑，或者说，他们的那些不加滤镜，那种照片里面真实的样子。

[42] 我还是会按照现在这种逻辑嘛，前期广泛浏览一下不同人的评价？哪怕有些文章不match 的话，也会继续看游记。只不过就多看一些。我会觉得这个东西都是人写的，会很主观一些。

[43] 嗯，我看了一个开头我记得当时的时候，他们好像没有选择那个海上清真寺……我觉得，好像就不是很专业，我觉得看了这个节目对我的行程没有多大的帮助。我就没有继续看下去。

friends with some online platforms she used before, because it was extremely hard for her to identify which specific article was the most credible in her mind after the journey.

4.3 Discussion

The results of this research bring clear information about travel-related UGC branding capability, as well as tourists' perceived credibility of this kind of online sources. First, the findings from UGC analysis indicated that eWOM could help build the destination's image in some certain domains, like the *cultural activities, natural resource, attractions*, which conform to Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis' (2005) theory. Second, the interviews explored tourists' perceptions of the UGC's credibility both before and after their trip, as well as their information searching behaviors and attitudes towards those online sources. By employing and comparing all these findings, the whole study could answer the main research problem: *How tourists' actual travel experiences affect their perceptions of the travel-related UGC credibility?* The comprehensive discussion for the relevant results are shown in the following paragraphs.

4.3.1 Travel-related UGCs and the image of Morocco

The research had collected 40 online articles from various Chinese platforms written by tourists. All these online sources, from a general perspective, could help the destination build the relevant brand and help potential tourists form their perceived images of the relevant tourist destination, Morocco (Marine-Roig, 2015). Although the writers of the chosen articles do not have the direct relationship with the Morocco tourism companies, their descriptions and judgements in the texts are still deemed as the branding materials for this destination. Similar to Fournier and Avery's (2011) study, such collaborative and participatory open sources make the tourists serve as the creators and disseminators of the relevant tourism destinations' brand.

Gartner's (1994) theory demonstrated that travel destination images were mainly divided into three interrelated categories: *cognitive*, *affective* and *conative*. This study coincidently found that the chosen travel-related articles also branded Morocco in these three ways. The cognitive dimension means the description and knowledges of the country, while the affective dimension refers to the emotional judgments of the Morocco travel experiences (Safaaa et al., 2017). Besides, the third category, conative, represent the images which derived from the previous two categories but could affect viewers' actual behaviors in the decision-making (Marine-Roig, 2015). Since the chosen data are articles with high volume of texts, descriptions about Morocco are detailed in these UGC, all the three kinds of information are undoubtedly found. However, content creators basically discuss their personal expressions along with the objective depictions of Morocco, which makes the cognitive texts and affective

texts more salient than the third one conative. All these three kinds results help the study to answer the first sub-question: *How does the travel-related UGC describe the travel destination "Morocco" on Chinese Internet?*

4.3.1.1 Cognitive images of Morocco described by UGCs

Unlike the social media posts which are extremely limited by the word counts, these chosen UGC have longer paragraphs, furthermore, contain more detailed and cognitive descriptions of Morocco. Such pieces of texts are mostly written in neutral way, since the related contents about the local history or local cities aim at describing the objective existences. Besides, these texts are centralized in the famous cities and attractions, which partially indicates that most tourists have travelled with similar routes. Therefore, such phenomenon causes multiple similarities in these UGC and brings the greatest fame for the most frequently mentioned attractions, like Marrakesh, Chefchaouen, Fes, Sahara Desert, etc. The texts about the cities or attractions could be mainly divided into two parts: nature and culture, which disseminated a holistic Morocco image with the famous rich nature resource and cultural deepness. Sahara Desert and Hassan II Mosque could represent the images respectively.

Apart from the depictions of cities or attractions, study also found numerous cognitive texts about the local characteristics which categorized into local culture, architecture and life. First, the unique and conservative local culture image has been formed by the UGC. Those materials about Moroccan distinctive items, like costume or mosque, build the cultural and historical uniqueness image to potential travelers. Meanwhile, some interpretations of the local rules, especially the religious prohibitions, portray Morocco as a conservative country. However, the multi-cultural trait in Morocco has also been detected in UGC as they mention the colonization history a lot. All the introduced factors are totally different from China, thus, a clear exotic image has been created among the specific readers, Chinese potential tourist.

Second, in the field of local architecture, the eWOM reinforce the distinctiveness of Morocco by describing the singularities of the local building ornaments and the architecture genre. In addition, numerous words about the colors in UGC interpret Morocco as a country full of visualized colorfulness. EWOM contributors also write down local people's lifestyle based on their seen and heard, which delineate the coziness and leisure there.

In the end, correlate the findings to Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis's (2005) study about destination describing angles, the three of them, "attractions", "cultural activities" and "natural resources" are found in these cognitive texts.

4.3.1.2 Affective images of Morocco described by UGC

Tourists created online articles or reviews aimed at expressing their feelings and affections instead of merely describing the objective knowledges (Kang & Schuett, 2013). Similarly, the study found that the chosen articles had many paragraphs related to contributors' own experiences and feelings. Although the previously mentioned cities or even the Moroccan architectures contained a lot of cognitive descriptions, there were still some affective comments in this same domain, as we could see contributors also use adjectives while introducing the relevant items. Such intertwined traits have already been discovered in some researches that the affective images and cognitive images are not mutually exclusive (Marine-Roig, 2015). The analysis of the articles shed light on that these Morocco-related UGC contain different affections and attitudes towards this destination, both positive and negative. Even the study already discovered multiple compliments about the exquisiteness of architectures or local cities' romanticism, some negative affections from the contributors were still noticeable.

For the local characteristics, UGC creators had most affective comments on the cultural sides, such as local people and local delicacies. These articles had two-sides judgments, since they complimented the friendliness and hospitability of local people, but also expressed small-scaled negative feelings on the local peddlers' tricks and deceptions. Most texts about these impressions were mentioned accompanied with actual events happened on the writers' actual trip. Similarly, the local food also obtained different evaluations in the various online articles, as some of them praised the flavor, the others described the tediousness of the food. Such results show the diversified affections in different UGCs.

Most affective comments are coming from contributors' authentic encounters, the theme called "General perceptions of trip experience" could specifically represent it. Users gave generally positive comments on the Moroccan facilities, especially for the cost-effective hostels. The texts related to the ornaments and commodities built a delicate image of Morocco. Meanwhile, a few texts about the specific descriptions of bad infrastructures were also detected during the coding process. Though these descriptions are mainly cognitive, they are still categorized in the affections as all the texts aimed at helping creators to make a conclusion about the inconvenience and negative amenities in Morocco.

Additionally, the study also identified authors' personal encounters about the Moroccan landscape (mainly concentrate on natural resource, Sahara Desert) and the local relaxed lifestyle. The beautiful and leisure country image had been created vividly based on contributors' true stories and the affective expressions. Whereas, significant negative judgments on local shopping experiences were also found in the research. As a result, built an unfriendly shopping image to the country. In contrast to the findings in cognitive images, affective images

did not have much similarities, but showed several contradictions according to various UGCs. Moreover, these dissimilarities represent the subjective traits of UGCs to some extent (Schmunk et al., 2013).

In this affective image area, Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis's (2005) all five angles in destination image descriptions are found. The texts about local architecture and cities indicate "attractions", and depictions about local food, people and shopping means "cultural activities". Meanwhile, the "accommodation" is exemplified by the hostels reviews. Lastly the "amenity" and "natural resource" are respectively illustrated by infrastructures and Sahara Desert.

4.3.1.3 Conative descriptions in Morocco-related UGCs

Apart from the cognitive and affective images coming from UGCs, there is still a third category named "Conative description" related to Marine-Roig's (2015) research. Content creators expressed the worthwhileness of visiting Morocco in the UGC which were aimed at influencing the viewers' decision-making. Such overall positive judgments not only branded Morocco as a rewarding tourism destination, but also allured potential tourists to decide this country for their next trip plan. Additionally, these UGCs involved multiple testimonials and references to emphasize the reasonability and fascination of traveling in Morocco. Such remarkable facts could be detected by the involved famous Morocco-related official media in relevant articles, like the movies and books, or some official credits and honors. Well-known celebrities were also mentioned in many pieces, which further lent the favorability to this specific country, since their own fame and attractiveness could generate higher trustworthiness among the potential tourists (Keller, 1993). However, in general, the frequency and volume of the conative descriptions are less than the previous two.

Another result is that most pieces of information in the conative part are limited to "attractions". Unlike the affective descriptions, the conative descriptions employ a lot official honors, like the already discussed codes "World cultural heritage" and "Movie Casablanca" which are the titles for famous tourism spots.

4.3.2 Tourists' expectation and evaluation of Morocco

In order to figure out the answer of research question 2, this study has discussed the relevant results from two aspects, tourists' subjective expectations and images of the country and their actual evaluations of Morocco trip. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) claimed that human's decisions and behaviors were strongly related to the personal presuppositions rather than the objective reality. Therefore, people's expectations and perceived images of Morocco could be deemed as important determinants of tourists' choice in this destination. Moreover,

multiple academic studies also demonstrated that, in the tourism domain, consumers' expectations and perceived images towards a specific country were significantly affected by the content they consumed before (Gartner,1994; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). In the end, their general evaluation and satisfaction of the trip could be determined by such expectations, since people tend to compare the real feeling with the previous mental perceptions (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017).

4.3.2.1 Before the trip: tourists and Morocco-related UGCs

Similar to the previously discussed research, this study confirms that all the informants need to search Morocco-related information beforehand in order to help them with the journey planning and final decisions around it (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). By reading this content, tourists obtained information and also formed their expectations toward the destination. Remarkably, interviewees mentioned the information they gathered was not only limited in UGC, some official media also affected their preconceptions of Morocco though the formal sources about Morocco were rare. Such phenomenon implied that their own conclusions or expectation of the tourism product were coming from a content mixture of both formal and informal ones, which complied to the relevant studies (Baka, 2016; Choe, Fesenmaier & Vogt, 2017). In addition, the result also showed, even though, all sources were confined to their native languages (Mandarin in this case), prospective tourists still tended to read contents from various contributors to plan their trip. Such inclined behaviors on source diversity demonstrated consumers' purpose to chase "completeness" in UGCs, furthermore, add more credibility on the collected eWOM (Wang & Strong, 1996; Wang et al., 2017).

From the interviews, this research explored that the overarching determinant of tourists' decision on Morocco was the visa-free policy, which was high-frequently mentioned in online articles. Apart from this element, their general positive expectation on the local natural views, religious culture and exoticism in Morocco also formed the final tendency to travel there. Interviewees claimed that they all had a strong sense of otherness toward Morocco since the textual information in eWOM ornately described the uniqueness there, both in the natural and cultural facets. Nonetheless, some negative comments on the local people and shopping experiences affected tourists' expectations as well (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). They had psychological preparation of such problems before going to Morocco rather than gave up the trip plan. *I-2* and *I-5* both talked about their preparations on the female problems in Morocco, but in the end, they still went to the country for travelling. *I-2* mentioned:

there were some comments about the unsafety in Morocco, especially for single girls…But

these negative comments did not make us give up the travel decision [44]

The result represented that negative textual information did not have as much impacts as the positive ones on tourists' final behaviors. Correspondingly, tourists' impressions about Morocco from eWOM were totally matched with the foregoing findings in the qualitative analysis of articles.

In addition, the subjects of this study also revealed that the photos in UGCs had more influence on their decisions and expectations. Several studies have the similar result about pictures' crucial roles in prospective travelers' preconception building and purchase decision, which means such great pictures would significantly add attractiveness on the destination among the end-users (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Kim & Perdue, 2011).

Although there were countless eWOM online, some informants still expressed their intentions in gathering traditional WOM from their social circles. This behavior, to some extent, demonstrated people had more trustworthiness on the traditional WOM comparing to UGCs. Similarly, Cheung and Thadani (2012) explain that tourists have more perceived credibility of traditional WOM because such information is emanated from a communicator who is known to message receivers. Pesonen and Pasanen's (2017) study has same conclusion that when prospective travelers try to plan the trip routes, the traditional WOM still have big effects, especially the ones from acquaintances.

4.3.2.2 Tourists' actual journey: evaluations on their own experiences

After reading the Morocco-related UGCs, tourists acquired some knowledge and built their own expectation and preconception about Morocco. While the tourists evaluated their actual trip, they tend to compare the real feelings with their previous expectations (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015). Most of the interviewees expressed their general negative feelings about the Morocco trip in the interviews, and their comments were mainly focused on the bad shopping experiences and local tricky people. Such negative encounters were also mentioned in eWOM they used to read, but informants still considered the real problem was worse than their expectation, which furthermore generated the negative evaluation. Similarly, the objective reality in Morocco, like the local infrastructures, also got criticism since tourists did not predict such problems which were rarely expressed in UGCs. The incompleteness sources in the previous phase negatively affected consumers' attitudes. On the other hand, some dissatisfied experiences, for instance, the mismatched views and colorfulness comparing to eWOM's rhetoric, also caused their unfavorable judgments on this country. Therefore, the study shows

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[44] 不太安全的就是指，额，如果你是女生单独出行的话…但是这些并没有让我们打消这个念头。

both travelers' higher expectations and underestimation of the problems are the main factors which dissatisfy them in the end.

Nevertheless, people's evaluations of their trip significantly varied from each other as well. According to Marchiori and Cantoni's (2015) study, tourists all have mental bias before acquiring knowledge from eWOM, such facts result in the different preconceptions and expectations of the same destination. Besides, every single informant would have the distinct trip encounters from each other, these idiosyncratic experiences would also bring varied evaluations. In the study, accordingly, there are also some detected positive comments on local people or city view unlike the foregoing relevant results. But the findings also disclose interviewees' consistent positive expressions on the cultural uniqueness, namely exoticism, and natural resources in Morocco.

It is worthy to mention that some travelers' favorable impressions are portrayed as revelations by themselves, which means they did not read any related contents before the trip and yet such specific attractions or experiences turned into some pleasant surprises in the end. The cheerful experiences that travelers chanced to meet build their final positive evaluations. In some circumstance, the tourists also described the authentic feeling of actual trip by comparing their previous travel experiences. *I-1* indicated in the interview that she was not quite satisfied with the Sahara Desert view, since she had already been to multiple deserts before. Meanwhile, *I-9* discussed about the blue color in Chefchaouen, she compared the city with Greek coast view she saw before, and concluded the Morocco color was not attractive at all. These relevant results in the study exposes that the tourists with more previous travel experiences, namely "experienced traveler", would use their earlier trips as comparisons to the new ones. In the end, the condition makes them harder to be pleased.

4.3.3 Judge it again: perceived credibility of UGC after the trip

Kerstetter and Cho (2004) indicated that people's prior experiences would influence their future information searching behavior and their perceived credibility of the sources. This study, correspondingly, found tourists had changed their attitude and perceived credibility of UGC they used before intended to adjust their searching behavior in the future. These findings could be extended into tourists' perceived credibility of the generalized UGC, since people's behaviors were the typical reflections of their mental perceptions (Bamberg, Ajzen & Schmidt, 2003). Meanwhile, such results would answer the sub-question 3 and the main research study question of this as well.

4.3.3.1 Tourists' post-travel perceived credibility of Morocco-related UGCs

By comparing the actual experiences and the presumptions of Morocco, interviewees claimed that they considered the Morocco-related UGCs were incomprehensive and shallow which jeopardized the trustworthiness of such sources. *I-7* and *I-8* talked about the abstract information from UGC which was not really helpful during their travel planning. Wang et al. (2017) demonstrated the completeness and accuracy would influence consumers' perceptions of information quality. Similarly, Choe et al. (2017, p.489) also proved "Functional information is still most important" in tourists' UGC searching". Therefore, these abstract comments about Morocco which mentioned by interviewees would bring unreliability to the contents. Consumers perceived relevant texts or photos as useless information for their actual trip. Besides, some previous studies concluded that eWOM were unsolicited and unbiased contents that also widely deemed reliable by end-users (Marine-Roig, 2017). But this study found some informants had strong feelings for the prejudice in UGCs, especially in the negative sides. Some interviewees encountered worse problems in the actual trip, such experiences brought them the feelings that UGCs neglected the negative sides of the destination. The indifference about the adverse stuff resulted in the phenomenon that content creators disseminate way more favorable comments than the unfavorable ones. Such biased sidedness added the untruthfulness to the UGC. Therefore, we could see that consumers preferred two-sided sources instead of these one-dimensional ones, since the contents contained both negative and positive attitudes on destination would be assumed more reliable (Cheung, Sia & Kuan, 2012; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Corelated the results to Wang and Strong's (1996) information quality dimensions model, the opinion "completeness" and "accuracy" determine tourists' perception of the information quality and UGC credibility. Interviewees stated these biased UGC built some hollow overpraised reputations of Morocco based on the ornate comments and travel rhetoric.

Basically, tourists' perceptions of less UGC credibility were coming from the mismatched trip experience. Once tourists experienced something different from the previously read UGC, they would blame the negative to the articles and criticize the UGC credibility. However, the travelers had a clear sense that contributors' latent intentions to provide contents would also discredit UGC. First, the key opinion leaders have self-branding goals when they create the contents. Previous researches shed light on the antecedents of eWOM generation behaviors, not only the individuation and altruism, but self-branding and self-enhancements also stimulated such content creating behavior (Chu & Kim, 2011; Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Subjects of the study complained that influencers always created content with what users preferred, rather than their true feelings just for attracting more followers. On

the other hand, the influencers considered UGC as a lucrative tool to get profits, so they tried hard to please readers and brand themselves. Meanwhile, creators are also easily manipulated by companies or organizations for some benefits (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015; Sharifpour, 2018). *I-6* talked about his mismatched hostel experiences, and how he found the hostel owner tried to use benefits to allure people writing good reviews. The secret cooperation embedded the marketing traits into UGCs, and such characteristics were possibly sensed by some viewers in the end. I-9's statement represents that end-users already know some influencers' latent intentions:

> *Sometimes the influencers did not sincerely recommend in their contents, they just wanted to continue producing works which would help them to sustain their fame.* [45]

However, the self-branding intentions were not only detected among influencers, normal people would also promote their images online. Many academic papers had explained how traditional WOM transformed into eWOM thanks to the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Some of them also indicated, in the tourism domain, eWOM are perceived to be the most persuasive and crucial information by tourists (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung & Lee, 2014). Whereas, in this study, interviewees criticized about the inauthentic posts generated by normal tourists, even someone in their own social circles. Informants found that they could get different judgments on the same destination from traditional WOM and eWOM. Unlike the eWOM which were widely used as self-promotion tools, the traditional WOM deemed as more trustworthy with providers' authentic feelings. Consumers still prefer the traditional WOM in the travel planning since they considered such information were more credible (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017; Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Lastly, all the informants in the study had mentioned that UGCs were subjective. Consumers read multiple articles online and found the dissimilarity in UGCs, which represented the contents were strongly related to the contributors' personal preferences.

4.3.3.2 Future behaviors of searching UGC

Apart from interviewees' post-travel evaluations on the Morocco-related UGCs, this study also investigated their intended behavior of consuming UGCs in the future. As reported by Bagozzi (1981), people's changing behaviors of information searching were determined by their prior experiences. Such psychological tendency of consuming UGCs would represent

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[45] 因为有一些知名的网红，他们很多时候不是真的想要推荐，因为他们要持续产出内容，才能维持他们的地位，所以有些时候只是完成工作量的那种，为了写文章而写。

tourists' overall perceived credibility of travel-related UGC, furthermore, extended previous results in to a wider field. Some informants who had overall positive experiences in Morocco showed their constant behaviors in consuming UGCs in the future. Their unwillingness of changing behavior was coming from their matched and satisfied actual trip experience, which further showed their confidence in previous content gathering. Meantime, the relevant interviewees also indicated they had two main goals for searching UGC, entertaining and knowledge gathering, which respectively corresponded to "hedonic" and "functional" in Vogt and Fesenmaier's (1998) tourism information needs model.

On the other hand, some tourists who had generally negative feelings of Morocco trip also claimed they would use UGC in the future, yet to adjust the behavior of searching them. Comparing to the findings about official media, tourists were more tolerant to UGCs, since they tended to give up the official materials once they found the bias and unprofessionalism. *I-1* claimed even though she experienced some mismatched feelings, she still approved the reference value of UGC and would keep using them. Whereas, when she talked about the TV travel show she watched before, the attitude had changed significantly:

"I had seen the beginning of a TV show which related to travel in Morocco. I remembered that the celebrities in the show chose a wrong attraction instead of Mosque in Morocco which showed their unprofessionalism…… I felt the show would not help me much in my travel planning, so I just gave up watching it." [46]

Tourists' perceptions of the reference value in UGCs are strong, no matter how they judge their prior trip experiences. For the adjustments in searching UGC, firstly, interviewees mentioned they would only partially believe in the UGCs since their overall attitude of contents were more negative. Tourists showed the preferences of the functional information, like the ticket price or transportation timetables, and considered these "Hard data" as high-quality sources (Wang et al., 2017). Similarly, Pesonen and Pasanen (2017) discussed that the more useful information a tourist can find, the more they can enjoy their holiday. Therefore, informants decided, in the future, to quickly scan the affective contents and only focused on useful information in UGCs. Although, several researchers interpreted the emotional pieces of information had more effect on individuals than the cognitive ones (Li, Cai, Lehto & Huang, 2010; Yu & Dean, 2001), this study result identified tourists still had higher trustiness in the cognitive texts than others. Those peripheral abstract and general affections about destination

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[46] 嗯，我看了一个开头我记得当时的时候，他们好像没有选择那个海上清真寺……我觉得，好像就不是很专业，我觉得看了这个节目对我的行程没有多大的帮助。我就没有继续看下去。

would be deemed as useless materials based on subjects' responses. Such findings proved Choe's at al research that functional information had the highest importance in UGC consuming. Therefore, we can conclude that quality and usefulness of the information are the salient factors to determine tourists' eWOM consuming behaviors (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Pan & Chiou, 2011).

Secondly, informants also talked in interviews about using more diversified UGCs in the next trip planning, because they blamed their mismatched trip experiences to the subjectivity of UGCs and their incomprehensive information gathering behavior. Some research showed the information receivers would more likely to believe in the eWOM which matched their prior knowledge and re-elaborated the relevant content based on their preconceptions (Cheung et al., 2012; Castells, 1996; Lash, 2006). Hence, to avoid bias, informants preferred involving UGCs coming from various contributors or platforms to counteract their previous tendentious searching behaviors.

Thirdly, travelers expressed their strong eagerness in searching traditional WOM in their social circle, although they still decide to use eWOM. Like the foregoing discussion, interviewees sensed the eWOM had self-branding traits which would make them be less trustworthy. They considered the traditional WOM that gathered from face-to-face talk were more homologous to their actual trip evaluations. The previous studies explained eWOM was coming from the traditional WOM, and had significant impact on tourists during their travel planning process (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). However, the informants' responses in this study expose that eWOM and WOM is not a same thing. When people generate eWOM they assume that they are talking in front of a group, which makes them embed more self-branding intentions in the content (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). In contrast, tourists are sincerer when creating the traditional WOM face-to-face, likewise, resulted in more perceived credibility among message receivers. *I-6* had demonstrated this situation in the interview:

> *"To be honest, I think my friends' posts on their own personal social media accounts were also a kind of untrustworthy UGC. One of my friend who had been Morocco before posted a lot beautiful pictures and the positive expressions. But when I asked him in person, he told me that the journey was really bad. Thus, you could get more authentic information by asking in person, but the expressions in the online posts were not true."* [47]

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[47] 因为，说实话啊，朋友在朋友圈里发的那些东西，可以说也是游记的哪一种。就是我的那个朋友他也是。他在朋友圈里发的星空好美啊，好快乐啊之类的。但是实际问他，他就说摩洛哥玩得特别不好。就是从个人上问，你会问到一些更真实的东西。但是他在朋友圈

Lastly, it is also remarkable that UGC readers tend to transfer their credibility perceptions of eWOM to the relevant online platforms (Wang et al., 2017). Interviewees described that they were not quite impressible with the singular eWOM, but they were sensitive about the platforms they previously visited. Once the traveler remember some reliable articles, they would be willing to recommend their friends with the platforms on which the corresponding eWOM were posted. Furthermore, in their future trip planning, tourists would use the same platforms on which the high credible eWOM were posted, rather than finding new platforms without any related personal consciousness.

里表现出的并不是真实的。

5. Conclusion

This Master Thesis focused on the case about Chinese tourists in Morocco, and discussed tourists' perceived credibility of UGC online. Due to the previous research had mainly restricted the UGC credibility to the pre-decisional phase, this study aimed at broadening this term and explore tourists' post-travel perceptions. In order to unravel the relationship between people's real travel experience and their perceived credibility of UGC, the research designed three sub-questions to elaborate relevant topics which were "UGC in travel destination branding", "tourists' judgements on their real trip" and "tourists' post-travel perceptions of

UGC credibility". By collecting and analyzing travel-related UGC on Chinese Internet, and

interviewing the tourists who already travelled to Morocco before, the research indicated that tourists' different trip experiences would affect their perceptions of UGC credibility. For instance, travelers with unsatisfied trip experience would perceive UGC as less credible sources. Remarkably, they still accept the reference value in UGC and will use them in the future, though they decide to adjust their UGC consuming behavior.

## 5.1 Theoretical implication and conclusion

In reference to the UGC and travel destination (Morocco) branding and answer the research question 1, relevant results demonstrated that these eWOM mainly described the destination image through three facets: "Cognition" which refers to the depictions of the objective existences, "Affection" represents the contributors' personal expressions of emotion, and "Conation" which could influence viewers' decision-making. Such findings verify Gartner's (1994) theory, but also add some new knowledge referring to the salience of these elements. During the coding process, the study found that eWOM contributors employed a lot content to portray their personal feelings with objective depictions of Morocco. Therefore, this research demonstrated that the "Cognitive" and "Affective" in Gartner's (1994) destination image model were more salient than the third one "Conative". To answer the sub-question 1, the travel-related UGC predominantly helped Morocco build cognitive and affective images among the potential tourists, meanwhile, also used small-scale conative contents to portray Morocco.

Additionally, the results of UGC analysis also reinforced Pike (2005) and Kavaratzis's (2005) combined model about the five angles in destination describing. However, although in general, the five angles are all discovered in study, there are still some distinctiveness in different contents. First, regard to cognitive contents, eWOM described Morocco in a neutral way. Such pieces of information mentioned the famous attractions and the natural views like

the local Mosque and Sahara Desert. Besides, relevant cognitive texts about local items also disseminated the cultural distinctiveness and exoticism in Morocco. Therefore, the study proved the three angles from the model, "attractions", "cultural activities" and "natural resources" appeared in area of the cognitive contents. Second, all the five angles "natural resource", "attractions", "amenity", "accommodation" and "cultural activities" are discovered in affective contents. eWOM contributors expressed their feelings about Morocco by using many adjectives when introduced the related items. But unlike the neutral cognitive contents, such affective information contained diversified attitudes towards Morocco, both positive and negative. Lastly, the third kind of content, conative descriptions had overall positive evaluations on Morocco and encourage potential tourists to travel there. These related contents only concentrated on the angle of "attractions", since the mentioned honors and credits in UGC were basically the well-known titles for famous travel spots. All these findings from UGC analysis are explicitly shown in *Figure 5* below.

Figure 5: The findings about how UGC described Morocco on Chinese Internet
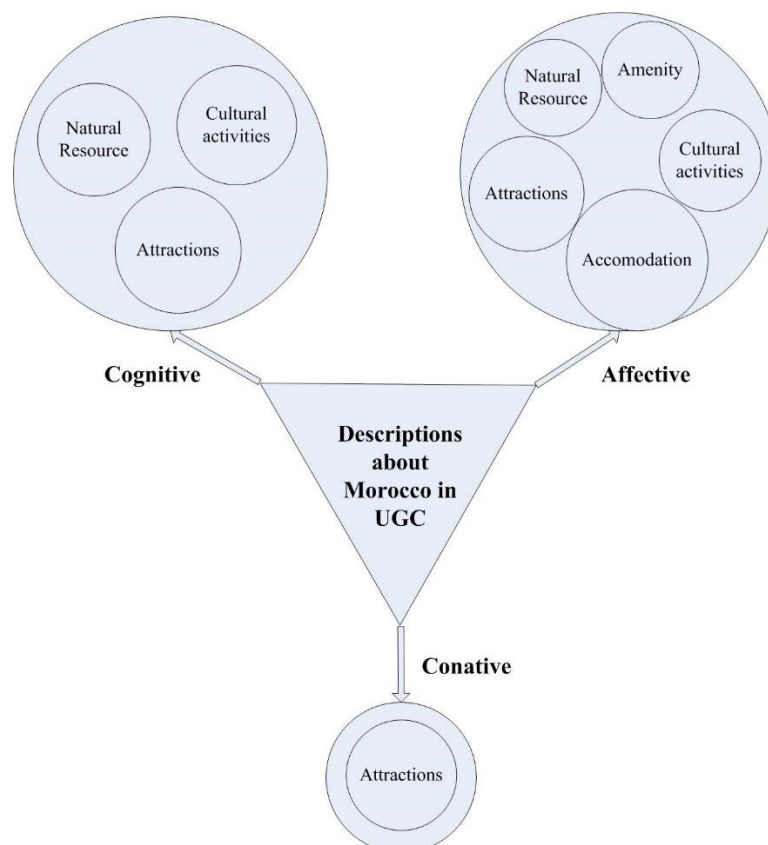
In the field of interview analysis, the findings explained that tourists' expectation about Morocco would be affected by the UGC they previously read, since people tended to compare their real feelings with the previous perceptions. Therefore, to answer research question 2, the

study discussed related results in two aspects, first focused on the pre-travel period about tourists' UGC consuming behaviors and presumptions of Morocco, then explored the ongoing trip period and evaluated their judgments of the real trip.

All the chosen subjects were predominantly consuming UGC in their Morocco pre-travel phase, but meanwhile, they gathered relevant knowledge from other sources as well. Whereas, they intend to involve various contents from different contributors to achieve "information completeness". Such results confirmed Wang and Strong's theory about information quality from consumers' perspective, that completeness influence users' perceptions of information quality and credibility. According to the findings, interviewees had overall positive expectation on the local views, cultures and exoticism in Morocco, which matched the results from the UGC analysis. Tourist' strong sense of otherness was built by the eWOM and encouraged them to make the final decisions in traveling to Morocco. However, they also have negative expectations about local people and shopping experiences that were all detected in UGC. The study found that these negative eWOM had less influence on tourists'' decision-making than the positive ones, since travelers just built the psychological preparations before the trip rather than gave up the whole trip plan. In addition, during the trip planning, travelers still showed their strong tendency in searching traditional WOM. Such results proved relevant researches that eWOM contributors' anonymity aroused tourists' doubts on their reliabilities (Park et al., 2007; Ayeh et al., 2013). Furthermore, similar to Cheung and Thadani's (2012) and Pesonen and Pasanen's (2017) discussions, traditional WOM still have stronger effect on content receivers' decision-making, as tourists' perceived credibility of them is higher.

Once tourists formed their presumptions and expectations of the destination, they would evaluate the real trip experience by their mental comparisons. Most of the interviewees had generally negative judgments about the trip, especially in the realm of shopping and local people. They portrayed the relevant problems were even worse than the descriptions in UGC. Some other negative evaluations were coming from their dissatisfactions. Tourists had higher expectations about this country because of the rhetoric in UGC, but in the end their real experience did not conform to the predictions. Nevertheless, the informants in this research showed their positive judgments on the cultural distinctions and natural recourses. Some revelations which the travelers did not read from UGC had also generate their positive expressions, interviewees portrayed such encounters as surprises in the end. Besides, the study explains the experienced travelers would have more negative evaluations on the Morocco trip, since they are more likely to compare the trip with their abundant previous trips, furthermore, indicates such travelers are harder to be pleased.

By analyzing tourists' perceived credibility after their Morocco trip, the study found out

the relevant results to answer research question 3. Vacationers' post-travel attitudes towards the UGC had changed and they also showed strong intentions to adjust the future UGC searching behaviors. These differences of their attitudes and behaviors in *prior* and *posterior* travel phase, would unravel how the actual trip experience affect travelers' perceived credibility of UGC, furthermore, answer the main research question of this Master Thesis. Generally, from the perspective of tourists, their dissatisfied trip experiences will bring down their perceived credibility of travel-related UGC, moreover, influence their future UGC searching behavior.

The travelers who encountered mismatched trip experiences have more concerns about the comprehensiveness and accuracy in UGC. They criticized the shallow and abstract information, which they considered useless. The ornate rhetoric and over-manipulated photos directly generated consumers' mismatched ongoing trip feelings. Moreover, consumers sensed that most eWOM neglected the disadvantages of the destination, which made the sources contained more favorable information. These criticisms strongly bolstered the "completeness" and "accuracy" in Wang and Strong's (1996) information quality model.

Apart from this, tourists also complained about the UGC authors' self-branding intention when writing the content. They sensed that both influencers and normal users posted contents to please the readers and built their own brand, instead of describing their true feelings about the destination. Some tourists figure out that their acquaintances' opinions in the traditional WOM are different from their online posts. Such phenomenon demonstrated the end-users started questioning the information's authenticity, which explained why they perceived UGC as less credible.

Therefore, this study would lead to recommend new dimensions to the Wang and Strong's (1996) model about information quality: "Authenticity" and "objectivity". The results obtained by this study indicate that consumers perceive UGC as subjective materials, and they collect more contents in the decision-making process as a way to try to get to objectivity by collecting and combining different ideas. The proposed modification to the Wang and Strong's (1996) theory is shown in *Figure 6* below.

Figure 6: The findings about UGC information quality dimensions

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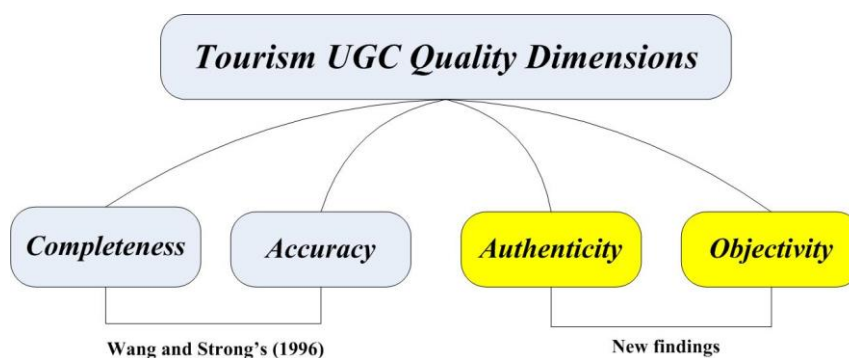
Since people's mental perceptions could also influence their actual behavior, this research also investigated tourists' post-travel behavior in UGC consuming. Travelers who encountered matched and satisfied trip experience showed their constant behaviors in the future, they were confident about their current information searching method. Such travelers read UGC for two main goals, entertainment and knowledge gathering, which respectively conformed to the "hedonic" and "functional" dimensions in Vogt and Fesenmaier's (1998) theory. However, in the study, most tourists had a negative and mismatched trip experience. Even though for these travelers' the perceived credibility of UGC has decreased, they still show strong willingness in the future to consume this kind of contents. Unlike tourists' picky attitudes towards official media, they are more tolerant to UGC and always accept its reference value no matter how they judge their prior trip experiences. However, the mismatched experience did partially change their behavior, as they declared that they would pay more attention on practical and functional information, and perceive these "hard data" as more credible. Meanwhile, they have decided to neglect the peripheral affective contents, like the ornate feelings or overmanipulated photos. These results, again, bolstered the crucial role of "functional" in Vogt and Fesenmaier's (1998) theory.

Additionally, since they perceived the UGC were subjective, travelers preferred involving diversified eWOM to counteract the bias in each article and gather more neutral and comprehensive knowledges. These revised future behaviors also justified the importance of "objectivity" and "completeness" in the domain of information quality (Wang & Strong, 1996). Lastly, travelers expressed their desire in searching traditional WOM in next trip plan, since they consider the face-to-face dialogue would contain sincerer information. Different from several researches reviewed eWOM's significant effects on tourists' decision-making, this study deduced that traditional WOM still had more influence power and were perceived as more authentic and credible materials (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Their tendency of using authentic face-to-face WOM future shows the crucial position of "authenticity" in information quality.

Therefore, this study argued that tourists' actual travel experiences would affect their perceived credibility of tourism UGC. Travelers who encountered mismatched and unsatisfied trip experiences would perceive UGC as less credible sources. In the end, they still choose to use them in trip planning, but will partially change their consuming behavior to searching more diversified eWOM, paying more attention on functional information. Besides, this study also supports the current theories as well as provides some new knowledges. In the travel destination branding area, comply to the theory, UGC build destination image in three dimensions "cognitive", "affective" and "conative", the relevant contents focus on "natural

resource", "attractions", "amenity", "accommodation" and "cultural activities" in Morocco (Gartner, 1994; Pike, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2005). For information quality, "completeness" and "accuracy" from Wang and Strong's (1996) research have been discovered, whereas, the new term "authenticity" and "objectivity" are also detected as additions to the theory. For Vogt and Fesenmaier's (1998) tourism information need theory, only "functional" and "hedonic" have been found, while the study explores the predominant role of "functional". Lastly, study deduces the traditional WOM still gains more perceived credibility among tourists.

5.2 Limitation and future research

Every study has their own limitations. As for this research, the data of first phase analysis were only limited in one kind of UGC, online articles. The description of UGC and destination branding will be more comprehensive when take other kinds of UGC, like short posts or photos, into the coding process, since the content volume of eWOM could influence their credibility as well (Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Pan & Chiou, 2011). Besides, the whole study was built based on one specific case, Morocco and Chinese tourists, which bounds strongly the study results. For the Chinese market, Morocco is a new tourism destination, and the related UGC online contents were just developing, which means the ideas in the contents and tourists' preconceptions were not exhaustive (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Therefore, future research should be conducted about tourism destinations that are well-known to consumers or already had multitudinous UGC, like Thailand, could add reliability to this study result. The consumers who went Morocco already were perceived as experienced travelers, since this new destination has intrinsic difficulties for Chinese, like the language barriers, far distance and inconvenient flights. Such inevitable features brought some bias to the research as well. Lastly, although the research employed relevant literatures to provide sensitizing concepts in the analyzing process, the coding for both articles and transcripts were executed by one person, which could partially generate personal prejudice.

To generalized the case results into a wider domain, more diversified UGC and travelers should be involved in the study. Not only the developing tourism destinations, like Morocco, should be investigated, some well-developed travel spots should also be discussed in the future. Similarly, the tourists also need to extended to the ones who comes from developed countries. Since people's post-travel perceived credibility of UGC were not merely affected by one specific trip experience, future research may examine the difference of newbie travelers and experienced travelers to see how the volume of travel experience influences their perceptions of UGC trustworthiness. This study found tourists have preferences on different information, which bring a new direction for the future studies to concentrate on tourists' perceived credibility of different UGC forms and attributes. Finally, some researches

on UGC which related to other tourism services, like hotels, local tours or restaurants, could also be conducted, as this article only focused on destination-related UGC.

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Appendix A: Coding tree for online articles

Table A1: *Selective codes and axial codes*

Selective codes	Axial codes
1. CITIES AND TRAVEL SPOTS	**1.1 Cities & regions**
	1.2. Attractions & natural resources
2. LOCAL CHARACTERISTICS	**2.1 Local People**
	2.2 Local culture
	2.3 Local Architecture
	2.4 The local delicacies
	2.5 The local life & environment
3. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF TRIP EXPERIENCE	**3.1 Amenities and infrastructure**
	3.2 Trip experiences & activities
	3.3 Feelings of landscape
4. REFERENCES AND TESTIMONIALS	**4.1 Celebrities**
	4.2 Official media
	4.3 Honors and credits

List of open codes

1. CITIES AND TRAVEL SPOTS

    1.1 Cities & regions (57 open codes)

        Africa

        Casablanca

        Fes

        Marrakesh

        Chefchaouen

        Tetouan

        Western Sahara

        Ifrane (european style city)

        Rabat

        Tangier

        Ancient Fes

        Ancient Marrakesh

        Ancient Rabat

        Ancient town

        Historical city

        Relaxing Chefchaouen

        Relaxing Essaouira

        Romantic Casablanca

        Romantic Chefchaouen

        Romantic Fes

Romantic Rabat

Romantic Sahara

Beautiful Essaouira

Beautiful Rabat

Blue city – Chefchaouen

White city – Casablanca

Pink city - Marrakesh

Red city - Marrakesh

White city - Essaouira

Unique country

Unknown and secret country

Unmissable Marrakesh

Peaceful Essaouira

Modern Casablanca

Sensational Chefchaouen

Tangier, the open city to the world

Tangier, summer city

Arabic imperial city

Asilah - Artistic town

Clean city Tangier

Casablanca - traffic hub city

Central city Casablanca and Marrakesh

Coastal cities

Puzzled city

Safe city

Sand city

Blurred city

Somber city

Controversial regions

Diversified region

Atlantic and Mediterranean

Mediterranean

Best destination

Magical african continent

Memorable place

Mountain area

Southern Spain

Commercialized Fes

1.2. Attractions & natural resource (65 open codes)

Avoid sunstroke in Majorelle Garden

Fantastic imagination and design of Majorelle Garden

Jardin Majorelle Garden

Popular Majorelle Garden

Luxuriant plants

Natural miracle

Tranquil gardens

Various cactus

Various plants

Tropical plants

Relaxing garden

Dangerous desert

Desert

Sahara Desert

Exotic desert

Unique sand ocean

Beautiful sunset

Cold desert and mountain area

Colorful sunrise view

Desert sunrise view

Shooting stars

Starry night sky

Hassan II mosque - third biggest mosque

Koutoubia Mosque

Mosque build on the sea

Most beautiful mosque

Unmissable Hassan II Mosque

Well-equipped mosque

The landmark of Casablanca

Luxurious interiors

Well-preserved historical site

Al-hoceima Park

Ali Ben Youssef Madrasa

Astonishing Berbers Musuem

Bab Boujloud

Bahia Palace

Blockhouse relic

British cemetery

Chaouwara Tanneries

Charming idyllic view

Dades Gorge

Djemaa el-fna

Historical divinity school

Historical palace

Imperial palaces

Leatherware dye house

Musee de Marrakesh

Noisy and dynamic attraction

Oudaias (architecture)

Place Jemaa el-Fna

Rick's Café

Roma relic

Spectacular view of dyehouse

The coast

Traditional architecture museum

Upscale Rick's Café

Atlantic Ocean

Atlas mountain

Cave

Fluctuated hills view

Grassland

No animals - desolated area

Poppy flower view

Rapid rivers

Snow mountain

2. LOCAL CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Local People (38 open codes)

Moroccan artists

Various performers

Bizarre dressed artists

Berber people

Old man in white robe

Conservative local people

Man in the café

Enjoyable driver

Enthusiastic waiter in restaurant

Friendly frontier guard

Friendly local people

Hospitable housemaid

Hospitable local host

Hospitable Moroccans

Lively local kids

Unadorned people

Nice local people

Open people in Casablanca

Knowledgable hotel owner

Passionate handicraftsmen

Polite local pedestrians

Curious local people

Greedy local people

Greedy performers

Solicited peddlers

Solicited restaurant owners

Intimidating behavior of local people

Tricky local people

Tricky taxi driver

Busy workers

Careful shop owner

French hostel owners

Central Asian face

Handcraft peddler

Peddlers

Local guide

Storyteller on the square

Surfing fans

2.2 Local culture (40 open codes)

Ancient Berbers towns

Exquisite Berbers exhibitions

Secret Berbers culture

Traditional Berbers costume

Colorful robe

Long robe

Unique local costume

Attractive cultural customs

Ethnic custom

Religious convention

Prohibition according to local culture

Conservative morocco culture

Cultural rules of mosque

Theology

Engraved Koran

Muslim religion

Islamic culture

Muslim

Intertwined history and culture

Combination of European and African culture

Diverse local culture

Multi-national culture

European colonized culture

Spanish colonization

Cuba style graffiti

Secret North-African culture

Arabic city style

Arabic music

Arabic characteristic

Exotic characteristic

Oldest university

Deep history

600 years history site

1000 years history

Humanity and culture

Graffiti and doodle

Hippy ages

Secret gay party

Greece mythology

Maghreb Union

2.3 Local architecture (49 open codes)

Casbah architecture (Arabic feature)

Islamic architecture decorations

Islamic building

Mosaic decorations

Mosaic tile

Mingle of old and modern style

Modern style mosque

Moorish architecture

Traditional decorations

Symmetric style

Exotic building style (Raid)

Similar art with traditional Chinese

Combination of Chinese and western style

European styled buildings

Spanish mosque

Andalusia styled buildings

Turkish style decorations

Tropical and Islamic style garden

French fashionable design

The palace of traditional buildings

Blue architecture

Blue background

Blue wall

Color combination

Colorful architecture

Colorful glazed windows

dark blue color design

Majorelle blue

Red buildings

Red wall

Various blue colors

Yellow castle

Beautiful and decadent architecture

Beautiful interiors

Beautiful Marrakesh station

Delicate and grand architecture

Grand and famous mosque

Tallest minaret in the world

Exquisite architecture

Exquisite decorations

Exquisite engraves

Popular Riad

Unique buildings

Dazzling chandeliers

Marble

Pretty fountain in Riad

Scented mosque

Small quadrangle

Dense buildings

2.4 The local delicacies (24 open codes)

African Turkish barbecue

Delicious almond crisp

Delicious tagine

Good barbecue

Fresh mint tea

Traditional Snail soup

Ubiquitous drinks

Unique flavor of snail soup

Unique scented soup

Characteristic snacks

Various flavor of meat

Well-simmered dishes

Yummy breakfast

Morocco traditional dishes

Not good bread and rice

One-dimensional food

Tedious food

Authentic local food

Cheap strawberry

Delicacy

Dessert

Food hall

Paradise of delicacy

Morocco Coffee

2.5 Local life & environment (31 open codes)

Active night life

Biggest night market

Busy traditional market

Exotic night market

Fantasy market

Open market

Open market at dusk

The sleepless square

Cozy local life

Dawdling

Kids playing football

Leisure lifestyle

Leisure local life

Lively square

Local daily life culture

Local men playing crossword puzzle

Local people chatting

Idle cats

Free Rabat life

Sunny day

Moderate sunlight

Big temperature gap

Cold morning and night

Wind-sand

Cold sea wind

Female protection

Gorgeous events

Traditional wedding

Chant spread all over the city

Handicraftsman's working

Working fishermen (23)

3. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF TRIP EXPERIENCE

3.1 Amenities and infrastructure (74 open codes)

Arabic street

Broad street

Car-free street

Cobbled road

Numerous alleys

Good quality of the road

Convenient railway

Two main train routes

Fast and ordinal train

Cozy train

Clean and safe bus

Several local bus choices

Cheap bus ticket

Cost-effective taxi

Convenient transportation

Local unique tram

Online train ticket booking

Unpunctuality of transportation

Inconvenient road

Inconvenient transportation

Crowded street

Noisy and dynamic street

Zigzag alleys

Non-direct flight

15 to 30 hours flight

Expensive flight from mainland

Car rental

Recommended ORV

Taxi choices

Taxi price

Beautiful traditional hostel

Cost-effective hostel

Cheap accommodation

Fancy local room

Fancy hotel for vacation

High quality of hotel service

Hotel's blue decoration

Numerous hotel choices

Well-designed hotel

Nice sea-view room

Numerous new-renovated hostels

Small apartment

Noisy shops

North-African style market

Restaurant with Arabic interiors

Simple market

Bizarre souvenir

Beautiful and high-quality postcards

Beautiful and comfortable local blanket

Rough packaging of handcrafts

Popular vintage

National characteristic ornaments

Low-qualified leatherware

Leatherware handcrafts

Night market

Exquisite handicrafts

Handcraft stores

Various commodities

Cost-effective souvenir

Bad signals

Incorrect GPS

Language barriers with local people

Smartphone GPS

Afforestation of the city

Good air quality

Ample tent

Walkable attractions

Hot weather

Pleasant weather

Mild weather

Changeable weather

Great weather in Rabat

Sunny day

Moderate sunlight

3.2 Trip experience and activities (52 open codes)

Exciting

Fantastic experience

Deserve to visit again

Ideal vacation

Fancy hostel experience

Satisfactory experience

Warm feelings

Helpful tourists during the trip (32)

Illusional city experience (5,38)

Memorable experience (10,32)

Exotic lifestyle (38)

Relaxed nap

Spectacular and peaceful

Cozy morning

Cozy experience

Reading books

Peaceful atmosphere

Relaxed wandering

Tranquil atmosphere

Relaxed experience

Crowded tourists

Booking tickets in advance

Tired travel experience

Paid luggage services

Paid guide services

Forced sell

Common overcharged phenomenon

Dangerous for girls

Tired trip

Bargaining with peddler

Peddlers' tricks

Bargain with drivers

Overcharged taxi fee

Easy to get lost in Marrakesh

Easy to get lost in Fes

Untrustworthy product price

Disappointed shopping experience

Campfire party at desert

Desert day tour

Different choices of desert tour

Good spot for taking pictures

Humanistic photograph

Pleasant tour

Ride camel

Sand skiing

Shopping

Photo shooting

Watching stars

Worthy desert trip

Impulsive trip

Family trip

Car sharing experience

3.3 Feelings of the landscape (20 open codes)

Unique and changeable sunset

Unique sea view

Unique city view

Astonishing desert scenery

Incredible view

Fairytale view

Fairytale world

Colorful view

Lively view

Sunlight spread on the city

Tranquil Sahara night

Prosperous view of garden

An idyllic world

Cinematic view

Colorful oceans

Grand sea view

Magical dawn lights

Natural landscape

Rural view

Strong waves of the ocean

4. References and testimonials

4.1 Celebrities (7 open codes)

Yves Saint Laurent

Riccardo Tisci

Monica Bellucci

Ibn Baṭūṭah

San Mao (Chinese Author)

Painter - Jacques Majorelle

Victoria Beckham

4.2 Official media (17 open codes)

Lonely planet

Book - the little prince

Movie – Casablanca

<007>

<Sex and the city>

<Mission: Impossible>

Traveler (Magazine)

One Thousand and One Nights

<Lawrence of Arabia>

Travel magazines

TV tourism show

<Journey to the west> (Chinese book)

<Game of throne>

European architecture magazines

Fashion magazines shooting spot

Cinematic locations

TripAdvisor

4.3 Honors and credits (5 open codes)

Influencers' photo spot

TV show shooting location

World cultural heritage

Second popular country in Africa

United Nations heritage

Appendix B: Coding tree for interviews

Table B1: Selective codes and axial codes

Selective codes (Themes)	Axial codes
Planning and expectation before the trip	Factors that influence decision
	Information gathering before trip
	Memorable ideas from UGC
	Expectation and presumption of Morocco
Feelings of actual trip	Negative feelings and experiences in the trip
	Positive feelings and experiences in the trip
	Comparisons of actual trip and UGC
Post-travel opinions of travel-related UGC	Post-travel evaluation for the previous UGC
	Post- travel attitude towards UGC
	Post-travel behavior of using UGC

List of open codes

1. Planning and expectation before the trip (78)

1.1 Factors that influence decision (6)

Visa-free policy

Impulsive decision

Various factors influence decision-making

The influence of pictures

Photo of Chefchaouen influence decision

Less influence by negative comments

1.2 Information gathering before trip (24)

Book of San Mao

Movie Casablanca

No traditional media information

TV shows

Chinese sources

French online sources

Gather information from travel community

Influencers' texts

Only source from UGC

Hotel reviews

Grades on Booking.com

Search useful data

Use Various UGC

No specific platforms

Friends' social media post

Various photos on social media

Read articles from social media

More trustworthy WOM

Search for WOM

Strong influence by WOM

Few UGCs about Morocco

Gather information about local cities and views

Neglect food comments in UGC

Not much preparation (6)

1.3 Memorable ideas from UGC (21)

Beautiful photos of mosque

Grand view in Morocco

Colorfulness

Exoticism in UGC

Good comments on Marrakesh square

Good comments on view and humanity

Great history mentioned

Desert photo

Impressive Sahara Desert

Useful transportation information

Local peddlers' tricks

Conservatism for female

Dry environment in Sahara

Negative comments on local people

Negative comments on shopping

Unavailable GPS mentioned in UGC

Unsafety and tiredness of Morocco

Negative WOM of Morocco

No previous reading about religious culture

No previous reading about safety

No specific comments on hotel

1.4 Expectation and presumption of Morocco (26)

Attractive Islamic culture

Beautiful Local costume

Beautiful Local decorations

Blue city - Chefchaouen

Cost-effective Morocco

Historical Fes

High expectation of desert view

Famous desert

High expectation of exoticism

High expectation coming from pictures

High expectation coming from positive comments

High expectation of starry night in Sahara

Curiosity about Morocco

Red city- Marrakesh

Uniqueness of the country

Less expectation of problems

Neglect small negative comments

More cautious after reading UGC

Precautions of harassment on women

Preconception of the underdeveloped Morocco

Psychological preparation of local food

Psychological preparation of local safety

Psychological preparation of local tricks

Psychologist preparation of transportation difficulties

Blur presupposition

Good destination marketing

2. Feelings of actual trip (69)

2.1 Negative feelings and experiences in the trip (22)

Forced sales

Local tricky peddlers

High price of local guide

Deceptive local people

Unfriendly for tourists

Dangerous for female

Bad experience in cities

Undeserved visit in Chefchaouen

Moderate feelings on Morocco

Negative feelings on Moroccan food

Negative feelings on Marrakesh Square

Not impressive cultural views

Difficult trip

Inconvenient infrastructure

Insanitary environment

Insanitary hotel

Language barriers

Lost in the ancient town

Not suitable for travel newbies

Tiredness of the trip

Unavailable GPS

Unpunctuality of the local transportation

2.2 Positive feelings and experiences in the trip (21)

Astonishing cultural decorations

Impressive Distinctive culture

Divine mosque

Impressive local lifestyle

Respected religious events

The great mosque in Fes

Well-protected heritage

Great breakfast in hostel

New transportations

Royal feelings in hostel

Cost-effective hostel

Grand view in Meknes

Great photo spot in Marrakesh square

Photo shooting in Chefchauoen

Beautiful starry night view

Astonishing Sahara view

Beautiful Chefchaouen

Friendly local people

Coziness in Chefchaouen

Exoticism and uniqueness of Morocco

Satisfied trip

2.3 Comparisons of actual trip and UGC (26)

Dissatisfy to expectation

Disappointment because of the artificial photos

Dissatisfied experience in Chefchaouen

Less beauty in real world

Mismatched experience in Tangier city beach

Mismatched feelings about price

Mismatched Marrakesh experiences

Dissimilarity in UGC and true experience

Over-praised city beach

Worse problem in actual trip

Unexpected inconvenient experience

Better impression of Morocco

Conformity of actual feelings and UGC

Desert fulfill the expectation

Matched experience about ancient town

More satisfied photo works

Similar view in UGC and actual trip

Similar attitude to Morocco comparing to UGC

Great revelation of desert

Impressive revelation in rural Tangier

Surprising discovery of hostel

Unexpected impression of Meknes

Unexpected impressive beach

Unexpected snowy views

Former experience influences the feeling

Similar desert views

3. Post-travel opinions of travel-related UGC (49)

3.1 Post-travel evaluation for the previous UGC (13)

Shallow comments of Morocco

Few words about Meknes

Few words about the local tricks

Few negative comments on female unsafety

UGC neglect the negative side

All positive comments of Morocco on social media

Always Positive attitude in UGC

Celebrity testimonials of Morocco

Charming texts in UGC

Overpraised photos about morocco

Over-praised texts

Artificial beautiful pictures

Pictures have more influence

3.2 Post-travel attitude towards UGC (15)

Unreliable online pictures

Untrustworthy one-dimensional articles

Other criticism about the marketing UGC

Reading UGC is time-costing

Criticize UGC credibility according to experiences

Commercialized online articles

Overpraised online comments controlled by owner

Marketing goals of influencers

Untrustworthy contents from influencers

Contributors please readers

Contributors' self-branding

Differences of E-wom and WOM

No skeptical feelings of UGC

Various ideas in UGC

Subjectivity in UGC

3.3 Post-travel behavior of using UGC (21)

Same online behavior in the future

Previously use UGC for fun

Currently use UGC for information

Partially believe in UGC

Not believe online pictures

Only for useful information in UGC

Useless expression and expectations

Find the unique texts in the UGC

Compare different contributors' articles

Use more sources in planning process

Tolerance to the UGC

Still use UGC as travel plan source

Some reference value in UGC

Give up the official media

Actual trip influences the attitude of platform

Fixed preference of platform

Recommend platform instead of specific articles

Believe WOM more than UGC

Important word-of-mouth

Personal different behaviors of WOM & E-WOM

Positive experience reinforces the perceived credibility of TV shows

Appendix C: Topic list for in-depth interview

Warm-up

- When did you travel to Morocco?
- Who did you go with?

Part 1: "Expectation of Morocco"

- What's your overall idea of Morocco before the trip?
  - Where did these ideas come from? (UGC? Books? Magazines? Films?)

- Why did you choose Morocco to travel?
  - What makes your final decision?
  - What kinds of media did you consume? (UGC? Books? Magazines? Films?)

- What's the most impressive description of Morocco in the UGC you read before?
  - Did these comments help to form your decision?
  - What's the most attractive part of Morocco in your mind during your travel-planning?
    - Did you read some relevant information in UGC? (Which platforms?)

- What's the main reason you consume these materials? (UGC? Books? Magazines? Films?)
  - Only for fun? For travel planning? Habits?

- Which one do you believe more (Positive and negative)

Part 2: "Actual judgments on the travel experience"

- How would you evaluate the overall experience of the trip?
  - Was it satisfied?
  - Which part is most impressive? Why you like it best? Did the UGC you read before mentioned it?

- Anything not really enjoyable? Or dissatisfied?
  - Did these experiences change some of your preconceptions of Morocco? How?
  - Did you predict these would happen when you plan your trip?
  - How was the UGC you read before mentioned it?

Part 3: "Perceived credibility of the previously-read UGC"

- Now, did you think the UGC you previously read match your true feelings of the Morocco trip?
  If yes

- ■ In what ways?
- ■ Any differences you think?

If no
- ■ Why?
- ■ Which part you think is not true or not exact?

- Did you notice the online comments and attitudes about Morocco had changed recently?
  - ■ How do you feel about this situation?
  - ■ Is there any type of online content you prefer to trust?
    - ◆ What kinds? Why?

- Will you read UGC in the future?
  - ■ Why?
  - ■ Will you use UGC to help your next travel-planning?
  - ■ To what extent would you trust UGC in the future?

- Would you recommend the UGC you read before to your friends who also think about going to Morocco?
  - ■ Why?

Appendix D: Demographics of interviewees

Table D1: Interviewee list

Number	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Kaidi Sun	Female	24	Blog Freelancer & Master student
2	Jiaying Li	Female	25	Psychologist assistant
3	Rui Zhang	Male	26	Human resource specialist
4	Zhongke Xie	Male	28	Photographer
5	Jingya Peng	Female	24	Master Student
6	Ruiyuan Cui	Male	25	Bachelor student
7	Zhiyu Zhang	Male	24	Master Student
8	Ting Sun	Female	24	Master Student
9	Qian Xiao	Female	25	Accountant