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CULTURE-BASED INTERPRETATION OF PROJECTED DESTINATION IMAGES: A SEMANTIC NETWORK ANALYSIS

Menglu Gao
Purdue University

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Xinran Y. Lehto

Mark Lehto

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CULTURE-BASED INTERPRETATION OF PROJECTED DESTINATION IMAGES: A SEMANTIC NETWORK ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Gao, Menglu. M.S., Purdue University, May 2014. Culture-based Interpretation of Projected Destination Images: A Semantic Network Analysis. Major Professor: Xinran Y. Lehto

This study attempts to explore destination image interpretation in the context of two cultural groups (US and China) and two information sources (Blog and Destination Management Organization website). Semantic Network Analysis was employed to obtain a visual representation and comparison of perceived destination image categories of Marrakesh across groups. Computer-Aided Textual Analysis software, AutoMap3.0 Program and ROST Content Mining System, were used initially for data preparation and keywords analysis, and UCINET 6 was then applied to conduct semantic network analysis such as centrality analysis and network structure measurements. The results indicated that the perceived image of Marrakesh varies by the different online information sources and cultural groups. In addition, features of the two specific information sources and cultures were discussed to explain the discrepancies and similarities. The study also underscores affective attributes in destination image perception by combing both quantitative and qualitative methods in the research. Practical and theoretical implications were demonstrated to shed light on managing and marketing desired destination images.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

Because service industries are inherently intangible and inseparable, tourism products are generally regarded as promises of an experience to the customer, which thus involve a high level of perceived risk in the decision-making process. This explains why positive destination image is so important in attracting potential visitors: they have limited knowledge of destinations they have never visited and rely heavily on perceived destination images to make purchase decisions (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Um & Crompton, 1992). From the perspective of destination marketing organizations (DMOs), destination image exerts a great deal of influence on decisions guided by increasing destination awareness, destination branding, marketing, and management (Qu et al., 2010).

Over the past few decades, a radical revolution has taken place in destination image marketing. With the advent of advanced information technologies, the old destination marketing models are now being challenged because of visitors' growing interest in user-generated content. Traditionally, DMOs play significant roles in promoting destination image via a variety of materials such as travel guidebooks, brochures, and TV commercial. Among all of the materials introduced, DMOs' official websites serve as

official self-presentation platforms online and provide travel information to potential visitors. These websites have been used since the late 1990s as one of the main communication channels (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2006; So & Morrison, 2003). However, with the upsurge in use of user-generated content, such as blogs, reviews, and videos, the influence of tourism marketers on potential tourists have been diminished (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). This user-generated information is created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers themselves and facilitates information exchange and experience sharing among consumers. Compared to official information on DMOs' websites, user-generated information is considered more trustworthy because the source of the information is a real consumer who shares no profit motive with DMOs, which might be considered a conflict of interest (Pan et al., 2007). Therefore, visitors are now more actively, if unconsciously, participating in destination marketing practices by distributing e-word-of-mouth (eWOM). The increasing development of user-generated information has become a new challenge to DMOs because management authorities lack direct control over images dispersed by visitors. However, DMOs have the opportunity to take advantage of this trend and pursue sustainable success in terms of destination marketing. For instance, DMOs are able to investigate destination images that dominate the Internet and determine whether the images are consistent with the images projected by the destination itself.

Among the several mainstreams of destination image research, the significance of the formation of destination image has been emphasized, and the study of the forces that influence an individual's image of a certain destination has become a priority. Multiple models have been developed to reveal the complexity of image formation and the

existence of a range of factors influencing image formation (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gartner, 1996; Stern & Krakover, 1993). Among a number of factors discussed in the literature, information sources that individuals are exposed to should be one of the critical concerns. The existing destination-image literature focuses on investigation of information sources such as tour operators and travel agencies (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Choi et al., 2007; Frias et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2009); the Internet in general (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Frias et al., 2008); promotional and news videos (Alvarez & Campo, 2011; Pan et al., 2011); DMOs' websites (Choi et al., 2007; Tang et al., 2009); brochures, guidebooks, and magazines (Arturo & Águeda, 2006; Choi et al., 2007; Tang et al., 2009); and blogs (Choi et al., 2007; Dev & Hwang, 2011; Tang et al., 2009). Although researchers have made some progress in elaborating the influences of different information sources on destination image, deeper analysis needs to be done with respect to how individuals process each kind of information. This research should be interdisciplinary, drawing on tourism, social psychology, and consumer behavior. In this study, two specific information sources, travel blogs and DMOs' websites, serve as media from which participants can get textual, pictorial, and video information.

Another factor, culture, needs to be taken into account because it has had a salient influence on destination image formation and the information sources utilized by tourists. For instance, in comparing the effect of travel agencies alone to the effect of travel agencies together with the Internet, Frias et al. (2012) noted that culture exerts moderating effects on pre-visit destination-image formation. Moreover, discrepancies in destination image have been found among travelers with different cultural backgrounds, no matter whether the study's respondents were drawn from a single nation or multiple

nations (Feng 2011; Kaplanidou, 2009; McCartney 2008). Two specific cultural groups, American and Chinese respondents, were investigated in the research for the following reasons. First of all, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the United States and China sits in significantly different rankings of Power Distance, Individualism, and Long Term Orientation Index. It means that Chinese and American culture is regarded as two distinctive cultures. Secondly, according to China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and Office of Travel & Tourism Industries (OTTI) statistics, China and the U.S. are two of the world's largest outbound tourist markets. Gaining a deep insight on these two cultural groups will help tourism marketers better understand their customers and develop appropriate marketing strategies. Specifically, this study is designated to investigate the effects of cultural background on image formation and information processing.

According to the literature, a variety of approaches has been utilized in destination image marketing study. Quantitative methodologies include multivariate analysis (McCartney, 2008), multidimensional scaling technique (Fesenmaier, 2000), experiment design and ANOVA analysis (Frías et al., 2012), importance-performance analysis and factor analysis (Lee & Lee, 2009), correspondence analysis (Tang et al., 2007), and Q methodology (Dewar, Li, & Davis, 2007). Qualitative methods such as content analysis (Govers, 2007) and thematic analysis (Prayag & Ryan, 2011) by semi-structured interviews and coding strategies (Koutra & Karyopouli, 2013) are widely used in exploratory studies and present to be alternative measurement techniques that can contribute to future image research. However, it is worth noticing that tourism researchers are still cautious about involving computer-aided text analysis (CATA) to

analyze textual data. Even though the use of computers speeds data preparation and processing, the rigor of CATA has long been argued because of its inflexibility. For instance, in content analysis, researchers find it challenging to discern categories of image constructs from textual data related to destination representation and promotion. Furthermore, CATA is difficult to produce statistical inferences, comparisons, and hypothesis testing (Stepchenkova et al., 2009). Based on the results of meta-analysis of destination image research, Stepchenkova and Mills (2010) concluded that new quantitative methods have been introduced, the proportion of qualitative studies has increased, and the growth of media-based and web-based studies has been noted. Moreover, tourism researchers seldom combine the study of destination image with network concepts. Communication networks are the patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space. The message here refers to its broadest sense including data, information, knowledge, and other symbolic forms that occur in the networks. These networks take many forms in contemporary organizations or an identified set of entities. In other words, communication network analysis is primarily used to measure relationships between people, groups, organizations, and other connected information/knowledge entities (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Most tourism studies that have adopted network theories have been analyzing the network structure of organizations, the interconnectedness of stakeholders, knowledge networks in the tourism field, and tourist movement patterns (Leung et al., 2012). Differentiating itself from the existing literature because the entities were nonhuman agents, this study utilizes semantic network analysis to investigate the semantic network structures created by potential visitors. Semantic networks are

networks generated from texts or other documentary artifacts, in which words or ideas are "nodes" and relations among those words or ideas are "ties" (Monge & Contractor, 2003). Density and centrality are two measures widely used in network structural analysis and visualization. Density is the "quantity of ties in a network expressed as a proportion of the maximum possible number of ties" (Scott, 2005, p. 71). Centrality measures the prominence and relative position of nodes in a network rather than the overall centralization of a network. The three most commonly used centrality measures were adopted in this research: degree centrality, closeness centrality, and betweenness centrality. Semantic network analysis uses computational models to process and visualize observed data (Bendle & Patterson, 2010). Thus, compared to traditional qualitative methodologies that incorporate into CATA, semantic network analysis has greater statistical rigor and validity. It is also effective in analyzing textual data, which cannot be achieved through quantitative approaches.

1.2 Study Objectives

This study will explore the role of new information sources, particularly travel blogs and DMOs' websites, as image-formation agents. Moreover, culture will be afforded proper attention because it has an influence not only on the processing of information but also on the formation of destination images. The objectives of the study are to (1) explore the different influences of two information sources on pre-visit destination-image formation, (2) investigate the influence of culture on information processing and destination-image formation, and (3) introduce semantic network theory to the study of destination marketing.

The proposed research is designed to produce theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study extends social network theory into traditional tourism research. Compared to content analysis, commonly used in tourism studies, semantic network analysis does not have to predefine destination-image attributes, therefore eliminating an element of subjective bias introduced by the coding procedure (Hookway, 2008; Jang, 1995; Rice & Danowski, 1993). Moreover, this study deepens the understanding of the effect of the travel blogs and DMOs' websites as information sources by analyzing the information processing carried out by individuals from different cultural backgrounds. From a marketer's practical perspective, assessing potential visitors' opinions on both DMOs' websites and travel blogs enables destination management authorities to better understand the image perceived by real market and to determine which images should be promoted to which segments of the market. With the exponentially increasing usage of blogs and DMOs' websites among tourists, managers have begun to realize the significance of these information sources as marketing tools. For instance, destination marketers seek to develop marketing strategies and to increase levels of management with the help of travel blogs because blogs provide valuable data with which to conduct customer profiling, customer engagement, customer acquisition, brand awareness and reinforcement, reputation management, and customer service (Akehurst, 2009; Puhringer & Taylor, 2008). As to DMOs, they increase local tourism transactions in the short term and are responsible in the long term for building a positive and unified destination image, enhancing the competitive advantage of the destination, and supporting the local economy (Perdue & Pitegoff, 1990; Pike, 2004; Prideaux & Cooper, 2002; Wang & Russo, 2007). As one of the most significant communication channels projected by

DMOs, DMOs' websites are designed to provide and collect information to and from tourists. Therefore, the results of this study's analysis of both information sources may help destination management authorities promote the destination, collect customer profiles, and gain deeper insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the destination.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, relevant literatures that provide background knowledge and theories for the study objectives were reviewed. The chapter traces back previous studies mainly on projected destination image, information sources and destination image, cultural influences on destination image, and semantic network analysis.

2.2 Projected Destination Image

Projected Destination Image originally derives from the concept of Destination Image. In the early 1970s, Hunt (1975), Gunn (1972), and Mayo (1973) first introduced destination image theories into tourism research. Although many efforts have been done for more than three decades, there is still no clear and widely accepted definition of destination image concept due to its heterogeneous, complex, and dynamic nature (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). A substantial number of researchers tend to define the concept by explaining the formation of image from psychological perspectives and describe it as a process of "mental construct" or "mental conception" (Reynold, 1965; Fakeye & Cromption, 1991; Court & Lupton, 1997; Ahmed, 1991; Leisen, 2001; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). They addressed the role of people's beliefs, ideas, and impressions in developing destination images (Crompton, 1979; Ross, 1993; Choi et al., 1999; Kotler et

al., 1993; Day et al., 2002). Other researches explored destination factors such as affective and cognitive image attributes in order to conceptualize their influences on image formation (Kim and Yoon, 2003; Gallarza et al., 2002). According to the existing meta-analysis of destination image research, several mainstreams dominated the body of literature: destination image construct and measurement; destination image management issues; destination image management and customer perceptions/behaviors; formation and dynamics of destination image; and conceptualization and operationalization of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie,1991; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia,2002; Pike,2002; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010).

To be more specific, projected destination images are the ideas and impressions of destination and are generated from various information sources (Hsu & Song, 2011). Kozma and Ashworth (1993) distinguished the intentional projected images from unintentional projected images. Intentional projected images are primarily created by destination marketing agencies or official organizations with the main purpose of promotion. On the other hand, unintentional projected images are delivered in popular media forms such as films, new broadcast, television programs etc. (Ji, 2011). Bouke van Gorp and Tine Beneker (2007) investigated both intentional and unintentional projected images of the Netherlands. Both similarities and discrepancies in the fields of projected image have been identified. This study focuses on the interpretations of the both types of projected images: the ones created cautiously by destination marketing organizations and the ones created and dispersed via emerging social media such as blogs. In addition, the most majority of papers discuss projected destination image from either tourism supplier

or demand's perspective. For instance, Govers and Go (2005) explored the projected image of Dubai generated deliberately by private enterprises and destination marketing organization. A content analysis of online textual representations shows that neither of them creates strong expressive emotional attractiveness to visitors. Grosspietsch (2006) investigated city images of Rwanda and synthesized three discrepancies between images perceived by visitors and images projected by international tour operators. As regards the current research, it attempts to explore projected destination image from image receivers' (potential tourists) perspective. It therefore will help image providers (i.e. DMOs) to gain a better knowledge of promotion media and tourist behavior.

2.3 Culture and Destination Image

The definition of culture has been conceptualized by researchers over the years. Geertz (1973) views culture as a system of meanings, while Keesing (1974) suggests that culture is not ''a collection of symbols fitted together… but [it is] a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates internal modes of reality'' (p.89). The definition means that culture may shape the way people delivery and interpret verbal and nonverbal messages (Gursoy & Umbreit 2004). Hofstede (1980) defined culture as "the collective mental programming of the people in an environment" and everything "that people have in common". Tylor (1993) described it to be "the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society". Other factors such as common values, attitudes, and behavior norms

were also encompassed in the definition of culture (Warner & Joynt, 2002). People of different nationalities held different cultures, while individuals from the same nation share a stable and dominant cultural character (Reisinger & Turner, 1998).

Culture has long been recognized as a crucial factor in tourism studies since it influences people's interpretation of the same event (Mooji & Hofstede, 2011), people's destination choices (Ng et al., 2007), tourists' behavior intentions (Ramkissoon et al., 2011), and destination image formation (McCartney, 2008). These investigations set out to explain whether destination marketers should standardize tourism products for all travelers regardless of their country of origin or customize products and marketing campaigns for each national market (You et al., 2001). Moreover, an understanding of cultural differences among tourists would help marketers attract international tourists (Reisinger and Turner, 1998).

In accordance with the research objectives, the author reviewed existing empirical studies aimed to reveal the various impact of visitors' culture on image formation. However, destination image based cross-cultural research is afforded scant attention (Lubbe, 1998; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Tasci et al., 2007). McCartney (2008) examined Macao's tourism image perceived by its main tourism markets of China (PRC), Hong Kong and Taiwan. Multivariate analysis revealed discrepancies between travelers from different cities within one nation. Kaplanidou (2009) took geographic region as the indicator of culture and found the discrepancies between European and North American spectators on images related to the destination's local attractions. Feng (2011) compared the

perceptions of Beijing's tourist destination image between Chinese and western tourists from five multi-dimensional perspectives. Cultural background, ideology and consumptive level were key elements that contribute to the discrepancies. Dewar, Li, and Davis (2007) studied the perceived photographic images of destination in terms of two cultural groups: university students in Canada and China. The results revealed that young educated travelers pursue novelty and unfamiliarity during travel, however, cultural background helps to shape what is defined to be novel and unfamiliar in their own minds. Mackay & Fesenmaier (2000) utilized multidimensional scaling (MDS) technique to exam cross-cultural image perception with the involvement of visual stimuli.

2.3.1 Hofstede's Five Dimensions of National Culture

Hofstede (1995) describes culture as patterns of mental programs, in other words, a ''software of the mind'' that partially influences a person's behavior. At a national level, Hofstede built a country score model that is widely used in psychology, sociology, marketing and consumer behavior studies, especially in the context of cross-cultural research. The Hofstede's model was originally built in the early 1970s, while many replications of the model on different samples have proved the value and validity of the data. More specifically, Hofstede (1980) posited five dimensions of national cultural value: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity/Femininity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Long-/Short-Term Orientation (LTO). As shown in figure 2.1, the United States and China differ greatly in terms of PDI, IDV, and LTO, which may explain why they interpret the projected

destination images differently. According to Hofstede, PDI is “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally." Cultures that endorse low power distance are more likely to embrace consultative or democratic power relations, whereas cultures of high power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. IDV depicts "the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups". In individualistic societies, people pursue a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are expected to pay more attention to their own interests and families. On contrary, in collectivist societies, individuals are regarded as members of a cohesive group and ask for unquestioning loyalty. LTO describes societies’ time horizon. Societies with long-term orientation are able to adapt traditions to changing conditions. They also show a strong propensity to save and invest. Meanwhile, they admire thriftiness and perseverance in achieving results. Societies with short-term orientation respect for tradition, reciprocation, and fulfilling social obligations. People in such societies are normative in thinking, resistant to save for the future, and aim to achieve quick results.

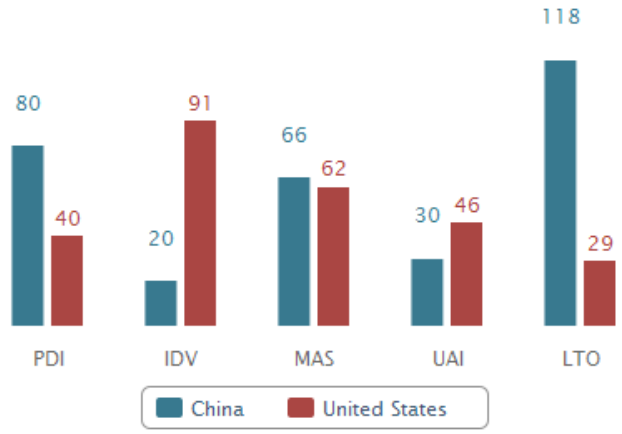

Figure 2-1 Comparisons of culture dimension scores between China and United States.

2.3.2 Hall's Low Context (LC)/High Context (HC) of Culture

Hall (1976) suggests that cultures can be characterized according to their communication styles by referring to the degree of non-verbal context used in communication. Context, information, and meaning are three terms central to Hall's concept. According to Hall, "high-context transactions feature pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message. Low-context transactions are the reverse'. In other words, HC and LC are two poles on a continuum with countless possible combinations of context and information but without both extremes (HC: only context; LC: only information) themselves. Though being criticized as bipolarized and over-generalized, Hall's (1976) LC/HC conceptualization is useful in explaining cultural communications. According to Yaveroglu and Donthu (2002), HC/LC cultures are somewhat similar to Hofstede's individualist versus collectivist dimensions of culture. Low context societies like US, aligned with individualist societies, are more

independent. High context cultures like China, similar to collectivist societies, tend to rely on other members in the group. Communication in HC societies places high emphasis on nonverbal clues in encoding a message, while communication in LC societies based on verbal messages.

2.3.3 Cultural Influences on Information Processing

Cross-cultural studies have verified that people's cognitive process (i.e. information processing, decision-making, etc.) is significantly influenced by individuals' cultural backgrounds. Marieke de Mooij and Geert Hofstede (2011) argued that people of collectivistic high-context cultures used to nonverbal, indirect communication such as symbols and signs. However, individualistic low-context culture are more likely to process verbal information and used to explanations, persuasive copy, and rhetoric. In individualistic cultures of low power distance, people actively search various media and then ask friends for information. In collectivistic and/or high power distance cultures, people acquire information via implicit, interpersonal communication and their purchase decisions are based on intangible factors such as emotions and loyalty to the product or the brand. For instance, Chinese consumers tend to consult with group members before purchase and their decisions highly depend on word of mouth communication (Cho et al., 1999). American consumers would consciously search product information online instead (Mediascope Europe 2008).

2.4 Information Sources and Destination Image

Stabler (1988) divided the factors affecting the formation of destination image into two categories: demand factors and supply factors. Information sources utilized by naïve or return tourists are recognized as supply factors.

Even though a substantial amount of destination image studies have been conducted in the context of various information sources including online website (Govers & Go, 2005; Tang et al., 2011), tour operators (Grosspietsch, 2006), Destination Marketing Organizations (Govers & Go, 2005) and etc., few of them have explored online travel blog entries and DMO's official website specifically. Some of the exceptions include that Chen et al. (2012) applied a four-quadrant Perception-Promotion Matrix (PPM) to investigate image gap of Kaohsiung City between blogs and DMOs, from both domestic and international traveler viewpoints. Schmallegger and Carson (2009) investigated image on consumer-generated content (CGC) websites, citing the Hinders Ranges in South Australia as a case study. They synthesized images retrieved from blogs, review sites and forums and then compared them to images projected by the DMO. Both studies revealed significant differences between images perceived by tourists and images projected by promoters. Chio, Lehto, and Morrison (2007) utilized content analysis to identify the destination image of Macau on the Internet. They examined both the narrative and visual content information of a variety of web information sources such as Macau official tourism website and online travel blogs. The results showed variances between the images projected by different online information sources. Tang, Chio, Lehto,

and Morrison (2009) identified Macau's online tourism image by content analyzing both English- and Chinese-language websites that include its official website and travel blogs. Discrepancies were carefully explained by different communication objectives and targeted audiences of different information sources, cultural influences and geographical distances.

2.4.1 Blogs and Destination Images

Blog was originally used in the mid-1990s (Keren, 2004). Young (2006) defined the blog as an "online diary or journal... a place for you to put your ideas out for the world to see, a place for feedback from others, or even a place to vent" (p. 27). They are primarily used as a form of social interaction and self-expression where people can post positive and negative experiences, but also opinions and beliefs (Pan et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2007). Within tourism industry, travel blogs are defined as "individual entries which relate to planned, current or past travel ... are the equivalent of personal online diaries ... commonly written by tourists to report back to friends and families about their activities and experiences during trips" (Puhringer and Taylor, 2008). They have some sort of narrative style and are strung together by a common theme (for example, a trip itinerary). Blogs satisfy tourists' psychological needs to express experiential and emotional feelings/perceptions/thoughts through the travel process. Litvin et al. (2008) mentioned blogs' nature of "a free and unbiased window", which means people benefit from perceived independence and credibility of message delivered via blogs (Mack et al.,

2008; Schmalleger and Carson, 2008). Travel decisions of blog readers are likely to be influenced by bloggers also because "interpersonal influence arising from opinion exchange between consumers is an important factor influencing consumers' purchase decisions" (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007, p. 36). Academically, blog is treated as one kind of consumer generated web content. Carson (2007) compared the value of primary data (i.e. focus groups and in depth interviews) with that of secondary data (i.e. data derived from travel blogs) and claimed the significance of travel blogs in terms of data richness, data collection cost and data quality. In addition, with the development of information technologies, the popularity of blogs has grown tremendously over the past decade and received much more attention as a destination marketing tool because blogs are important "for destinations and businesses to learn about the attitudes of their markets" (Wenger, 2008, p. 169). Blogs as well provide valuable data to conduct analysis such as customer profiling, customer engagement, customer acquisition, brand awareness and reinforcement, reputation management, and customer service (Akehurst, 2009; Puhringer & Taylor, 2008). Even though blogosphere provides DMOs with valuable information to create positive word-of-mouth (Carson 2007), "overall, there has been very little research into how blogs can be used as part of a marketing communication mix, and much more needs to be done on this topic" (Wenger, 2008, p. 175).

As to research methods employed in the studies examining travel blogs, content analysis was widely accepted in order to explore "activities undertaken at the destination, positive and negative perceptions of the destination, overall impressions of the destination, demographics, and identity creation" (Banyai and Glover, 2012). Content analysis is

defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff 2004, p. 18). Leung, Law and Lee (2011), for instance, explored 2247 travel blog entries of Ctrip.com to gain insights into the perceived destination image of Hong Kong among Chinese tourists. Another study conducted by Law and Cheung (2010) analyzed recently published blogs and indicated a positive destination image of Hong Kong among Chinese tourists, with strengths in transportation, the harbor, and outlying islands especially. Banyai (2010) analyzed the contents of Western tourists’ travel blogs to investigate their destination image of Dracula. Amongst all the seven themes synthesized by the author, historical and fictional images are highlighted. Banyai (2012) also analyzed travel blogs depicting travel experience to Stratford, Canada and conducted a deductive qualitative content analysis with the help of neural network analysis as well as frequency output. The findings indicated that tourists and the local destination management authorities perceive the destination identities differently. In spite of the significance of content analysis in previous literature review, other emerging methodologies are gaining ground. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2008), for example, employed narrative analysis, a pure qualitative research methodology. Stance-shift analysis was conducted on data derived from Internet blog entries by Crotts, Mason and Davis (2009). The reason why semantic network analysis was selected in the study will be discussed thoroughly later.

Though research on blogs is receiving more and more intention during these days, the majority of the research has been located to issues related to blog contributors as opposed to blog readers (Huffacker & Calvert 2005). According to Yoo and Gretzel (2010),

however, about half of the respondents read other travelers' posts and take them as references when they plan their most recent overnight pleasure trips. Meanwhile, the majority of them (81.6%) trust the information posted by other travelers. Therefore, this study was trying to identify individuals' perceived image of a specific destination from blog readers' perspective.

2.4.2 DMO's website and Destination Image

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) exerts profound influence on destination promotion, communication, management, research, and product distribution (Carson, 2005). Unlike commercial tourism website, DMO's website was originally designed to promote major activities, draw attention to historical and cultural attractions, and inform target audience about the facilities (Sar & Kozak, 2005). It is one of the most significant promotion vehicles with a strong emphasis on self-presentation and has potential to induce a favorable destination image to potential tourists. Websites of tourism destinations today have radically evolved into Destination Management Systems (DMS) consisting of tourism products, means and services as a product bundle or travel experience (Ružić et al., 2010). Advanced DMS also incorporates into prevailing information technology trends such as social media to satisfy customer need. However, this study takes a classical, official destination website as a case study to represent DMO's website.

Schmallegger and Carson (2008) claimed that official website should be considered as a special government-to-consumer (G2C) blog. Nevertheless, unlike blog, DMOs' website receives less attention in regards to destination-image-related topics in the literature. For example, some researchers explored pictorial image conveyed via DMO's website since pictures or photographs are indispensable components on DMO's website and play an important role in communicating the destination's attributes. Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) compared pictorial images of Peru collected from a DMO's website and from a user-generated content website site, Flickr. Projected and perceived images were mapped and a statistical difference was identified. Singh and Formica (2006) assessed the congruency in two photographic representations (official brochures and official websites) projected by DMOs. The results illustrated a low level of congruency with a few exceptional variables. Being a component of destination's image, perceived risk of Uganda was examined before and after the exposure of Uganda's official tourism website (Lepp, Gibson and Lane, 2011) to potential tourists. The findings showed a positive role of destination website in reducing perceived risk. However, the most majority of articles have focused on examining the effectiveness of DMO's website (Xiang et al., 2010; Mills et al., 2007; Morosan 2008; Qi et al., 2008; Loda et al., 2010; Romanazzi et al., 2011; Li and Wang 2010,2011; Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011; Stienmetz et al., 2013) and DMO's website design (Lee and Gretzel 2012). This study, hence, attempts to explore and compare perceived destination image projected via DMO's website in a cross-cultural study setting.

2.4.3 Cognitive Elaboration Models and Information Processing

As mentioned earlier, in order to deepen the understanding of the influences of information sources on destination image formation, it is crucial to articulate the way information is processed. However, rare tourism researches have fallen within this area (Frias et al., 2008). Social psychology has established sophisticated models explaining how information processing takes place and the key factors occurred in the process. Cognitive elaboration and elaboration models are noteworthy in this study. Cognitive elaboration refers to "the extent to which people think about and cognitively process issue-relevant information" (Zhang et al., 2013). The most popular models that describe cognitive elaboration process include the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980).

With minor differences between the two models, there are dual modes in each of them: an effortful mode that is called central route in ELM and systematic route in HSM, as well as an effortless mode that is called peripheral route in ELM and heuristic route in HSM. An effortful mode implies that people generate the attitude towards the destination after cautiously thinking and analyzing of the information. The attitudes are more rational, logical, durable, and indicative of future behavior. On the other hand, an effortless mode indicates that people require less cognitive effort in information processing and the generated attitude was based on simple and intuitive inferences and cues. The attitudes are less durable and less indicative of future behavior (Frias et al., 2008; Jun & Holland, 2012).

According to Frias et al. (2008), the degree of message elaboration was influenced by two variables simultaneously: motivation and ability. Motivation was defined as the individuals' desire to decode the message, whereas ability describes the subjects' capabilities in decoding the information. Motivation is measured by variables such as message involvement or product involvement (Andrews, 1988; Muehling, Laczniak, & Andrews, 1993). Ability is identified with such variables as previous knowledge or experience towards the information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

To date, scholars' interests center on information processing in the context of the Internet in general. The results reveal that the Internet is conducive to the occurrence of information overload, thus leading to intensive cognitive elaboration in comparison to print media (Frias et al., 2008; Yu & Roh, 2002). Others claim that the control of Internet information would cause greater cognitive involvement (Cho, 1999; Cho & Leckenby, 1999; Coupey, 2001; Dijkstra & Van Raaij, 2001). Still, little is known about individuals' cognitive processes while dealing with blog information and official website information specifically.

2.5 Semantic Network Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been applied in destination image research. According to Choi et al. (2007), measurement methodologies and techniques are determined by the structure of destination image and researcher's conceptualization. The majority studies that measure only the cognitive component of destination image

highly depend on quantitative methods such as multivariate or bivariate structured techniques (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Tasci et al., 2007;). Compared to quantitative studies, qualitative studies, especially those rely on computer-aided text analysis (CATA) are still in its infancy (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). However, qualtitatvie approach has been increasly reconginizied as a maningful method because qualitative approach aims to analyze the subjective affective componenet of destination image constructs (Tasci et al., 2007). That is, a qualtitative approach reveals holistic and psychological impressions associated with a destination that can not be easily captured by quantative resaerch (Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000). On the other hand, with a cumulatively rich and readily available text data on the Internet, qualitative methods take avdantages in analyzing non-numerical data over traditional quantitive methods. For example, imagery or pictorial materials are often treated as visual stimuli to participants, and then participants' responses are converted into a scale format that facilitates quantitative approaches of image measurement (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013; Singh and Formica, 2006). As to textural messages, content analysis is widely accepted (Leung, Law and Lee, 2011; Law and Cheung, 2010; Banyai, 2010; Banyai, 2012). Actually, another trend in the current literature is to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The underlying reason is that cognitive attributes comprising objective reality of destination and affective attributes including subjective attitudes towards the destination can be understood more ccomprehensively through a combination method (Tasci et al., 2007).

Though content analysis remains to be the prevailing qualitative method in the literature, other methods aimed to understand the meaning of open-ended, unstructured, and textural material are being raised. Semantic network analysis, for instance, is introduced in the study. The concept of semantic networks originally emerged from social network analysis (Monge and Eisenberg 1987). Monge and Eisenberg (1987) focused on the shared interpretations that people have for message content, particularly those message that comprise important aspects of an organization's culture, such as corporate goals, slogans, myths, and stories (Dunn & Ginsberg,1986; Fiol, 1989).Linkages could be then created between people who share similar interpretations. We, however, adopt another definition of semantic networks in the study in order to facilitate the research: semantic networks refer to networks generated from texts or other documentary artifacts, where words or ideas are nodes and the relations exist among those words or ideas are ties (Monge and Contractor, 2003). Shortly, semantic network analysis is a method of extracting meaning from texts by building networks of concepts that occur in close proximity (Diesner and Carley 2011; Doerfel 1998; Rice and Danowski 1993).

Node and *Tie* are two basic terms commonly utilized in semantic networks. Each participant in the network is called an actor/agent/player and depicted as a node, whereas ties are linkages exist between nodes. Ties normally vary along three elements, including direction, reciprocity, and strength. Directional ties mean movement between the two nodes follows the direction, from one point to another. While the non-directional links indicate an association of two nodes without accompanying direction (Rosen et al., 2011).

Network *Density* and *Centrality* are two key measures used to describe the network structure and relative position of nodes in the network. The *Density* of network depictures the tendency of individuals scattered around the network. In other words, density, also called connectedness, captures the idea of cohesion. In literature, density is calculated as the number of arcs (directed relationships) divided by the number of maximum possible relationships (Nooy, Mrvar, & Batagelj, 2005). Thus, density of any network should be a fraction that ranges from minimum of zero to a maximum of one. The ratio identifies networks as being sparse (relatively disconnected) or dense (relatively well connected). *Centrality* metrics, on the other hand, is a better measure of network cohesiveness and it reflects the prominence of actors in the network. Unlike density, centrality is a measurement conceptualized as an indicator of individual activity, which focuses on the relative positions of nodes in the network. The study adopted three common centrality measures: degree, closeness, and betweennes centrality (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). *Degree centrality* of an actor is the total number of links that are adjacent to this node. It calculates the number of ties a node has to other nodes. There are two kinds of degree centrality: degree centrality for an undirected graph and that for a directed graph. The latter has two forms: in-degree centrality and out-degree centrality. In-degree is the sum of connections leading to a node from other nodes, while out-degree counts connections leading out from a node to other nodes. *Closeness centrality* measures the extent to which a node is close to other nodes in the network based on the shortest paths. Thus, an actor's shortest path distance to all other nodes in the network, also called geodesic distance, should be calculated first and closeness is defined as the inverse of the sum of geodesic distances (also called "farness"). Since the more central a node is, the smaller its sum of

geodesic distances. Therefore, nodes with high closeness centrality are much closer to all the others and have best visibility in the network. *Betweenness* centrality is a measure of the extent to which a node is connected to other nodes that are not connected to each other and the extent to which a node serves as a bridge. It depicts centrality from a different aspect and measures the brokerage of an individual node. Nodes with high betweenness centrality tend to be found on the shortest path between any other pair of nodes and control the flow of communication in the network. Particularly, a large number of nodes may come with zero betweenness centrality, whereas with non-zero degree and closeness centrality because not many nodes in the network can act as bridge.

Historically, the concept of semantic analysis has been argued with other types of network analysis. Doerfel (1998) compared three categories of network research: a semantic network analysis concentrates on word associations in texts, with a link demonstrates the extent to which two nodes share the same meaning; traditional content analysis involves professional judgment to decode textural messages; attitudinal networks apply to answers to close-ended, ordinal-scaled questions, with a link represents the extent to which two participants answer an scale item similarly. In addition, though content analysis is more authorized in tourism research, it still has some inherent shortcomings that may lead to less rigorous findings. Carley (1993) pointed out that content analysis is time consuming, complex, repetitive and lack of strong theoretical base. Moreover, semantic network analysis is argued to be more advantageous over content analysis since it does not employ prior categories based on preconceived theories, which might have suppressed unexpected emergent meanings (Rice and Danowski, 1993).

What's more, semantic network analysis eliminates the possibility of individual bias triggered by decoding procedure in content analysis (Jang, 1995). For example, Hookway (2008) argues that the use of quantitative content analysis results in the loss of the blogs' reflection of real life.

During the past few decades, semantic networks analysis has been examined extensively in empirical research with respect to political issues (Choi et al., 2012; Doerfel et al., 2009), marketing (Netzer et al., 2012), organizational culture and communication (Stohl, 1993; Doerfel et al., 1999; Scott, 2005; Podnar et al., 2012), and social psychology (Goldschmied et al., 2012; Rosen et al., 2011; Alexandridis et al., 2010). Diesner and Carley (2004) greatly extend the breadth of semantic network methods via developing the *Automap software package* (Kathleen M. Carley, Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems, Institute for Software Research International, School of Computer Science, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA, USA). However, the application of semantic network to tourism industry is still at its early stages. Exceptions include the empirical study aimed to compare website-based destination images of Macau and Hong Kong (Tang et al., 2011). Semantic network analysis and content analysis method were both applied. Results suggested that Macau transforms to a mega-gaming hub with casino strips, themed properties, and entertainment complexes, while Hong Kong remains to be a paradise and conference center. Pan et al. (2007) analyzed travel blogs on Charleston, South Carolina, to explore bloggers' interpretation of local destination image. Major strengths and weaknesses of the destination were revealed and travel blogs were demonstrated to be a cost-efficient means

of gathering customer feedbacks. Both studies tend to analyze image from destination marketers' perspective (i.e. DMO's website, travel bloggers, destination agencies, and local enterprises). In contrary, the proposed research focuses on real image receivers. Other studies in tourism area did not fall within destination image scope. For instance, Bendle and Patterson (2010) utilized a social network analysis to explore the network of leisure community groups and service organizations in an Australian city. Measures of density, centrality, and cliques/ties revealed that there are several clusters exist and service organizations were the communication hubs in the network. Peter A. Chow-White (2006) examined 22 sex tourism websites, 1143 and 220 discussion board postings from 2 specific websites respectively, in order to investigate sex tourism on the internet. A quantitative content analysis was first implemented to get an overview of word frequencies for sorting and coding. Then, semantic network analysis was used to measure the structure and relationship between the themes or nodes based on the results of coding. Centrality measures compare the structures of discussion networks and investigate the positions of themes (sex, race, gender, economic etc.) in the structure. Tourism domain with respect to information on the Internet was examined as well for effective online marketing (Xiang, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier, 2008). The researchers explored the language representation of the tourism domain in research engines from both the supply and demand perspectives. Semantic network analysis based on centrality measures were established through word association and the results showed a huge divergence between the two domain ontology. Actually, communication network analysis, the one that identifies communication dynamics within social groups, was also introduced into tourism research recently. For instance, Racherla and Hu (2010) investigated co-

authorship data derived from top three tourism journals in order to understand the tourism researcher network. The discussion revealed that the research collaboration network is dispersed into several core groups that play more important role in the network.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The present study proposed a semantic network analysis to assess potential tourists' perceived destination image of Marrakesh. In this research, a survey was conducted online upon both American and Chinese college students in a major US university. In general, the whole procedure consists of **1) study design, 2) pilot study, 3) sample design and data collection and 4) semantic analysis.**

3.1 Study Design

The author developed a multi-factor between-subjects design with two independent variables (information source and cultural background) and one dependent variable (pre-image of the destination). In this study, each independent variable has two levels (blogs and DMO's website vs. American culture and Chinese culture). Therefore, a two by two matrix (table 3.1) was established based on the study and each subject was assigned to one of the four quadrants. The most significant advantage of using this design is to assure that each individual score is independent of the other scores. In other words, every participant was only subjected to a single condition. Each participant's performance will not be influenced by such factors as practice or experience gained in other conditions. Failure to separate the subjects and stimuli would involve confounding factors, and thus

influencing the validity of the results. For instance, if one subject reviews travel blog content first and then DMO's website for destination information search, the subject's perceived destination image projected through DMO's website would be impacted by that projected through blogs. In addition, between-subjects design avoids fatigue and boredom from subjects' participating in a serious of conditions. Despite the advantages of generalization, between-subjects design has inherent shortcomings when using human participants in real world. For instance, it is impossible to control all factors and there may be other confounding variables, thus complicating explanations for observed evidence. For example, individual differences could be serious issue since characteristics differ from one subject to another in the study. Moreover, compared to other experimental study, between-subjects design needs a large number of participants.

Table 3-1 A two-factor between-subjects design

Information sources Culture	Blog	DMO's website
USA	BLOG-USA	DMO-USA
CHN	BLOG-CHN	DMO-CHN

(1)Independent variable: information source and culture

The subjects were assigned in accordance with the information source they were exposed and cultural background they were in. As regards information source, each subject was supposed to review either blog content or DMO's website before generating the

destination image. Therefore, in line with the objectives of the study, the design would highlight the influence of travel blogs on destination image formation as compared to the influence of DMO's website.

Culture was administered as another independent variable that we are interested in. In the study, the categorical variable has two levels: USA and China. Subjects were asked if they were raised in typical American culture or Chinese culture particularly. A respondent who answered "other" to the screening question would be led automatically to quit the survey page.

(2)Dependent variable: pre-visit destination image

In structured surveys, a number of scale items have been established to measure the attribute constructs of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie 1993). However, the author utilized a semi-structured survey where open-ended questions have been incorporated to gain insight into subjects' perceived destination images. Details related to open-ended questions will be discussed later.

(3) Possible confounding variables

As mentioned earlier, possible confounding variables may exist in the design since factors including age, education, and marital status have been validated as key construct in image formation in extant literature (McCartney 2008). In order to eliminate the influences of confounding variables, the research has sampled a homogeneous group of college students. As regards other factors such as prior travel experience and gender, the

results of multiple t-tests on the pretest and main experiment have shown that their influences on the dependent variable are insignificant.

To sum up, subjects were assigned to one of the four treatment conditions. The first treatment condition involved subjects who are typical Americans with the exposure of online travel blog contents (USA-BLOG Group), the second treatment condition involved subjects who are typical Americans but with the tourism destination official website reference (USA-DMO Group), the third treatment condition was the typical Chinese with textural and pictorial stimuli of online travel blogs (CHN-BLOG Group), while the last treatment condition was the typical Chinese with the DMO's website reference (CHN-DMO Group). In each treatment condition, participants were asked to complete an online survey.

3.2 Pilot Study

In order to check the effectiveness of the study design and rule out possible confounding variables, a pilot study was carried out before the main study. A pretest is used to check the success of manipulations in marketing experiments. So it was run under the simulating conditions with the same venue and target subjects. They were required to respond to the questionnaire and then evaluate the readability of the questions. The researchers intercepted qualified subjects at several main entrances/lobby lounges on campus and provided mobile devices (i.e. PC and iPad) to assist them with answering questionnaires. Forty subjects participated in the pretest in the end with 10 subjects assigned for each group. On average, it took them 20-25 minutes to complete the survey,

which implies that subjects have been thoroughly exposed to the stimuli and they have invested considerable elaboration in the survey. Interviews were conducted immediately after the pretest; otherwise, their report to the manipulations may be biased or altered (Perdue and Summers 1986). According to the results of data analysis and interview, few subjects reported that they have visited Marrakesh at least once during the past five years. If so, question *"Have you ever heard/read about Marrakesh, Morocco?"* was added to the questionnaire in order to gain insight into participants' familiarity with the destination. The purpose is to rule out travel experience variable since it would influence pre-visit destination image. Additionally, answers to the question *"What are Marrakesh's strengths and weaknesses that impress you the most as a travel destination?"* overlapped those to the question *"After reading the material, do you like Marrakesh? Why or why not?"* Therefore, only the latter question was kept. As we mentioned before, another important goal of the pretest was to examine the significance of confounding variables such as gender. The results of t-test revealed that the gender influence is insignificant, which means any pair of groups are equal in terms of gender distribution. Therefore, any difference between groups should be attributed to the independent variables of information source and culture.

3.3 Sample Design and Data Collection

Marrakesh was taken as the case destination in this study for two reasons. First, the purpose of the study is to discover how individuals process different information sources and how culture influences information processing and interpretation. Therefore,

confounding variables, such as prior travel to the destination or previous travel knowledge about the destination, need to be ruled out. In other words, world-famous destinations are not appropriate in this research because they have been thoroughly exposed and already project a stereotypical image to potential visitors. However, for both Chinese and American college students, countries in Africa are geographically distant, and naïve travelers' limited knowledge of African countries is primarily derived from second-hand information sources such as pictures, TV commercials, and other peoples' travel experiences. That is, both cultural groups seem to employ the same level of familiarity to Marrakesh, which equalize the subjects to the best one could. Otherwise, it is reasonable to assume that an American is more likely to be familiar with destinations in Europe, while a Chinese is more familiar with Asian countries. Second, Sirakaya, Sönmez, and Hwan-Suk (2001) suggest that there is a need to understand images related to newer tourist destinations in the developing world such as Morocco.

A sample of travel blogs about Marrakesh, Morocco were collected in March 2013 through online searches on Google (www.google.com). Google is widely adopted and is deemed a reliable search engine across the world (Brin & Page, 1998; Cheung, 2007). Google's PageRank system, which ranks websites based on their popularity (Pan et al., 2007, Li et al., 2011), was used in selecting desired blog website. Thus, using searching key words such as "Marrakesh blog(s)", "Marrakesh travel blog(s)" and "Marrakesh trip blog(s)", we got a collection of website links that direct to blog content about travel experience in Marrakesh. Other screening guidelines used to filter "meaningless" websites included content quality and text length (i.e. blog entries that were too short

were deleted) (Tang et al. 2011). The three most popular travel blog websites identified were http://www.travelblog.org, http://www.travbuddy.com, and http://www.lonelyplanet.com. All these websites have a hierarchical directory of blogs based on geographical locations (i.e. continents, countries) or themes. Then, the author located the webpage especially about Marrakesh on the three sites. The majority blog contents include textural and pictorial representations of the destination. Actually, with the development of multimedia technologies, pictures and videos are receiving more and more attention. Photo image is believed to be crucial in destination marketing and needs to be included in travel blog research (Day, Skidmore, & Koller, 2002; Law & Cheung, 2010; Wenger, 2008). In addition to the three websites, Marrakesh official website supported by the Moroccan National Tourist Board (MNTB) was selected (http://www.marrakech.travel/). As an important alternative information source, official website offers tourists a variety of knowledge they may be interested to know, from local maps to special offers provided upon their arrival.

Qualtrics, widely used web-based survey software, was implemented to create the semi-structured survey and collect data. Qualtrics enables researchers to create multiple choice questions as well as short answer questions online and embed web links in the survey. The survey consisted of three sections and started with brief introductory questions in order to obtain participants' demographic information including age, gender, nationality and travel experience. Specifically, participants were asked two questions in terms of culture orientation: *(1) "Generally speaking, in which culture have you been raised?" and (2) "What is your permanent country of residence?"* That means, a participant will

not be regarded as a typical Chinese/American unless s/he has been raised in Chinese/American culture and meanwhile taken Chinese/American as permanent country of residence. Only answers of typical Chinese/American respondents will be recorded for data analysis. Moreover, previous travel experience to Marrakesh was also asked because it exerts profound influence on image formation (Phillips and Jang 2010; Kim et al. 2012; Hsu, Wolfe and Kang, 2004). Therefore, two questions were asked: *(1) "Have you ever heard/read about Marrakesh, Morocco?" and (2) "Have you ever been to Marrakesh, Morocco?"* Additionally, because the research targeted two cultural groups and involved reading English textual materials, the problem of differences in English proficiency has arisen. Thus, for typical Chinese participants, their TOEFL scores were taken as a validated track of English proficiency (Carson et al., 1990; Phillips, 1991; Park, 1994 1997). TOEFL was developed to address the problem of ensuring English language proficiency for non-native speakers wishing to study at U.S. universities. It has become an admission requirement for non-native English speakers at many English-speaking colleges and universities. The TOEFL iBT, a format that is now primarily adopted in China, is scored on a scale of 0 to 120 points. A sampling of required TOEFL admissions scores shows that a total TOEFL iBT score of 74.2 for undergraduate admissions and 82.6 for graduate admissions may be required. According to 2012 Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL ibt Tests, examinees whose native language is Chinese had an average total score of 77. Reading and Writing turns out be the two sections that Chinese students excel. Considering the average minimum TOEFL iBT score required by the sample university, the author excluded respondents whose scores are lower than 90 and those who did not even report a score. Scores of other English tests like IELTS have been

converted to TOEFL iBT scores.

The second section, which consisted of unstructured query, assessed destination image of Marrakesh. Destination image has both cognitive and affective components. Cognitive components refer to the individual's knowledge or belief about destination and affective components focus on the individual's feelings toward the destination. Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) proposed a holistic model of destination image and it incorporates three mutually overlapping continuums: attribute-holistic continuum, functional-psychological continuum and common-unique continuum.

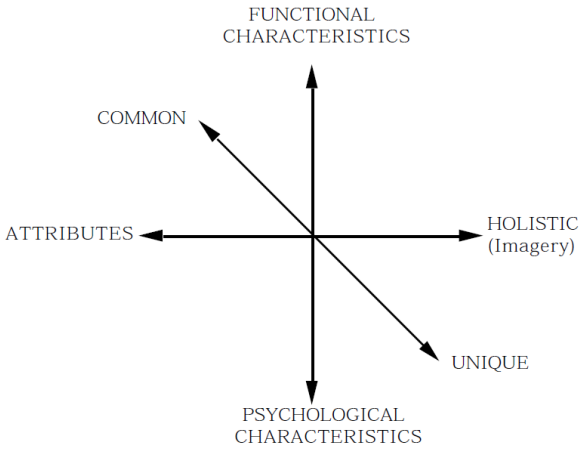

Figure 3-1 The components of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991)

The author attempted to represent both cognitive and affective factors by combining functional-psychological characteristics with common-unique attributes. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), common functional characteristics include climate, prices, or infrastructure while common psychological traits refer to friendliness, safety or general feeling/auras. Moreover, the unique functional/psychological components measure

unique features and auras. Unique functional features are those that could mostly represent the image of a destination. For instance, China may evoke an image of the Great Wall or the Forbidden City. Unique psychological auras are more difficult to provide because it is special to the particular destination and associated with a set of special values specific to the location. For example, Paris may be regarded as romantic, Nepal as mystic, etc. Thus, the author slightly modified three questions posited by Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) to examine different component of the image: (1) *"What three characteristics/attributes come to mind when you think of Marrakesh as a travel destination?"* (2) "*Please describe the general atmosphere/mood that you feel about Marrakesh after reading the blog/browsing the official website?"* and *(3)* "*Please list any distinctive/unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Marrakesh?"* (O' Leary and Deegan 2003; Choi, Chan, and Wu 1999; Grosspietsch 2006; Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2008; Pan and Li 2011). The last question was *"Overall, what three words would you use to describe Marrakesh as a place to visit?"* This question was based on Crompton's (1979) definition of destination image and was designed to probe visitors' beliefs and expectations when they think about a particular place (Hsu, Wolfe and Kang, 2004).

The third section probed respondents' travel intentions and behaviors. An open-ended question was asked if they liked Marrakesh after reading the material and the reasons why people liked or disliked Marrakesh. After that, respondents' likelihood of considering Marrakesh as a future destination and of recommending others to visit Marrakesh was asked.

At the beginning of the second section, subjects within each group were asked to follow the directions and click on the web link embedded in the survey page. It would open a new window as well as lead subjects to a certain information source. For those who were assigned to travel blogs, they would choose only one of the three blog websites and pick one blog to read carefully. While for those who were assigned to DMO's website, they just need to browse the website. When the reading is accomplished, subjects were led back to the survey page and required to answer the rest questions in their own words. Survey duration for each subject was checked to elevate the quality of the answers. Uncompleted surveys or surveys finished within 5 minutes were deleted. The questionnaire was also translated into Chinese with the help of bilingual researchers who are professional in the area of tourism. Participants were requested to answer questions in their native languages, either Chinese or English. For typical Chinese respondents, reading in English whereas writing in Chinese would be helpful in eliminating the gap caused by different levels of English proficiency since past literature suggested that reading ability transfers more easily from first language to second language than does writing ability (Carson et al., 1990). In other words, it implies that the literate Chinese adults who are learning English will be more comfortable reading in English than writing in English. This finding was also validated by Test Taker Performance Report 2012 published by IELTS. IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is the language of communication. There are four sub-tests to the IELTS test: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Each test is assessed on a 9-band scale and the report scores both overall and by individual skill. According to the test result statistics,

Chinese students turn in a worse performance at Writing than at any other parts. Chinese student's mean score for each section is: Listening (5.7), Reading (5.9), Writing (5.3), Speaking (5.4). Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Chinese-speakers will be able to express themselves more easily if writing in their native language. In addition, based on the results of word count of original textual data derived from respondents' answers, Chinese and American groups used basically same amount of words when answering the open-ended questions (Chinese: 8747 vs. American: 7202). Survey duration is another key factor that may influence the quality of collected data. According to the survey duration statistics provided by Qualtrics, Chinese group and American group spent roughly equal time in the survey. The results of both word count and survey durations help to rule out possible confounding factors in order to make sure the variances come from the key factors, not sampling issues. A brief introduction and explanation of the research were added to the beginning of the survey. Besides, the principle researcher's email address was publicly available in order to facilitate communication and ensure there is no misunderstanding during the process. The online survey was distributed via the university's Qualtrics online platform with the help of the Registration Center. Email invitations were sent out to targeted cultural groups from March 2013 to June 2013. If potential participants did not respond within 7 days, another email reminder would be sent again. The second round of email invitation was sent out in the middle of data collection and the last round was completed in June 2013.

Last but not least, in order to verify the difference of two information sources in their information emphasis, a content analysis of most popular words from sampled travel

blogs and DMO's website were conducted. Figure 3.2 is the screen shot of sampled blog websites. It was hypothesized that the DMO's website and travel blog website were different in terms of the content they distribute online (Chen et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2009; Tang et al., 2009), and the results of content analysis proved it. Table 3.2 shows the top 50 most frequently used keywords in sample blogs and the DMO's website. These words were categorized into 9 categories: general description, entertainment, transportation, sightseeing, food, history, shopping, tourism and accommodation (Tang, Soojin, Morrison and Lehto, 2005, 2009).Comparing the words in the two groups, only 9 words were identical, while 41 words were dissimilar. To be specific, the DMO's website emphasizes the historical heritage of Marrakesh and attempts to market Marrakesh as a destination with rich history. In addition, the percentages of words describing entertainment activities (8.97%) and sightseeing (31.97%) on the DMO's website were higher than those on the blog websites (2.13% vs. 24.37%), which illustrates the role of DMO's website in promoting activities and local attractions. Moreover, the proportion of total words related to tourism, shopping, and accommodation were lower for the DMO's website (3.45% vs. 2.0% vs. 1.44%) than travel blogs (12.09% vs. 5.8% vs. 3.58%), which means bloggers who are real travelers care more about travel-related experience. Similarly, few information regarding food and transportation were posted on the DMO's website, whereas bloggers did mention them in their descriptions (7.45% vs. 5.03%), therefore attesting the importance of these elements in delivering unforgettable travel experience. Overall, one could tell that contents on the DMO's website offer valuable information about entertainment activities and attractions,

while blog contents cover more areas of travel experience and reflects the real perspectives of visitors.

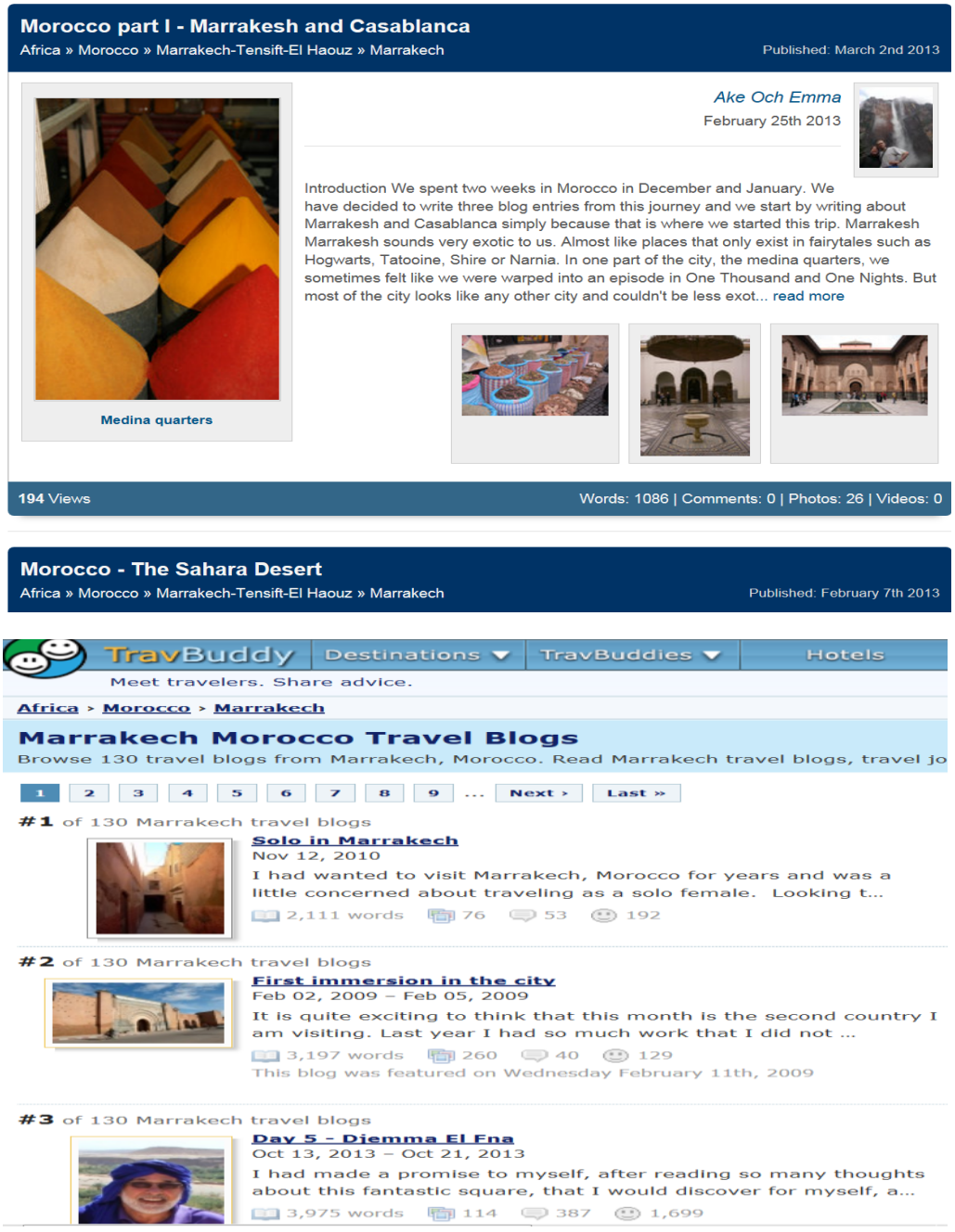

Figure 3-2 Screen shot of sampled blog website

Table 3-2 Top 50 keywords in blogs and DMO's website

General Description	morocco	162
	Marrakesh	78
	city	42
	town/village	34
	enjoy	29
	discover	26
	experience	24
	famous	22
	Mediterranean	16
	modern	15
	relax	14
	luxury	12
	protect	12
	unique	12
	life	12
Sub-total		510
Percentage		40.87%
History/culture	tradition	45
	culture	42
	historical	20
	heritage	19
	Berber	15
Sub-total		141
Percentage		11.30%
Entertainment	festival	23
	ski	19

Category	Word & phrases in website	Frequency
General Description	Marrakesh	88
	nice/great	49
	morocco	48
	people	36
	beautiful	27
	night	27
	city	26
	town	15
	interesting	11
	love	11
	blog	10
	wonderful	10
	experience	10
	talk	10
	watch	10
	adventure	9
Sub-total		397
Percentage		38.39%
Tourism	America	39
	tourist	23
	guide	19
	France	17
	English	15
	photo	12
Sub-total		125
Percentage		12.09%
History/culture	Arabic	12
Sub-total		12
Percentage		1.16%
Entertainment	snake	12
	charmer	10
Sub-total		22
Percentage		2.13%
Accommodation	hotel	17
	pool	10
	room	10
Sub-total		37
Percentage		3.58%
Sightseeing	Djemaa_el_Fna	66
	riad	42
	medina	34
	garden	27
	square	25
	terrace	20

	golf course	18
	sports	15
	music	13
	activity	12
	event	12
Sub-total		112
Percentage		8.97%
Sightseeing	mountain	43
	nature	37
	beach	35
	Djemaa_el_Fna	32
	art	29
	coast	29
	medina	25
	desert	22
	garden	21
	national park	21
	souk	18
	water	17
	landscape	15
	magnificent	15
	museum	14
	architecture	14
	sand	12
Sub-total		399
Percentage		31.97%
Shopping	numerous product	13
	spice	12
Sub-total		25
Percentage		2.0%
Tourism	tourist	18
	atmosphere	13
	international	12
Sub-total		43
Percentage		3.45%
Accommodation	hotel	18
Sub-total		18
Percentage		1.44%
Food		
Transportation		

	street	16
	plant	11
	koutoubia	11
Sub-total		252
Percentage		24.37%
Shopping	shop	20
	money	14
	price	13
	dirham	13
Sub-total		60
Percentage		5.8%
Food	food	16
	tea	14
	dinner	13
	lunch	12
	cook	11
	restaurant	11
Sub-total		77
Percentage		7.45%
Transportation	walk	23
	taxi	20
	airport	9
Sub-total		52
Percentage		5.03%

3.4 Semantic Network Analysis

In the literature, structured questionnaires and quantitative analysis methods in the area of destination image research have been criticized because respondents were asked to subjectively rate a set of predetermined attributes. The measurement might not be holistic because the attributes could be unimportant to them, and important attributes could be missing (Timmermans, van der Heijden, and Westerveld 1982). In accordance with research objectives of the research, the exploratory study attempted to explore pre-visitors' perceived destination images of Marrakesh via analyzing their concepts of the destination in term of functional attributes, affective attitude and behavior intentions. Additionally, it has been argued that the meaning of a concept can only be determined by the relationship with other concepts (Barnett et al., 1984; Palmer et al., 1984; Woelfel et al., 1980). Traditional content analysis based on word count can be misleading because words are used in a variety of contexts with different intended meaning. Thus, in order to capture the relations among concepts/keywords and investigate the context of the discourse, a technique called Semantic Network Analysis was employed in the research. Three programs: AutoMap 3.0, ROST Content Mining System, and UCINET 6 Software were adopted.

3.4.1 Automap 3.0 Program

AutoMap 3.0 is a network text analysis tool that extracts, analyzes, represents, and compares mental models from texts. The program reads the text and produces results about concept counts, frequency rankings, semantic networks and multidimensional

scaling concept maps. To be more specific, network text analysis is a specific text analysis method that encodes links between words in a text and builds a network of the linked words (Diesner and Carley 2004, 2005). All textual data were downloaded from Qualtrics and saved as .txt file. Answers to aforementioned image-related questions were analyzed separately. Keeping in mind that there were four experiment groups in the study, four.txt files were integrated in the end with one for each group. Moreover, answers to the question *"Overall, what three words would you use to describe Marrakesh as a place to visit?"* were analyzed alone. Similarly, four .txt files were saved at this step. Question, "*After reading the material, do you like Marrakesh? Why or why not?"* measured respondents' overall affection for Marrakesh and probed the reasons. Four .txt files were also saved at this step. As a result, there were twelve .txt files in the end.

For each file, it was imported into AutoMap because the program takes raw, free flowing and unmarked texts as input. When the input texts were loaded into Automap, the program enabled researchers to clean and refine text data through "Preprocess" procedure. First of all, all text data were manipulated to remove prepositions and pronouns because they show little content themselves. Deleted words included but not limited to "a", "the", "to", "it", "she", "he", "I" and etc. Similarly, noise words such as "Day and Month Words", "Complete Numbers" and "Single Letters" with no meanings were eliminated from the entire text to achieve interpretable results. Thirdly, all text data were converted to lowercase to decrease the number of meaningful concepts. Fourth, AutoMap automatically corrected common misspelling such as "intersting", "comonplace", "Mararkesh" etc.

The following procedure “Generate” started with the generation of thesauri. In Automap, a thesaurus is a list that associates multiple concrete concepts with more common abstract concepts. “Nice” and “good”, for instance, are two frequently used concepts that stand for similar meaning. We defined “nice” as a more generalized concept and associated the text-level concept (“good”) with generalized concept (“nice”). Another application of thesauri is the replacement of word strings with single concepts. For instance, the famous attraction in Marrakesh, “Main Square” incorporates two words: “main”, and “square”. The two words have distinct meaning if they were separated and used individually. However, once they were combined together in the context we analyzed, it referred to a particular new concept. This also explains one of the advantages of using “concept” instead of “word” because concepts can be compound words or whole phases that make a specific meaning. Besides, establishing thesauri also helped to replace plurals with singulars, and past tense with present tense. Table 3.3 displays an example of user-defined thesauri. After applying the thesauri, a concept list that contains all concepts occurred and the related frequencies is automatically created. An overview of the concept list enabled the researchers to highlight unexpected meaningless concepts that passed the “Preprocess” filter. Some of the unexpected words (i.e. “come”, “country”, “room”, “place” etc.) were even frequently used in travel-related text but would not be useful in interpreting the data. These concepts were then saved as a delete list and could be used in the next step to refine the concept list. Multiple runs of the program were needed at this step before achieving any consistent and interpretable results. In the end, final concept list was generated after applying both thesauri and delete list.

Table 3-3 Thesauri (partial)

concrete concept	common abstract concept
djemma	Djemaa_el_Fna
el	Djemaa_el_Fna
fna	Djemaa_el_Fna
el-fna	Djemaa_el_Fna
jemma	Djemaa_el_Fna
jemaa	Djemaa_el_Fna
marrakech	marrakesh
badii palace	El_Badi_Palace
jardin majorelle	Majorelle_Garden
bahia palace	Bahia_Palace
koutoubia minaret	Koutoubia_Minaret
main square	Main_Square
flea market	Flea_Market
yves st laurent garden	Majorelle_Garden
majorelle garden	Majorelle_Garden
musee de marrakech	Marrakech_Museum
saadinn tombs	Saadinn_Tombs
medersa_ben_youssef	Ben_Youssef_Medrassa
djemaa	Djemaa_el_Fna
visit	travel
cultural	culture
history	historical
historic	historical
warm	hot
tour	travel
visiting	travel
adventurous	adventure
arab	arabic
architect	architecture
architecture3	architecture
blogger	blog
chaos	chaotic
charmers	charmer
colors	colorful
comfort	comfortable
comforting	comfortable

The last procedure relies on “Mapping” the semantic network using the concept list generated earlier. The first step was to establish semantic networks. According to literatures, semantic networks are knowledge representation schemes involving nodes and links between nodes. The nodes represent concepts and the links represent relations between nodes. Therefore, it is a way of representing relationships between concepts and this relationship is based on co-occurrence matrix of identified concepts. To achieve this goal, a co-occurrence or similarity concept-by-concept matrix was created. In the matrix, the value of each element indicated the frequencies of the corresponding two words occurred simultaneously in a sentence. Table 3.4 is a partial example of co-occurrence matrix. The elements of co-occurrence matrix were keywords identified before and the numbers indicate how many times two corresponding elements co-occurred. Then, a

semantic network was established based on the matrix via AutoMap automatically. The theoretical foundation lies on the windowing method created by Danowski (1993).

Table 3-4 Co-occurrence/similarity matrix (partial)

	adventure	architecture	atmosphere	beautiful	buildings	bustling	busy	chaotic	climate	colorful	crowded	culture
adventure												
architecture				1								1
atmosphere												
beautiful		9			1		1					
buildings												
bustling							1					
busy			1					2		2	3	
chaotic			1	1			2			1	1	
climate				1			2					
colorful							1				4	
crowded												1
culture						1				1		
Djemaa_el_Fna									1			
environment		1										
exciting							1	1				
exotic			5									1
expensive												
food				2								1
friendly				1			1					1
gardens												
great	1						1		9			1
historical		3		1					1			3
hot							2		20			1
interesting		4		2				1		2		3
luxury										2		
markets											2	1
Marrakesh												
Palaces												
people												
relax			1									
rich												5

3.4.2 ROST Content Mining System

ROST Content Mining System (ROST) was applied in the study to analyze answerers of typical Chinese subjects, due to the fact that most prevalent content analysis programs or semantic network analysis programs can only deal with English words. ROST is a program specific to Chinese semantic network analysis and has been employed in social sciences in recent years (Shen, 2010). The results of ROST are comparable with those of AutoMap, for the reason that ROST program shares the basic algorithms with AutoMap while establishing semantic networks. The only difference relied on the algorithms of counting and analyzing key words' occurrences in the textual data. In ROST, texts were firstly divided into chunks of separate Chinese words. These words were short and

usually one sentence composed of one or a few words. Secondly, “stopwords” which include meaningless prepositions, conjunctions, and transitive verbs were eliminated from the raw data (i.e., “and”, “to”, “the”, “that”). The occurrences of the remaining words were then counted to identify the most frequently used words. The last step was projected to refine the data by dealing with misspellings, synonyms, multiword concepts, and singular or plural forms of keywords. Similarly, a co-occurrence matrix based on the concepts was established.

3.4.3 UCINET 6 Software

UCINET 6(Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 1992) for Windows (UCINET) is a software package for the analysis of social network data. The co-occurrence matrix generated via Automap and ROST was inputted into UCINET as input dataset. It is important to mention that UCINET could only deal with English words, so the similarity matrixes for Chinese groups were translated into English by utilizing Google translator (http://translate.google.com) and the results were examined by one bilingual tourism researcher who has professional knowledge of destination image. A visualization tool called NetDraw came with the installation of UCINET and was used to visualize semantic network.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The results of frequency analysis of most popular words suggested that the two types of information sources were quite different in their information emphasis. Therefore, it is meaningful to move a step forward and investigate how culture influences people's interpretation of the information. The descriptive data analysis revealed characteristics of experiment participants, while semantic network analysis and centrality analysis indicated the participants' perceived destination image of Marrakesh. A correspondence analysis was conducted to gain a holistic picture of the relations among information source, culture, and pre-visit destination image. In the end, subjects' overall affection for Marrakesh was examined.

4.1 Participants' Profiles

Table 4.1 presents the socio-demographic information of the research participants. After deleting all uncompleted or unqualified questionnaires, we collected 428 questionnaires that passed all filters. The differences in the number of questionnaires collected for each group was statistically insignificant (DMO-USA: 99, DMO-CHN: 102; BLOG-USA: 115, BLOG-CHN: 112). The percentage of female respondents turned out to be a little higher than that of male respondents. As mentioned earlier in the pretest, the gender distribution difference was confirmed to be insignificant. In addition, homogeneity of age appears in

the measurement because we used only college students in the sample. The majority of respondents were between fifteen and twenty-four years old. The results also showed that most respondents in the two Chinese groups had a TOEFL score over 90 (i.e., DMO-CHN: 72.6%; BLOG-CHN: 67.8%), which confirms their ability to understand English without difficulty. Lastly, as shown in the table, participants hold a relatively positive behavior intention. For example, each group has an intention to visit Marrakesh after being exposed to blogs or DMOs' websites. However, they prefer visiting Marrakesh to recommending Marrakesh to other people. In general, both cultural groups were neutral about recommending Marrakesh to others, demonstrating no favorable behavioral intention.

Table 4-1 Participants' profile (DMOs' websites, n = 99 + 102 = 201)

Demographic characteristic	American group (percentage)	Chinese group (percentage)
Gender		
Male	39 (39.4)	37 (36.2)
Female	60 (60.6)	65 (63.8)
Age		
15-24	63 (63.6)	88 (86.3)
25-34	27 (27.2)	14 (13.7)
35-44	7 (7.0)	0
45-54	2 (2.2)	0
55 and older	0	0
TOEFL Score		
<=90		27 (26.5)
91-100		52 (51.0)
101-110		17 (16.7)
111-120		5 (4.9)
No TOEFL		1 (0.9)
Intention to visit Marrakesh		
Yes	64 (64.6)	58 (56.9)
No	35 (35.4)	44 (43.1)
Intention to recommend Marrakesh		
Yes	45 (45.5)	54 (52.9)
No	54 (54.5)	48 (47.1)

Table 4-1 (continued) Participants' profile (online travel blogs, n = 115 + 112 =227)

Demographic characteristic	American group (frequency)	Chinese group (frequency)
Gender		
Male	59 (51.3)	44 (39.3)
Female	56 (48.7)	68 (60.7)
Age		
15-24	81 (70.4)	89 (79.5)
25-34	25 (21.7)	23 (20.5)
35-44	6 (5.2)	0
45-54	3 (2.7)	0
55 and older	0	0
TOEFL Score		
<=90		34 (30.4)
91-100		50 (44.6)
101-110		18 (16.1)
111-120		8 (7.1)
No TOEFL		2 (1.8)
Intention to visit Marrakesh		
Yes	69 (60.0)	65 (58.0)
No	46 (40.0)	47 (42.0)
Intention to recommend Marrakesh		
Yes	53 (46.1)	55 (49.1)
No	62 (53.9)	57 (50.9)

4.2 Frequency Analysis

The frequency analysis resulted in the construction of Table 4.2. The table listed the top 15 most frequently used keywords while answering the question "Overall, what three

words would you use to describe Marrakesh as a place to visit?" Answers were copied and pasted in .txt files for each group and then analyzed using the text-mining programs mentioned in chapter 3. The listed words occurred at least four times in the corpus and represented a high percentage of the total frequencies of all words. In addition, a large number of words were singletons and, as such, were not included in the table. The number of singletons was much more than that of the frequently used keywords even though singletons were only used once or twice in the entire text. As such, the results followed the power-law distribution: the description of respondents' perceived images of Marrakesh was dominated by a small number of words, but the overall corpus was extremely rich and largely idiosyncratic.

The singletons merely demonstrate the main concept of the destination image, though they contain almost every aspect of tourism experience. Thus, we focused on the most frequently used keywords that represent the key characteristics of Marrakesh. In general, Marrakesh was recognized as an exotic destination with beautiful scenery, a long history, and a rich culture. Hospitality and friendliness of local residents were also mentioned in each experiment group. Incidences of the words hot and dry indicate that climate or weather was another element that most in the groups were interested in.

Additionally, different groups showed variation in their fields of interest and perceived atmosphere. For instance, American respondents experienced a sense of excitement and interest in Marrakesh while Chinese counterparts placed a high level of emphasis on mysterious feelings. Chinese respondents mentioned landscape aspects such as *desert* and *nature* more frequently than Americans did.

There were also discrepancies between perceived destination images projected through the DMO's website and those projected through travel blogs. Respondents brought up the words *peaceful* and *relaxing* after browsing the DMO's website, whereas respondents to travel blogs reported a busy,

crowded, bustling, and chaotic environment. Another interesting observation is that both cultural groups associated *expensive* and *luxurious* with the image of Marrakesh projected by the DMO's website, but none of them mentioned these characteristic in response to images projected by blogs.

Table 4-2 Most frequently used keywords in describing Marrakesh as a place to visit

DMO-USA		DMO-CHN		BLOG-USA		BLOG-CHN	
Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree
Exotic	23	Mysterious	26	Busy	24	Mysterious	24
Beautiful	17	Exotic	23	Interesting	21	Exotic	24
Historical	16	Beautiful	16	Culture	17	Crowded	12
Hot	13	Landscape	13	Unique	14	Culture	9
Relaxing	13	Hospitality	11	Exciting	13	Interesting	9
Culture	11	Culture	11	Exotic	13	History	9
Exciting	8	Nature	10	Hot	13	Chaotic	9
Friendly	8	History	9	Beautiful	11	Unique	8
Colorful	6	Silent	7	Historical	7	Beautiful	8
Expensive	6	Desert	7	Vibrant	7	Dry	7
Interesting	6	Age-old	6	Adventure	6	Hospitality	7
Peaceful	6	Original	6	Crowded	6	Landscape	7
Different	5	Relaxing	6	Friendly	6	Age-old	5
Luxurious	5	Luxurious	6	Lively	6	Desert	5
Pretty	5	Friendly	4	Bustling	5	Simple	5

4. 3 Semantic Network Analysis

In semantic network analysis and centrality analysis, the destination image of Marrakesh was measured across the four groups through the aforementioned open-ended questions. Answers to the questions were combined, copied, and pasted into the .txt file for each group. Therefore, there were four files in total. In each of the integrated files, words that occurred three times or more in the corpus were defined as the most frequently used words. Then, the most frequently used words were smoothed out following the steps mentioned in chapter three. The lemmatization of words and combination of phrases

minimized the quantities of meaningful concepts, thus facilitating the visualization and interpretation of the semantic networks of images. Forty words in each of the four integrated files passed the filters and were deemed image variables to be used to create similarity or co-occurrence matrixes. The symmetrical adjacency matrixes were then input into UCINET for semantic-network and centrality analysis.

4.3.1 Demographic Measures for Multiple Semantic Networks

The number of nodes and ties are two basic demographic measures for networks. As shown in Table 4.3, the number of nodes did not change much among the four groups, but the number of ties increased dramatically for group BLOG-USA. This suggests that the American group interconnects image-related themes in the network more actively. In other words, it means that the respondents mentioned and interconnected the perceived image variables more frequently. The underlying reason may be complicated: on the one hand, it could be caused by the blog content to which the participants were exposed. On the other hand, Chinese and American culture (i.e. languages) may lead to different interpretations of the same event, thus making Americans involve a higher level of cognitive elaborations while providing feedbacks towards the travel blog and the destination. However, it is still unknown that whether Americans showed more interest in travel blog information than DMO's website information because of demonstrating a greater willingness to provide feedbacks after reading a blog.

Network density is another criterion used to assess the centralization of semantic networks. The higher the network density, the more the image variables are connected to each other. Hence, the measurement of density is related to the number of nodes to some extent. The more the nodes in the network, the higher the possibility of having a high network density. As from the table, the densities of the four networks were generally low (under 0.3), which suggests great potential to develop future variation in destination image variables. The density of network for BLOG-USA was much higher than that for DMO-USA, which supports the previous conclusion that Americans interconnect image-related themes in the blog network more actively. The density of BLOG-CHN and DMO-CHN were almost identical, which is not surprisingly because they obtained an almost equal number of ties. In summary, as to the difference between information sources, Chinese respondents interconnected the image variables in the DMO's website network more frequently while Americans invested more cognition effort in the blog network.

Table 4-3 Demographic measures for semantic networks

Group	Number of nodes	Number of ties	Density	Network centralization

DMO-CHN	36	196	0.156	49.85%
DMO-USA	37	126	0.095	26.57%
BLOG-CHN	39	198	0.127	27.82%
BLOG-USA	39	352	0.238	8.96%

In a network, if a node or a number of nodes are more central than the rest, the network is more hierarchical, and the betweenness centralization score is high (Freeman 1979). The betweenness centralization scores varied extremely among the four groups (Table 4.3). DMO-CHN had a substantial degree of concentration among image variables because its highest score was 49.85%. In other words, most Chinese respondents tended to depict Marrakesh using a limited number of certain words, which also suggests that Chinese respondents think alike and achieve some sort of consensus. The least centralized network was mapped by group BLOG-USA (8.96%). With an almost equal number of image variables in the networks, the DMO networks showed stronger centralization tendency than blog networks. Moreover, the graphs depicted by Chinese groups were more likely to be centered on several nodes, while those for American groups were less concentrated.

4.3.2 Marrakesh Image Analysis of Group BLOG-CHN

The semantic network that emerges from the group BLOG-CHN's responses is shown in Figure 4.1. The links refer to a co-occurrence relationship between any pair of destination

variables. Thirty-nine nodes were kept in the network, with one isolated node deleted from the network because it was not connected to any other node. The arrows of the links show the direction of the relationship, which has little meaning in this study because symmetric matrixes were applied. The width of the ties indicates the number of co-occurrences between each pair. The size of the node reflects the results of betweenness centrality measures for each node in the network. A larger square indicates a node that has a greater betweenness centrality value, which means this node was considered a bridge in the network and placed on a higher level of importance.

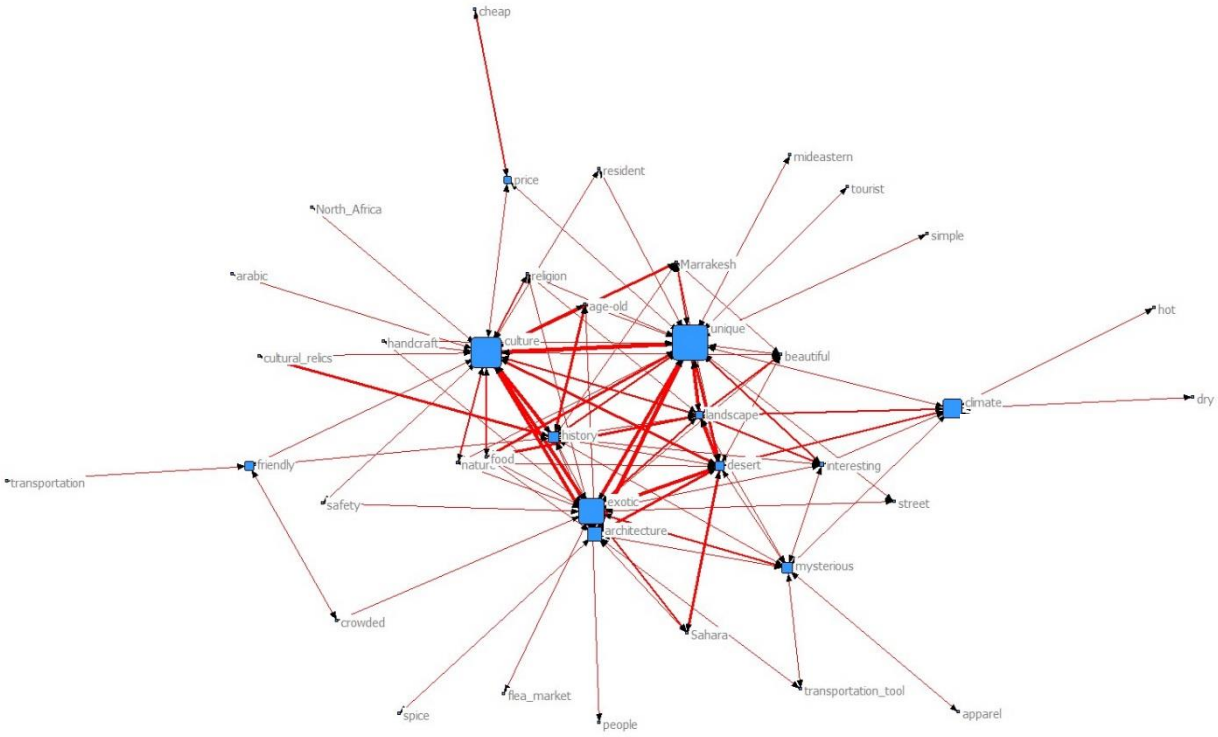

Figure 4-1 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for group BLOG-CHN

To be specific, one could tell that *culture*, *unique*, *climate*, and *exotic* were variables that most frequently serve as bridge in the network, followed by variables such as *architecture*, *history*, *landscape*, and *desert*. *Unique*, *exotic* and *culture* sat in the center

of the network while *climate*, along with *hot* and *dry* comprised a subcenter on the right of the graph.

Group BLOG-CHN has placed much emphasis on elements such as culture, history, and natural resources, which is not surprising given that the long history and exotic culture of Marrakesh was easily recognized from pictures and textual depictions. In the network, *architecture* and *cultural relics*, such as historic buildings, mosques, city walls and gates, and tombs were closely related to *culture* and *history*. Words that support the culture and history image of Marrakesh also include *age-old*, *arabic*, *north africa*, and *mideastern*. Compared to culture and history, other image themes were placed on a subordinate level of emphasis, having received limited attention from respondents. Natural resources, for instance, consisted of *landscape*, *Sahara*, *desert*, and *nature* in the graph. *Cheap*, *price*, *flea market*, *spice*, and *handcraft* were key elements under the theme of shopping. Other than the image themes mentioned above, Chinese respondents also mentioned characteristics of Marrakesh such as climate, transportation, food, safety, people, and religion.

Moreover, because an open-ended question was asked to describe the atmosphere of Marrakesh, *mysterious*, *crowded*, *friendly*, and *simple* were mentioned by respondents. It's worth noting that no unique tourist attractions or tourist activities were reported by this group.

4.3.3 Marrakesh Image Analysis of Group DMO-CHN

Figure 4.2 shows the semantic network for group DMO-CHN. Unlike BLOG-CHN, the network was highly centered on the node *exotic*. In accordance with previous analysis, *culture, unique, landscape*, and *architecture* were words that serves as bridges in the network. Similar to group BLOG-CHN, DMO-CHN perceived several destination image themes, including culture and history (*culture, history, old*, and *original*), natural resources (*desert, waterfall, nature,* and *landscape*), shopping (*cheap, price*), food (*cuisine*), and climate (*dry* and *tropical*). One unique cluster in this network was *website* and *picture*, which are placed at the top of the map. This cluster implies that the Chinese group paid attention to visual information while browsing the DMO's website.

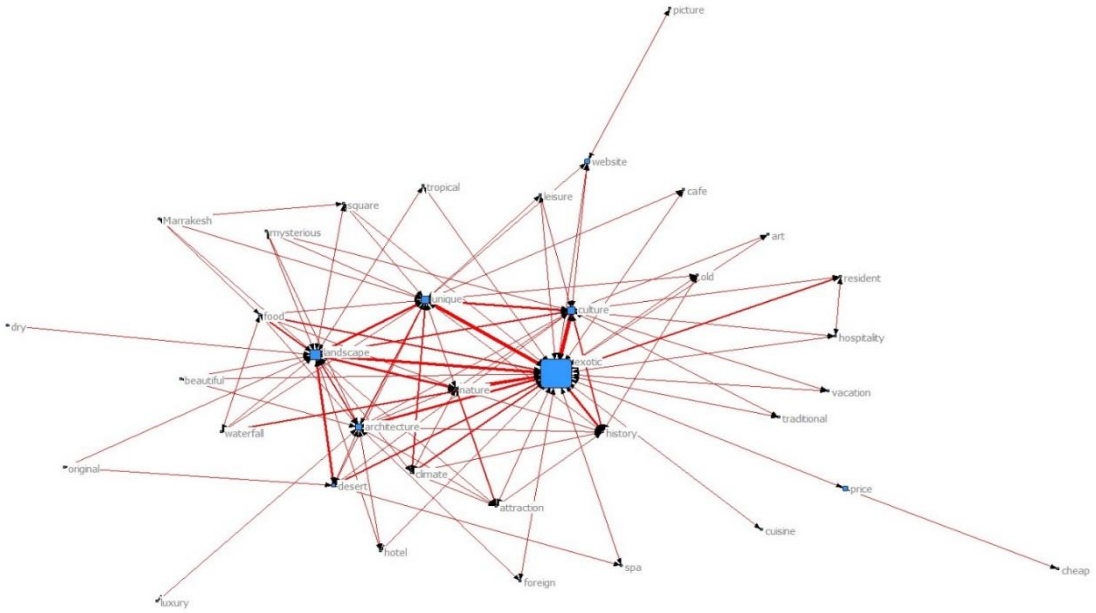

Figure 4-2 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for group DMO-CHN

Unlike travel blogs, the DMO's website gave Chinese students some information about entertainment activities unique to Marrakesh. The frequently mentioned activities included enjoying spas at hotels and visiting art museums and cafés. *Square* was

mentioned abstractly as tourist attractions. As to atmosphere in Marrakesh, Chinese respondents used *hospitality, leisure,* and *vacation* to demonstrate a relaxing and enjoyable environment.

4.3.4 Marrakesh Image Analysis of Group BLOG-USA

The semantic network for group BLOG-USA is shown in Figure 4.3. To simplify the network to show clear image variables and connection patterns, a new network that only kept ties with a strength greater than three was mapped as Figure 4.4. The reduced network only showed image variables that co-occurred with other variables for at least four times. Several results were indicated by the network.

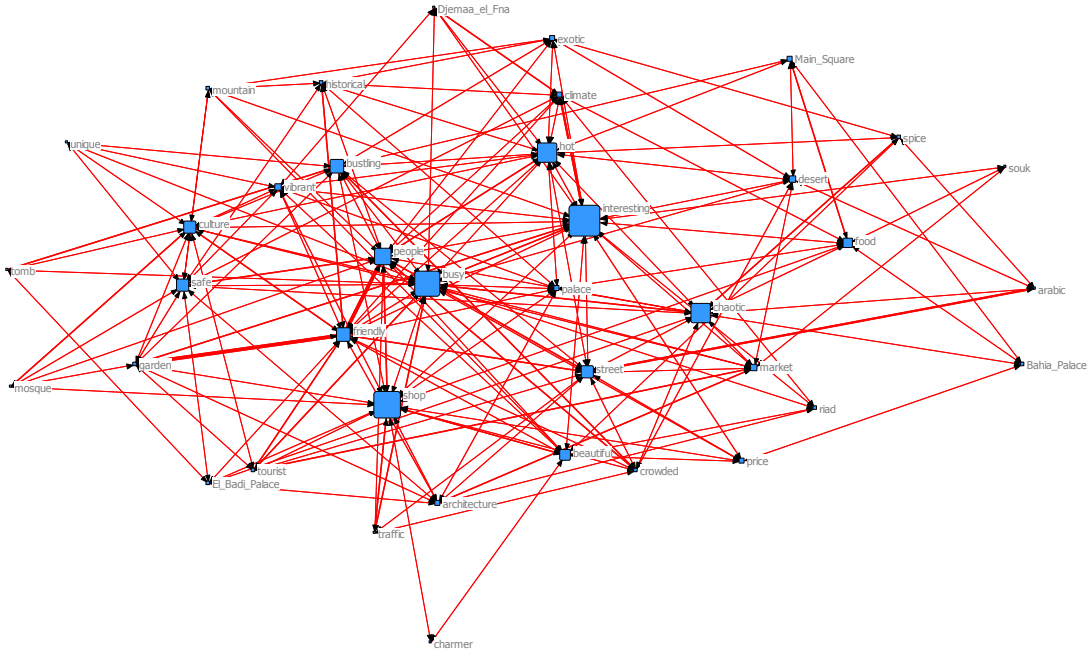

Figure 4-3 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for group BLOG-USA

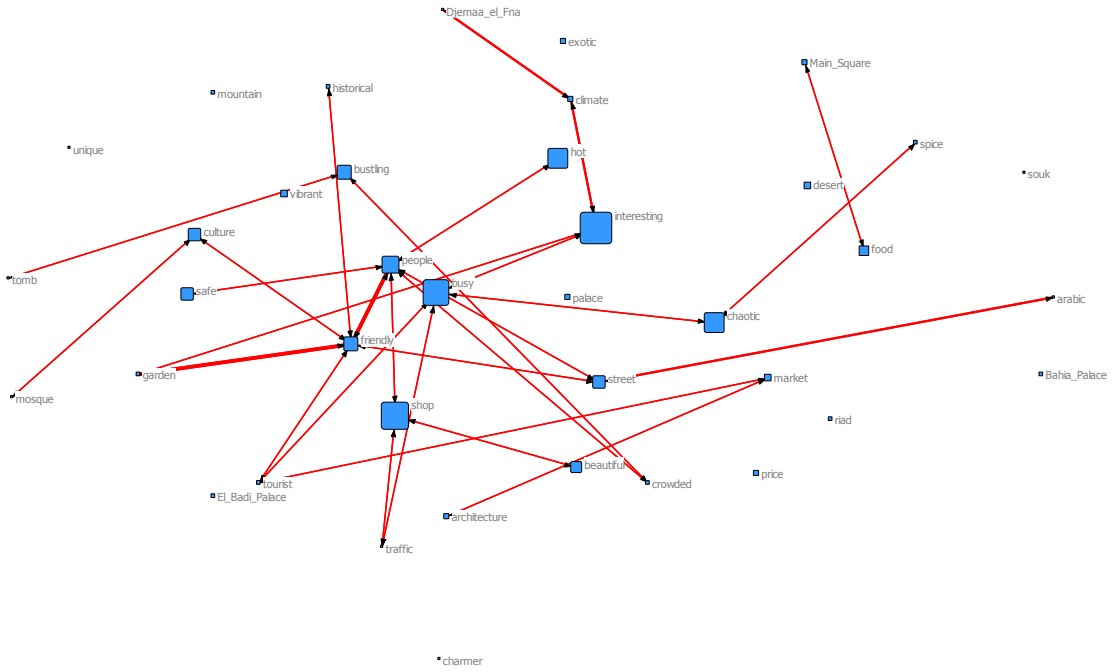

Figure 4-4 Reduced semantic network of Marrakesh images for group BLOG-USA (tie strength > 3)

First, there were several subgroups scattered in the network, which demonstrates that more nodes play important bridge roles in the network than stay latent and offer no contributions to other nodes. Since the network is more dispersed, this implies that Americans didn't rely on densly centered variables to describe Marrakesh. In other words, unlike Chinese, Americans are encouraged to freely express their own opinions without restraints of obeying social consensus. Thererfoer, more connections and more significant variables emerge in American networks. Another possible explanation would be that Americans emphasised more aspects of Marrakesh after reading blogs, which also reveals that the travel blogs provided more visible information on almost every aspect of travel experience than did the DMO's website. Visible information means information that was perceived by blog readers successfully. These information may be significant only to

travelers but not DMOs because sometimes DMOs would like to position the destination in the way unexpected by real visitors.

Second, unlike the networks discussed previously, this network had fewer strong ties, and these ties were spread out rather than centered in the middle of the network. For instance, the tie *people-friendly-garden* was placed on the left, *interesting-climate—Djemaa el Fna* was on top, and *arabic-street* was on the right of the graph. Because the thickness of ties represents the measurement of degree centrality and the size of nodes represents the degree of betweenness centrality, one can tell that nodes with a high degree of centrality are not nodes with a high degree of betweenness centrality. *Djemaa el Fna* and *climate*, for instance, did not served as important bridges in the network, which means other variables did not require these variables to be connected to one another. However, according to the results of degree centrality measures, many more respondents mentioned these two words together in one sentence.

As to image themes mentioned in the graph, one could tell that culture and history (*historical*, *arabic*), climate (*hot*), natural resources (*desert*, *mountain*), shopping (*shop*, *price*, *spice*, and *market*), people (*tourist*) and food (*food*) were highlighted by Americans. Another interesting finding is that American group perceived the most tourist attractions unique to Marrakesh. This image theme contains variables such as *Djemaa el Fna*, *Bahia Palace*, *El Badi Palace*, *Main Square*, *palace*, *garden*, *mosque*, *tomb*, *riad*, and *souk*.

For BLOG-USA, the most frequent responses describing the atmosphere of Marrakesh were *vibrant*, *busy*, *bustling*, *chaotic*, *friendly*, and *beautiful*, which indicates that Marrakesh's atmosphere is perceived as vibrant and enjoyable.

4.3.5 Marrakesh Image Analysis of Group DMO-USA

Similar to the network of BLOG-USA, the semantic network of DMO-USA has several subcenters scattered throughout the graph (Figure 4.5). *Exotic*, *garden*, *unique*, and *climate* have larger betweenness centrality values than variables such as *architecture*, *beautiful*, *friendly*, *crowded*, and *culture*. The most frequently co-occurring pairs of variables were *friendly* and *people*, *hot* and *climate*, and *garden* and *Majorelle Garden*. These ties demonstrate that Marrakesh's climate, famous tourist attractions, and people were perceived as important by Americans after browsing the DMO's website.

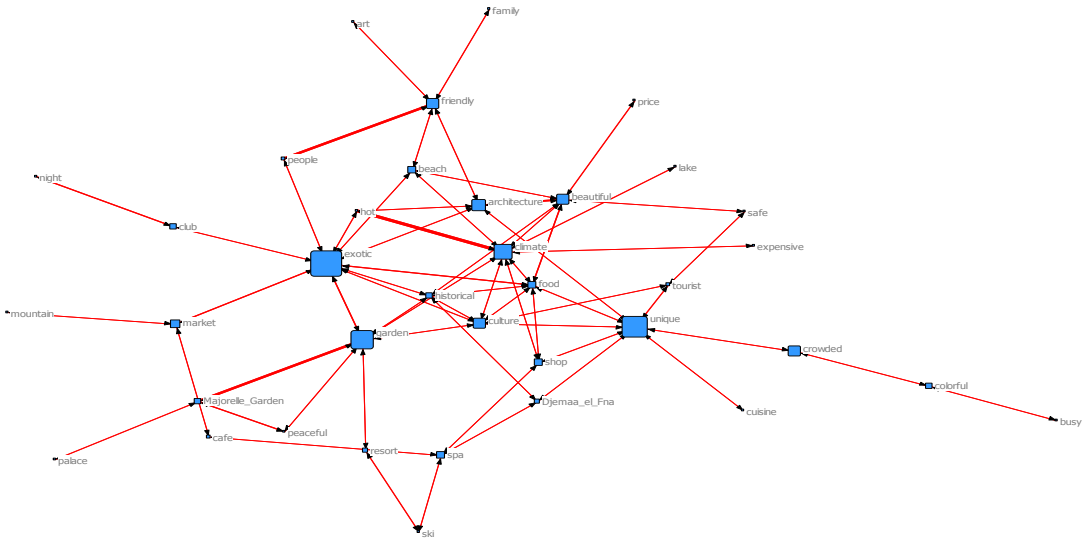

Figure 4-5 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for group DMO-USA

Other image variables mentioned in the graph include natural resources (*beach*, *mountain*, and *lake*), shopping (*expensive*, *market*, *price*, and *shop*), and food (*café* and *cuisine*). It is meaningful to note that *family* was first reported by this group, which implies that Marrakesh was valued as a destination suitable for family travel. But, because it is the only one of the four groups that made this connection, one could conclude that the positioning of Marrakesh as a family-friendly destination was not as successful as expected. It is true that there are sometimes when images projected by DMOs differ with images perceived through tourists. Other than the Majorelle Garden, the most frequently reported attractions were *Djemaa el Fna*, *art museums*, *gardens*, and *palaces.* Most attractions mentioned were found to be historical, cultural, and architectural. The most popular terms to describe tourist activities in Marrakesh were *night clubs*, *resort*, *spa*, and *ski*.

Again, in accordance with previous results, the atmosphere of Marrakesh perceived by Americans was described as *crowded*, *busy*, and *colorful*. However, *peaceful* was mentioned as well, which implies the mixed aura in Marrakesh.

4.3.6 Marrakesh Image Analysis of American Group and Chinese Group

In order to articulate the influences of cultural backgrounds on destiantion iamge perceptions, the semantic networks of both American Group and Chinese Group were developed. Unlike previous maps, these two maps disregard the influences of inforamtion source factor and was derived from combined data. For instance, the data input for

devleoping American Group Semantic Network Map was a combination of data input for network BLOG-USA and NTO-USA. Each network originally had 40 nodes like other networks did, but two isolated nodes were deleted from Chinses group.

From Figure 4.6 and 4.7, one could tell that American group had a more spread out network structure with more subgroups scattered throughout the map, while Chinese group showed an obvious centralization tendency. In addition, Americans made more connections in the network, thus resulting 304 ties in total. Chinese group, on the other hand, made less connections in the network and the total number of ties was 101.

To be specific, American group addressed the importance of image variables such as *hot climate, safe, culture,* and *beautiful.* Atmosphere elements such as *interesting, busy,* and *exciting* were highlighted in the network as well. Chinese group concerned variables such as *natural resources, exotic* and *unique history*, and *price*. No affective image attributes were identified in the network.

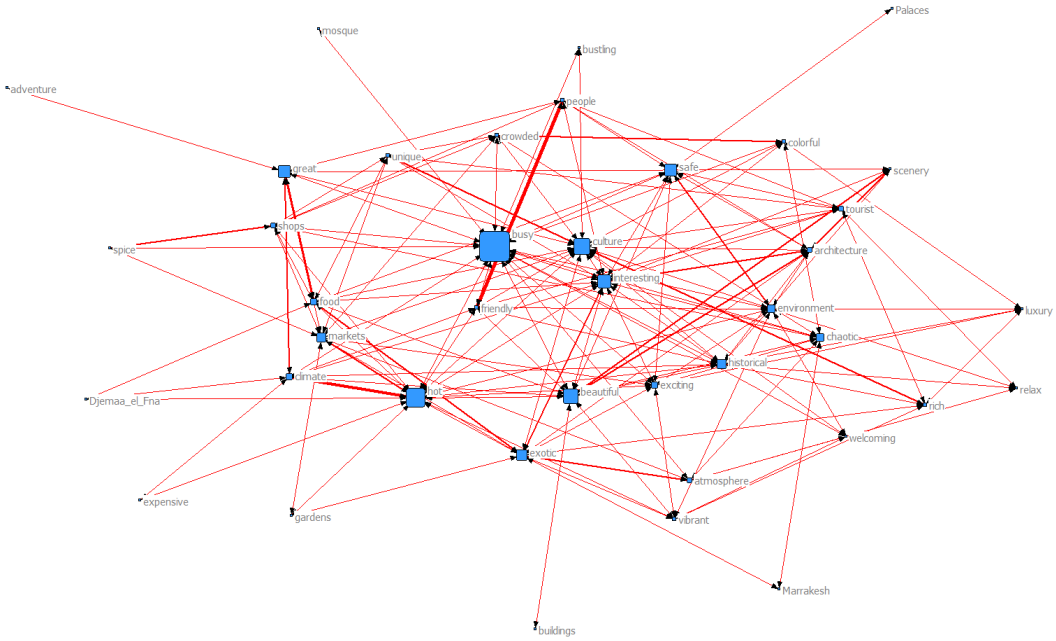

Figure 4-6 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for American Group

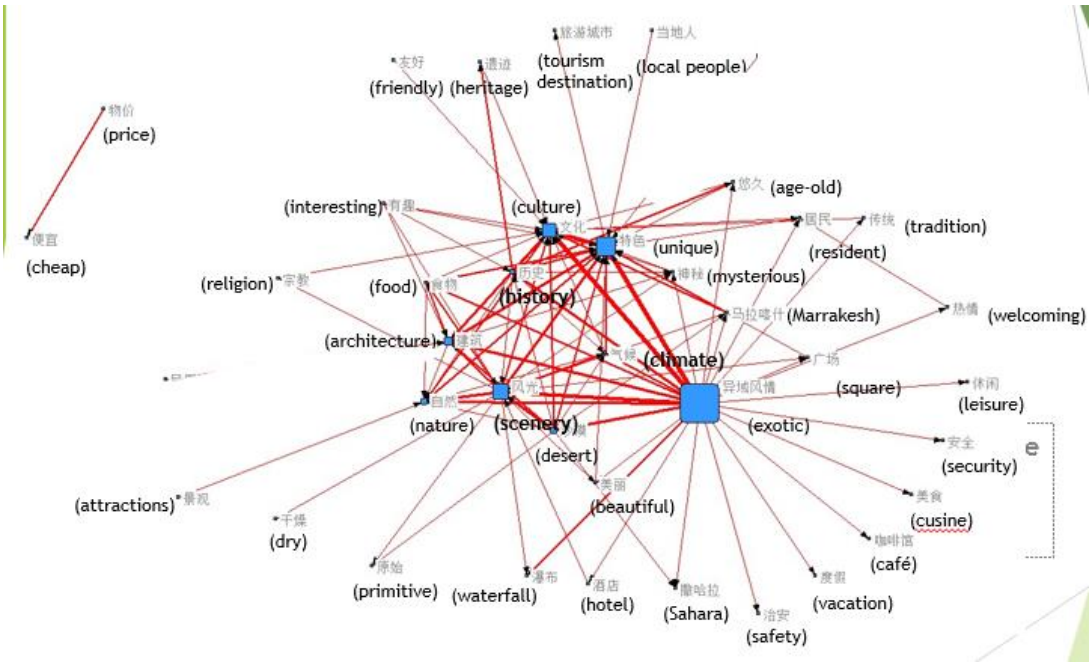

Figure 4-7 Semantic network of Marrakesh images for Chinese Group

4.4 Centrality Measurement

As we mentioned previously, three different kinds of centrality measures were used in the research to identify words that are prominent in the semantic network. According to the results of the centrality measurement, the commonality and dissimilarity regarding destination image of Marrakesh between two cultural groups and information sources were demonstrated.

4.4.1 Freeman Degree Centrality Measures

Freeman degree centrality measure was calculated to identify an actor's centrality and potential to be powerful in the network (Borgatti, Everett, and Johnson 2013). The more ties an actor has the more power it has to be accessible to resources. Since undirected data was adopted in the study, so degree centrality of an actor was only determined by how many connections it has in the network. Table 4.4 lists the top 15 words that have the highest degree centrality values in the semantic network.

Table 4-4 Freeman degree centrality measures for DMO-USA, DMO-CHN, BLOG-USA, BLOG-CHN

DMO-USA		DMO-CHN		BLOG-USA		BLOG-CHN	
Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree
Exotic	21.000	Exotic	191.000	Friendly	56.000	Culture	108.000
Climate	21.000	Landscape	109.000	People	45.000	Unique	106.000
Garden	19.000	Unique	105.000	Interesting	39.000	Exotic	85.000
Beautiful	17.000	Culture	84.000	Busy	31.000	Desert	66.000
Hot	17.000	Architecture	70.000	Shop	29.000	Landscape	64.000
Food	15.000	Nature	53.000	Garden	26.000	Architecture	58.000
Majorelle_Garden	14.000	Desert	39.000	Street	26.000	History	56.000
Friendly	13.000	History	37.000	Hot	25.000	Mysterious	31.000
Architecture	12.000	Food	34.000	Climate	23.000	Climate	29.000
Historical	10.000	Climate	30.000	Safe	21.000	Marrakesh	24.000
People	10.000	Attraction	22.000	Chaotic	21.000	Interesting	22.000
Culture	9.000	Waterfall	18.000	Culture	21.000	Nature	22.000
Unique	8.000	Resident	13.000	Bustling	18.000	Beautiful	21.000
Market	7.000	Marrakesh	13.000	Market	15.000	Food	20.000
Club	6.000	Square	13.000	Architecture	15.000	Age-old	18.000

As can be seen, words such as *exotic, unique, culture, climate, architecture* and *food* were on the top of the list in at least three networks. Thus, it was implied that Marrakesh was highly recognized as a city that has exotic culture and offers unique travel experience to potential tourists. In addition, people also care about information related to climate and food in common.

Some discrepancies between cultural groups and information sources were identified at the same time. For instance, only Group DMO-USA mentioned a local attraction *Majorelle_Garden*, which means local tourism attractions still have potentials to lure more tourists. Besides, American groups showed a higher level of emphasis on *friendly people*, while only one of the Chinese groups noticed the element of *resident*. Another interesting finding is that American groups were more attracted by tourist attractions

(*garden, Majorelle_Garden*), while Chinese groups found natural resources *(desert, waterfall, nature, landscape)* of Marrakesh fascinating.

Table 4-5 Descriptive statistics of Freeman degree centrality measures

Group	Mean	Std Dev.	Variance	Min.	Max.	Network Centralization
DMO-CHN	27.278	38.851	1509.367	3.000	191.000	23.59%
DMO-USA	6.865	6.187	38.279	1.000	21.000	3.19%
BLOG-CHN	22.000	28.054	787.050	3.000	108.000	21.10%
BLOG-USA	16.359	11.340	128.589	3.000	56.000	6.87%

Table 4.5 shows the distribution of the actor's degree centrality scores. Since the range of the number of observations/nodes is from 36-39, the results are comparable across the groups. On the average, group DMO-CHN has the highest value of 27.278 and more variability across the actors because of its standard deviations and variances. Network centralization describes the network as a whole at a macro level. Centralization is measured as the degree of variability in the observed network and processed as a percentage of that of a "star" network[2] of the same size. Not surprisingly, group DMO-CHN expresses the highest degree of inequality or variance in the network, which means that it was the most centralized network across four groups. Another interesting finding is that compared to American groups, Chinese groups are generally more centralized. Therefore, we would arrive at the conclusion that the power of individual actors varies substantially in CHN networks, which means that positional advantages of actors are unequally distributed. The result was also visualized in previous figures.

[2] "Star" network is the most centralized or unequal network for any number of actors. In the star network, there is only one actor (A) at the center of the network, while all the other actors only connect to the actor A and have degree of one.

4.4.2 Geodesic Path Closeness Centrality Measures

Since degree centrality only counts direct connections or immediate ties an actor has, rather than indirect ties to all other actors in the network, another centrality measure was adopted in the study. Closeness centrality calculates the distance from each actor to all others. "Farness" is used in the approach to represent the sum of the distance from one actor to all others. In other words, "farness" is the sum of the lengths of the shortest paths from one actor to other actors. Table 4.6 lists the top 15 words that have the smallest geodesic path closeness centrality in the semantic network. Actors with small "Farness" means that they are much closer to all the others in the network based on geodesic distances and can quickly interact with others. Therefore, they have the best visibility in the network.

Table 4-6 Geodesic path closeness centrality measures for DMO-USA, DMO-CHN, BLOG-USA, BLOG-CHN

DMO-USA		DMO-CHN		BLOG-USA		BLOG-CHN	
Theme	Farness	Theme	Farness	Theme	Farness	Theme	Farness
Exotic	78.000	Exotic	42.000	Interesting	56.000	Unique	59.000
Culture	80.000	Landscape	54.000	Busy	58.000	Culture	62.000
Food	82.000	Unique	54.000	Hot	60.000	Exotic	65.000
Garden	83.000	Culture	56.000	Shop	60.000	Desert	68.000
Architecture	83.000	Architecture	58.000	People	60.000	Landscape	69.000
Climate	83.000	Nature	63.000	Friendly	61.000	History	70.000
Historical	85.000	Food	65.000	Chaotic	64.000	Architecture	71.000
Unique	85.000	Desert	65.000	Street	64.000	Interesting	77.000
Shop	90.000	History	66.000	Bustling	65.000	Food	79.000
Beautiful	91.000	Attraction	66.000	Culture	65.000	Mysterious	79.000
Hot	93.000	Climate	67.000	Safe	66.000	Beautiful	80.000
Beach	93.000	Beautiful	69.000	Palace	67.000	Nature	81.000
Djemaa_el_Fna	98.000	Hotel	69.000	Beautiful	68.000	Climate	82.000
Tourist	99.000	Waterfall	69.000	Vibrant	68.000	Religion	83.000
Market	106.000	Square	69.000	Market	69.000	Handcraft	83.000

21.000

The results of the closeness centrality measurement are partially consistent with the previous results. For instance, American groups are more interested in shopping (*shop, market)* and sightseeing *(garden, palace*), while Chinese groups are attracted by natural resources (waterfall, desert etc.). However, it is important to notice that there are still some interesting findings. *Djemaa_el_Fna* is another famous attraction that has been mentioned in the study. In addition, BLOG-USA group placed a high level of emphasis on safety issues, whereas BLOG-CHN group stressed the influential power of the element *religion*.

Table 4-7 Descriptive statistics of geodesic path closeness centrality measures

Group	Mean	Std Dev.	Variance	Min.	Max.	Network Centralization
DMO-CHN	71.778	12.446	154.895	42	108	69.08%
DMO-USA	111.784	24.332	592.061	78	184	26.01%
BLOG-CHN	91.300	17.643	311.260	59	130	45.18%
BLOG-USA	71.538	8.302	68.915	56	91	29.18%

Table 4.7 shows the distribution of the closeness centrality scores. On average, group BLOG-USA has the smallest "farness" value of 71.538. Group DMO-USA shows more variability across all the actors in the network because of larger standard deviations and variances. Centralization is also calculated to measure the inequality in the distribution of distances across all the actors. In accordance with previous findings, group DMO-CHN demonstrates the highest degree of inequality or variance in the network.

4.4.3 Freeman Betweenness Centrality Measures

Betweenness centrality measured the extent to which an actor falls on the geodesic paths between any pairs of actors in the network. An actor that has a higher level of betweenness centrality has more power to help other actors make connections. In other words, the actor serves more as a bridge, compared to others, to facilitate communication of other actors that are not connected to each other. Normally, an actor's betweenness centrality is measured by adding up the actor's real "betweenness" and then expressing it as a percentage of all the possible "betweenness" that the actor could have had. Table 4.8 lists the top 15 words that have the largest betweenness centrality values in the semantic network.

Table 4-8 Freeman betweenness centrality measures for DMO-USA, DMO-CHN, BLOG-USA, and BLOG-CHN

DMO-USA		DMO-CHN		BLOG-USA		BLOG-CHN	
Theme	Betweenness	Theme	Betweenness	Theme	Betweenness	Theme	Betweenness
Exotic	200.779	Exotic	306.756	Interesting	78.129	Unique	227.112
Unique	158.594	Landscape	93.722	Shop	68.022	Culture	192.229
Garden	143.514	Unique	57.937	Busy	63.983	Exotic	157.452
Climate	112.221	Culture	54.334	Chaotic	46.571	Climate	112.810
Architecture	76.393	Architecture	53.246	Hot	45.436	Architecture	78.574
Friendly	73.591	Website	34.000	People	37.336	Mysterious	59.690
Culture	69.146	Price	34.000	Friendly	30.268	History	53.086
Crowded	68.000	Desert	14.697	Bustling	29.370	Friendly	42.319
Beautiful	65.909	Food	4.369	Street	28.273	Desert	41.245
Market	54.310	History	3.067	Safe	27.900	Price	38.000
Food	43.923	Nature	2.227	Culture	26.233	Landscape	31.545
Beach	43.310	Square	2.143	Beautiful	24.776	Interesting	7.643
Shop	38.576	Attraction	0.710	Food	18.235	Crowded	2.686
Spa	36.010	Climate	0.543	Market	13.454	Beautiful	0.943
Majorelle_Garden	35.000	Marrakesh	0.250	Desert	12.791	Religion	0.250

As shown in the table, *exotic* was the most important word when Chinese respondents

were asked about their perception of Marrakesh after browsing the official website. It has a value of 306.756 that is much bigger than that of the second important word for group DMO-CHN. In other words, without the help of *exotic*, many of other words in the network would not be connected to each other. Another interesting finding is that, compared to American groups, Chinese groups are more interested in *history* and *price.*

Table 4-9 Descriptive statistics of Freeman betweenness centrality measures

Group	Mean	Std Dev.	Variance	Min.	Max.	Network Centralization
DMO-CHN	18.389	53.339	2845.008	0.000	306.756	49.85%
DMO-USA	37.892	48.199	2323.156	0.000	200.779	26.57%
BLOG-CHN	26.150	54.141	2931.218	0.000	227.112	27.82%
BLOG-USA	16.769	19.959	398.380	0.000	78.129	8.96%

Table 4.9 shows the distribution of Freeman betweenness centrality scores. On average, group DMO-USA has the largest value of 37.892. Group BLOG-CHN shows more variation across all the actors in the network because of larger standard deviations and variances. Network centralization of group BLOG-USA is relatively low, which means that most of the connections in the network can be made without the aid of any intermediary or “bridge”. Unsurprisingly, group DMO-CHN demonstrates the highest degree of inequality or variance in the network since we have discussed the significance of actor *exotic* in building this network previously. In accordance with previous findings, Chinese groups are generally more centralized than American groups.

4.5 Correspondence Analysis

Correspondence analysis was conducted to examine the images of Marrakesh that arose from each information source in the context of a cross-cultural study, using the frequency table for the top 50 words as the input dataset. The rows of the table are the most frequently used words while the columns are each group (BLOG-CHN, BLOG-USA, DMO-CHN, and DMO-USA). The frequency rate for each word in each group was used as a distance measure in constructing a correspondence map. The underlying reason for employing correspondence analysis is to visually represent the relationships between the destination and its attributes. In the current study, the two-dimensional correspondence map was used to elucidate the differences between the travel blogs and the DMO's website in image formation and in the influences of culture on destination image. Two axes were added to the map, making four quadrants consistent with the classification of the four groups. According to Whitlark and Smith (2001), closer proximity means greater perceived similarity. Singular values describe the number of dimensions and the proportion of variance explained by each dimension (Hair et al., 1998). As shown in table 4.10, the first and second dimensions explained 58.75% (horizontal axis) and 30.87% (vertical axis) of the variance, with singular values of 0.513 and 0.372 respectively. The two dimensions in total explained 89.62% of the overall variance. Moreover, the principle (horizontal) axis separated American culture from Chinese culture, whereas the secondary (vertical) axis separated travel blogs and the DMO's website. Hence, in the destination-image formation, the effects of cultural background are more significant than those of the source of information.

The correspondence map also reveals structural relationships among the variable categories (Hoffman & George, 1986). In this study, the associations among information sources, cultural backgrounds, and destination images were displayed by the top words. The closer a word was to a specific group, the greater the frequency of the occurrence of the word in the group. In figure 4.8, the words related to shopping, historical heritage, social interactions, and chaotic atmosphere (e.g., *spice*, *street*, *Main Square*, *crowded*, *people*, *friendly*) were located on the left side of the map and reflected US culture. The words describing natural resources, food, price, religion and transportation (e.g., *desert*, *waterfall*, *cuisine*, *cheap*) were located on the right side of the map and reflected Chinese culture. The second dimension separates the two information sources. On the upper side (BLOG), words used by respondents were related to shopping, historical heritage, chaotic atmosphere, social interaction, dry and hot climate, and price (e.g., *market*, *palace*, *bustling*, *friendly*, *dry*, *cheap*). On the lower side (DMO), words focused on natural resources, food, and Marrakesh attractions and activities (e.g., *Djemaa el Fna*, *cuisine*, *beach*, *spa*).

Overall, it is noteworthy that each of the four clusters varies in image associations, except for several overlaps and outliers. The results indicated that each of the four groups perceived the destination differently. Based on the quantity of image attributes associated with each information source, one could conclude that respondents are more likely to give feedback under the stimulus of travel blogs no matter what their cultural background. Moreover, according to the relative positions of each group in the map, the discrepancies with respect to destination-image representation between BLOG-CHN and BLOG-USA are less than those between DMO-CHN and DMO-USA. In other words, while

interpreting blog information, cultural difference is not as significant as expected. However, culture does have influence on interpreting DMO's website information.

Table 4-10 Summary of correspondence analysis

Dimension	**Singular value**	**Principal Inertia**	**Chi-Square**	**Sig.**	**Proportion of inertia**	
					Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	0.51286	0.26303	540.788		58.75	58.75
2	0.37178	0.13822	284.187		30.87	89.62
3	0.21555	0.04646	95.522		10.38	100.00
Total	**0.44771**	**920.497**	**100.00**			

Degree of Freedom = 147

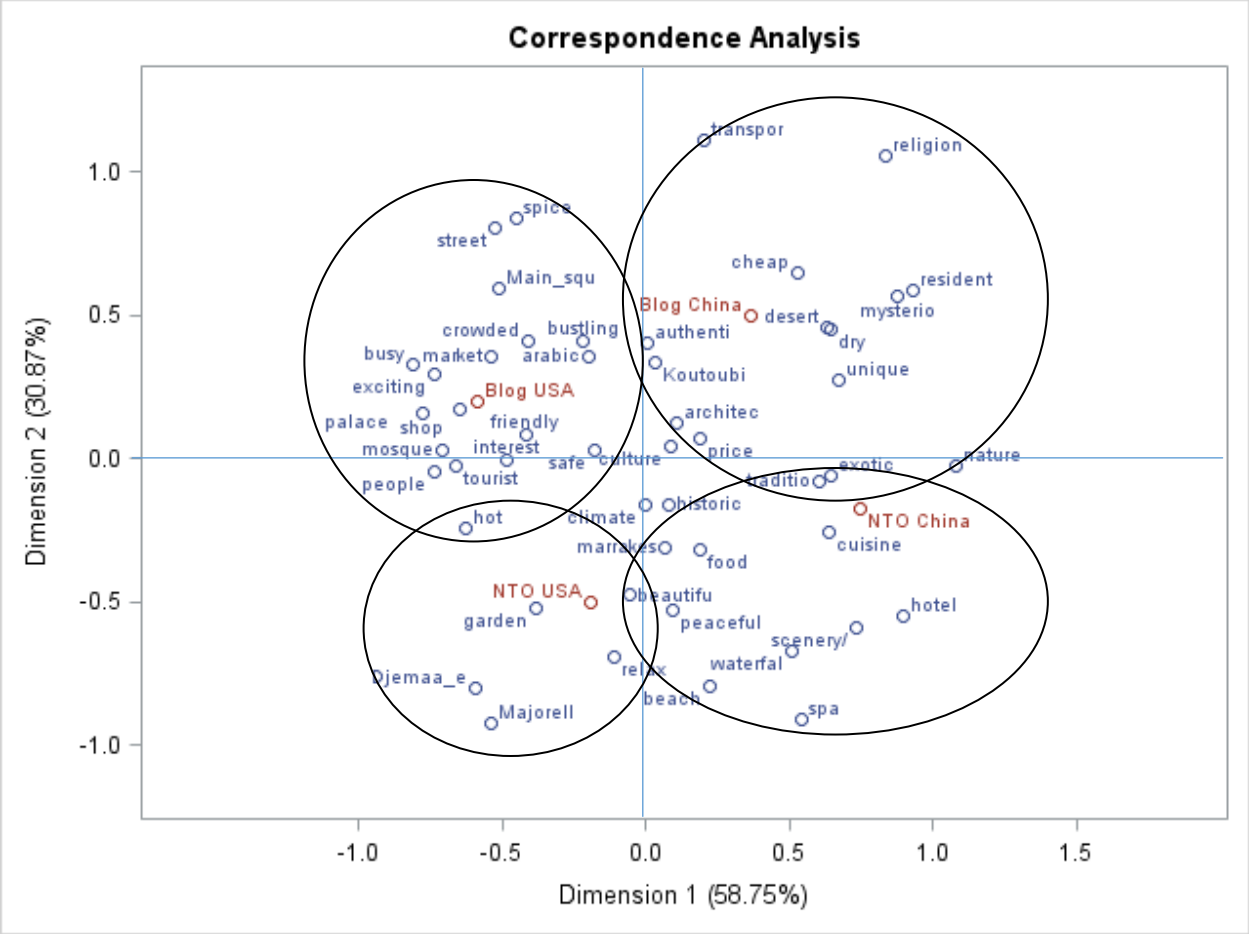

Figure 4-0-8 Correspondence map for word frequency in each group

4.6 Overall Affection for Marrakesh

Multiple t-tests were applied in the study to measure the significance of difference in respondents' overall affection for Marrakesh across four groups. The analysis started with coding respondents' answers to the question "Do you like Marrakesh after reading the material? Why or why not?" A positive answer was coded as "1", a negative evaluation was coded as "-1" and a neutral answer was coded as "0". SAS program was used to process t-tests across groups. Two of the tests (DMO-CHN vs. BLOG-USA; BLOG-

CHN vs. DMO-USA) were eliminated since they are irrelevant to the research objectives of this study. Results only show significance between group DMO-CHN and group DMO-USA, which means that Chinese respondents and American ones hold different levels of affection towards Marrakesh after browsing the DMO's website. Another interesting finding is that the mean value of overall affection was low in general and thus indicating a great potential for local authorities to promote Marrakesh as an attractive tourism destination.

Table 4-11 Multiple t-tests for the comparison of overall affection for Marrakesh across four groups

Factors	N	Mean	t-value	p-value
BLOG-CHN	112	0.2234		
DMO-CHN	102	0.1489	0.62	0.5362
BLOG-USA	115	0.3333		
DMO-USA	99	0.4362	-0.90	0.3690
BLOG-CHN	112	0.2234		
BLOG-USA	115	0.3333	-0.92	0.3588
DMO-CHN	102	0.1489		
DMO-USA	99	0.4362	-2.53	0.0124*

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to expand the semantic network approach to destination image research, thus revealing the influences of online travel blogs and DMOs' websites on image formation by investigating the difference between Chinese and American potential travelers' interpretations of the two information sources. The results and findings produced a holistic image of Marrakesh as a tourist destination. Moreover, this study revealed the roles of online blogs and DMOs' websites as marketing tools that are positive correlated with offering valuable customer feedback. Some managerial and academic implications are presented. The limitations of the study are considered, and suggestions for future research are provided.

5.1 Destination Image of Marrakesh

This study revealed the holistic image of Marrakesh perceived by both American and Chinese tourists as well as the discrepancies between the two cultural groups. Table 5.1 shows the summary of perceived destination images constructs across the four groups.

In general, Marrakesh's image was represented by words such as *culture*, *climate*, *exotic*, and *unique*. According to the summary, the major strengths of the destination lies in its

cultural charm reflected by attractions and architecture, the beautiful scenery, and rich natural resources represented by the Sahara desert, waterfalls, mountains, lakes, and beaches. Food and climate were an important elements that were highlighted by each group but did not exert a strong positive impression on both cultural groups. As to local attractions and entertainment activities, the results do not show much awareness of famous landmarks and activities in Marrakesh, which implies great potential to lure more tourists and increase awareness. Last but not least, Marrakesh demonstrates a mixed aura of vibrancy, friendliness, and peace. However, different groups place emphasis on different aspects of this aura.

As to weaknesses reported by respondents, safety was regarded as a serious issue in Marrakesh, even though the local government is determined to advertise Morocco as a safe place for tourists. Another major weakness is a hot and dry climate. Moreover, most complaints related to underdevelopment are about transportation, especially infrastructure and road conditions. Bustling or chaos was an unfavorable aura that many respondents disliked.

Other characteristics of Marrakesh were mentioned without evaluation. Religion, for instance, was only highlighted by group BLOG-CHN. American groups showed special interests in shopping even though Marrakesh not appear to be a well-known shopping center.

Table 5-1 Summary of perceived destination images across four groups

Group	Image theme/characteristics	Attractions	Activities	Atmosphere
General	Climate: hot/dry Culture: exotic/unique Food: cuisine	Limited	Limited	Mixed aura
BLOG-CHN	Religion Transportation Nature History Price	No	No	Mysterious Crowded/chaotic Friendly
DMO-CHN	Nature History Price	No	Spa Art museum	Mysterious Leisure/vacation Hospitality
BLOG-USA	Shopping People	Djemaa el Fna Bahia Palace El Badi Palace	No	Busy/bustling Friendly Safety
DMO-USA	Shopping People: family	Majorelle Garden Djemaa el Fna	Spa Night club	Crowded Peaceful

5.2 Discrepancies between Online Travel Blogs and the DMO's website

The Internet has become a major source of information for travelers. The Travel Industry Association of America (2005) reported that 67% of travelers who have Internet connections in the United States search for information about destinations online. The influence of the Internet continues to shape the tourism industry more than any other sector of the economy. With the advancement of the Internet, new methods are being created to help travelers learn about their destinations, communicate with other travelers,

and facilitate business transactions. Travel blogs and DMOs' websites are two main information sources in today's search for destination information.

5.2.1 Characteristics and Implications of Images Projected through Blogs

Blogs are getting more and more popular among people. In 2007, there were 70 million blogs on the Internet with 120,000 new blogs coming online each day (Technorati, 2007). In 2005, around 7% of the 120 million adults in the United States had created at least one blog, and 27% of Internet users had read blogs (Rainie, 2005). However, the implications of travel blogs for destination marketers have not been thoroughly studied by researchers. Previous research has tended to explore travel blogs from the perspective of bloggers or businesses (Carson, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). This study, on the contrary, focuses on blog readers' interpretations of blog information. We required 227 college students to read online travel blogs and describe their perceived destination images of Marrakesh. It should be noted that even though young adults were sampled in this study, they are a reflection of real blogosphere because both blog creators and readers are more likely to be young, well educated, and Internet veterans (Rainie, 2005). The results showed that blogs cover more areas of tourism experience, thus providing readers with a holistic yet subjective image of the destination. This observation was consistent with the conclusion that blogs provide "multiple interrelated information about particularities of a destination, including, but not limited to attractions, facilities, infrastructures, and a more abstract value such as the overall atmosphere" (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008, p.309). In other words, blogs convey more information that can be

successfully perceived by blog readers, thus making them an effective tool for destination marketing. In addition, based on the number of ties in blog networks, it appears that blog readers, no matter their cultural background, generally make more connections between the nodes in the networks than website readers do. One plausible explanation is that they have invested more cognition effort while interpreting blog content. Therefore, the results may also suggest that naïve travelers enjoy reading blogs more than DMOs' website because they are motivated to invest more effort in blog information processing. Of course, as discussed previously, other factors such as the features of the information source could influence information processing. Another interesting finding is that blog readers have no strong impressions of famous local attractions and activities, which means either the blogger did not mention them in their stories or readers thought the description of attractions and activities was not appealing enough and did not impress them. Either explanation indicates that greater efforts need to be made to increase awareness of local attractions and activities through blogs. Again, the result of empirical study supports the conclusion that travel blog is an effective marketing tool for DMOs to collect feedbacks from real travelers, estimate potential tourists' pre-visit destination image and make proper changes to adjust destination positioning.

5.2.2 Characteristics and Implications of Images Projected through the DMO's website

Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI, 2011) defined DMOs as a not-for-profit organization that represents a specific destination such as a city or a region. DMOs work as the official contact point between tour stakeholders and individual

travelers. For stakeholders such as tour operators, DMO's website facilitates the communication between organizations to enable them work better with partners as cohesive rather than fragmented organizations (Presenza et al., 2005). Moreover, it is a cost-effective way of communicating messages since the website allows DMOs to save money on printing and delivering paper-made advertising materials, which helps to reduce DMOs' pressure on marketing budget (Feng et al., 2003; Gretzel et al., 2006). For individual visitors, DMO's website were developed to serve the needs of diverse business components, especially consumers (Wang and Russo, 2007; Yuan et al., 2003). According to Wilgen (2009), when choosing a vacation destination, US travelers start with search engines such as Google or Yahoo (34%), and then visit DMO's website (23%). Therefore, DMO's website plays a significant role in providing services to customers and enhancing customer satisfaction towards the destination. However, even though DMOs are influential in media content placement and the coordination of destination-positioning initiatives, their influence and dominance have been diminished in the Internet era (Choi et al., 2007; Govers & Go, 2003) for the recent surge in user-generated content. In addition, from an academic perspective, Feng et al. (2004) pointed out that "with many DMO websites having been developed since the mid-1990s, this area of research could be characterized as still being in its infancy".

As regards features or characteristics of typical DMO's website, Li and Wang (2011) addressed the following five dimensions: information, communication, transaction, relationship and technical merit. From a functional perspective, technical merit directly affects the effectiveness of the other four dimensions. Information dimension implies that DMOs' website serves as an official platform for providing tourists with timely

information about the destination. Communication involves all facets of marketing and promotion such as emails and other contact information. The transaction function enables DMOs to generate revenue through the usage of the websites. Among the five features, relationship is the most difficult to implement. Examples of relationship attributes include customer loyalty programs, privacy policy, deals and discounts, etc. In short, the five dimensions of website function cohesively to influence information researchers' perceived image of the destination and their virtual experience (Maswera et al., 2007; Tanrisevdi & Duran, 2011). In this study, the author examined the performance of Marrakesh Tourist Office and found the website lacking of transaction and relationship dimension. More research could be done in the future to probe the importance, complexity, effectiveness and performance of the website by item.

In this study, the respondents were exposed to the DMO's website of Marrakesh and then required to describe the destination images they perceived. In accordance with previous findings, activities and famous attractions were highlighted on the website, which indicates its functionality as an information source. Figure 5.1 shows the homepage of Marrakesh government tourism website. As can be seen, a navigation system that directs users to a series of information under the category of Marrakesh was placed on the left side of the webpage. Even though two more tabs called "I ENJOY" and "GET INFORMATION" is located on the top of the website, each tab leads to general information about Morocco rather than Marrakesh. "Art and Culture," for instance, introduces museums, palaces, and riads not only in Marrakesh but also in Fez, Rabat, and Meknès. Therefore, it is understandable why respondents complained that there is not

sufficient information related to Marrakesh. Moreover, the DMO's website conveys an atmosphere of luxury, relaxation, and peace, whereas none of the blog networks transmits this aura. Another example is what has been illustrated previously: Americans highlighted "family" features of Marrakesh after browsing the website, while Chinese did not perceive the element at all. Additionally, blog readers from both cultural backgrounds did not rank family top on the frequency list as well. However, according to Marrakesh's tourism planning, DMOs have been attempting to position Marrakesh as a family-friendly destination. Thus, it indicates that there are discrepancies between the images DMOs projected and those that potential travelers perceived.

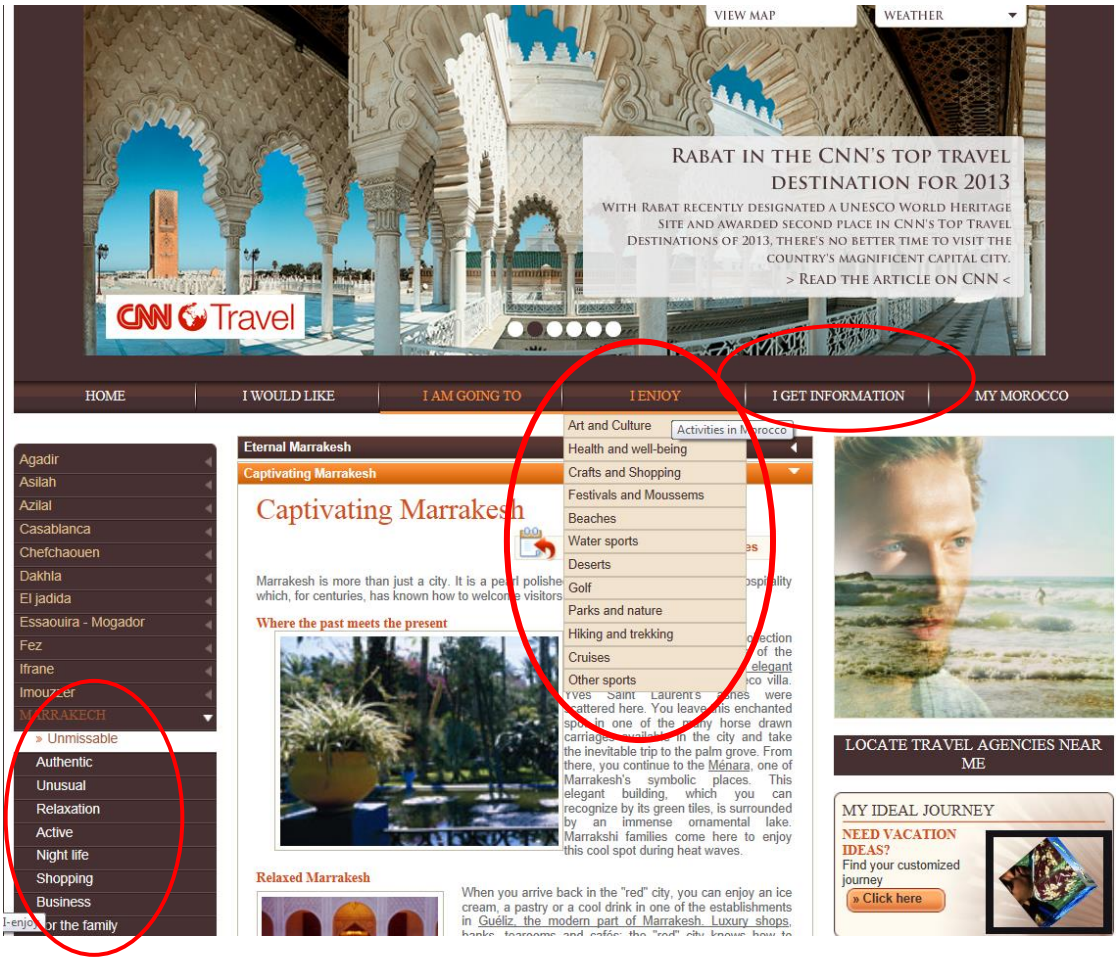

Figure 5-1 Webpage of Marrakesh official website (DMO's website).

5.2.3 The Influences of Information Sources on Destination Image formation

As mentioned earlier, the motivational factor called *message involvement* also mediates the results of information processing. In situations of high message involvement, readers who keep a clear reading goal in mind have to employ a high level of cognitive elaboration to assimilate the message. In situations of low message involvement, readers are arbitrary and indifferent as regards the reading goal and thus do not need to engage all their cognitive elaboration. Through network density analysis performed across the four groups, one could tell the difference between viewers of blogs and the DMO's website in terms of information processing and thus explore the influences of information sources on destination image formation. Scott (2000) defined social network density as a level of interrelatedness of all possible ties of a group. The denser the group, the more ties exist among its members (Scott, 2000; Wasserman & Faust, 2006). In the current research, a network with a low density means little connection among the nodes (words), whereas a network with a high density implies that the majority of nodes co-occurred with other nodes within the network. In this sense, density reveals the overall amount of participation in the network. Another application of network density is to determine a cluster within the network. A cluster is an area of high density within a graph. Nodes within this area are contiguous and constitute a subgroup. As shown in aforementioned figures and tables, blog networks have high density in general, whereas the DMO's website networks displayed low density. Higher density means more ties, which lead to the conclusion that people engage more cognitive resources in the process of dealing with online blog content. In addition, the discussions drawn from network centralization imply that blog networks have low centralization tendency, whereas DMO's website networks

have high centralization. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that blog readers are both more willing to provide feedback and more active in evaluating the destination image. The high density implies that, compared to the official website, blogs influence the building of the destination image to a greater extent and will assist destination marketing from a practical point of view. The result is consistent with extant findings that narrative advertisings are more effective in promoting experiential products such as tourism(Padgett & Allen, 1997). The underlying reason for that may rely on the fact that the narrative structure of travel blogs allows readers to empathize with the blogger and associate his or her experiences with their own (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008). Another interesting finding is that the differences with respect to density between information sources are more significant in American culture than in Chinese culture (DMO-USA: 0.095, BLOG-USA: 0.238; DMO-CHN: 0.156, BLOG-CHN: 0.127).

The differences between information sources could originate from various reasons. For example, it is reasonable to assume that there are content difference between blogs and DMO's website in term of their information emphasis. A content analysis conducted previously has justified the difference. However, it is worthy noticing that other factors may also contribute to the information source difference. Writing style, for example, is one of them. Blogs are concerned to be blogger's narratives with features of chronology and causality (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004). DMO's website content, on the other hand, tend to be expository text that is descriptive and does not connect separate text elements to tell a story (Lee & Gretzel, 2012). Content depth, is another factor that needs concern. Blogs serve to convey a complicated scheme of destination images that include cognitive

and affective attributes and elements. DMO's website, on the contrary, serves as an information platform and therefore lacks information about affective images of a destination.

5.3 Discrepancies between Chinese and American Potential Travelers

Though a homogenous student sample was used in this study, there were some differences between the two cultural groups. In the future, destination marketers could utilize the results to gain insight into potential tourists' expectations and perceptions.

5.3.1 Differences Shown among Destination Image Interpretations

Despite the general image themes both cultural groups perceived, the differences in image perception between Chinese and American groups align partially with previous findings. As shown in Table 5.1, Chinese groups placed extra emphasis on natural resources, history, and price, while American groups focused on people and the shopping environment. To be specific, this result is consistent with existing studies stating that Chinese tourists pursue contextual elements of natural scenery, specifically those related to culture and history (Fu et al., 2012). Chinese groups seemed to have more interest in the stories behind attractions and discovering the fabricated aspects attached to scenery.

The level of social interaction is another area of divergence between Chinese and American groups. Compared to Chinese groups, Americans are more likely to enjoy human encounters, and the process is found to be pleasant (Fu et al., 2012). Chinese

respondents, however, are more cautious about interacting with local residents or other tourists. According to Chen et al. (1992) and Yum (1988, p.81), Chinese tend to be cautious and sensitive toward a foreign environment but are cooperative and friendly within the "in group." The underlying reason for this behavior is that unlike the United States, China employs a higher degree of power distance, which implies a society that defines social boundaries clearly. To protect their self-interest, Chinese people tend to be more cautious and remain stable in current situations. This study provides empirical support for this conclusion because only Americans regarded "people" as a significant theme in the Marrakesh image.

Entertainment activities were normally mentioned when evaluating a destination. In this study, Americans placed much emphasis on shopping because words within this theme ranked top on the frequency list, while Chinese participants addressed the influence of prices. It has been reported in existing literature that American packaged respondents are about nine times more likely than Japanese respondents to attend flea markets, whereas Japanese packaged tourists are 54 times more likely than American ones to shop at duty-free stores and four times as likely to shop at outlet stores (Spears and Rosenbaum, 2012). Since Japan and China have common Eastern cultural dimensions with high LTO, it is understandable why Chinese respondents did not perceive themes like souks or squares after being exposed to the stimuli. As for price, Chinese respondents were more sensitive than their American counterparts were. This difference sounds reasonable because China is long-term orientated and shows a strong notion of saving money whereas American consumers are used to consuming in advance. Further, the income level of Chinese

consumers is much lower than that of American ones. That Chinese consumer's care about price was also verified by exiting studies (Guillet & Xu 2013; Milman et al. 2012).

5.3.2 The Influences of Culture on Information Processing and Image Formation

As shown in semantic network maps, Chinese networks are generally more centralized than American networks are, no matter what information sources they were exposed to. It implies that Chinese respondents reach several major consensus, and meanwhile individuals hold a lot different opinions about the same event. Compared to Chinese, American respondents reach consensus to a larger extent. In order to illustrate the information processing of the two groups, two sets of respondents were cited as example. Each set consists of three respondents: R1, R2, and R3. In Chinese respondent set, the information processing follows the paradigm: R1: CA, ××, ××××××. R2:××××, B××A. R3: ×, DA. To explain the paradigm, it means each respondent mentioned the image variable A, and A was co-occurred with other image variables such as B, C, and D. However, B, C, and D was not co-occurred in one description (e.g. one sentence) anyways. In American respondent set, the situation is more complicated and follows the paradigm: R1: E×A, FB, DCG. R2: ×H, CD×, E×A. R3: ××C, EA, ×DB. Each respondent mentioned more variables in one description, and these variables were more likely to be correlated with each other, therefore resulting in more connections in the network. From another perspective, it is assumed that Chinese respondents tended to focus on a few words to interpret their perceptions of Marrakesh, whereas Americans were more explicit and willing to share their feedback. In other words, the Chinese respondents tend to adopt

the same bunch of words to demonstrate their perceptions and reach a consensus, even unconsciously. With respect to the discussions drawn from the results of density measurement, one could tell that generally speaking, there are more connections in American networks. As we mentioned earlier, a high density means more connections, which implies respondents involve more cognitive resources in information processing, tend to provide feedbacks on the information, and therefore perceive the destination image more actively.

Another interesting finding has been argued earlier in this chapter: Chinese respondents appeared to invest more cognitive resources in DMO's website, whereas Americans make more connections in blog networks. It may be a reflection of the fact that Chinese are more interested in official website while Americans prefer targets that represent uniqueness such as blog (Kim & Markus, 1999). One plausible explanation for this finding is that Chinese culture accepts inequalities among subordinates, abides by group-oriented relationships, and respects superiors' authorities. American culture, on the other hand, strongly encourages individuals to express themselves and admires critical thinking. The official website serves as an intermediary between tourists and destination managers, thus indicating its authorities in introducing the destination. Compared to official website, blogs offer an informal way of both getting information and sharing knowledge about the destination; they are relatively free from the constraints of administration organizations.

5.4 Practical Implications

Given the rich heritage of Morocco's civilization, unique natural beauty, and welcoming and tolerant people, the Moroccan government is under pressure to make the country one of the top twenty tourist destinations in the world by 2020. However, as Table 4.11 shows, the mean value of overall affection for Marrakesh is low, which implies a potential for local government to develop competitive destination image and positioning strategies. Therefore, the practical implications rely on figuring out ways of promoting a destination that has not projected an attractive image. The findings from this study can enrich current insights into destination image marketing and provide new opportunities and ideas for destination marketers.

5.4.1 Implications Drawn from Cross-cultural Analysis

Over the last few decades, the international travel market has grown dramatically. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013), international tourism exceeds expectations with arrivals up by 52 million in 2013 and is regarded as an engine for the economic recovery. The total international tourist arrivals grew by 5%, reaching a record 1087 million arrivals (UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, 2013). Demand for international tourism was strongest for destinations including Asia and Pacific (6%), Africa (6%) and Europe (5%). For 2014, UNWTO forecasts 4% to 4.5% growth, while regional prospects are strongest for African destinations as well (4%-6%). Following the world trend, US travelers are booking more international travels. In 2013, the total U.S.

Citizen Travel to International Regions reached 25 million YTD with an increase of 1.1%. The market share of international trip has arrived 47.3% in 2013 (US Office of Travel & Tourism industries [OTTI], 2013). Similarly, China has also become one of the most important sources of outbound tourism in the world (Zhang 2006). In 2011, Chinese citizens made more than 70.3 million outbound trips, a 22% increase from 2010 (He & Yang, 2012). The Chinese outbound tourism market has great growth potential and thus should not be overlooked by destination marketers. This study selected two of the most important outbound tourism sources, and the results showed that American and Chinese potential tourists have distinctive perceptions of destination image, suggesting that destination marketers should enhance their segmentation of target markets and offer customized products and services to satisfy customer needs and demands. For instance, Chinese respondents showed interest in the natural resources and historical and cultural elements attached to tourist attractions, whereas Americans pursued social interaction and recreational activities such as shopping. It requires destinations with rich tourism resources to reconsider their positioning and take full advantages of the resources. Marrakesh, for instance, transform itself from a destination with a single dimension of historical heritage into a destination with multidimensional attractions including cultural products, nature tourism products, and recreational events and activities. Actually, according to the official strategic plan called “Vision 2020 for tourism in Morocco,” Marrakesh would be among the eight major destinations in Morocco. The government planned several programs especially to diversify and improve tourism products and services. The “Patrimony and Heritage Program”, for instance, is an attempt to enhance the range of cultural experiences.

It should be noted that although this study discloses cultural difference, cultural convergence appears as well because homogeneous student samples were used. The majority of respondents were young adults with at least some college education. Belonging to what is known as "Generation Y," they have extensive experience with computers and websites and are willing to utilize the Internet for information search and reservations as well as other leisure activities. Different Generation Y users followed similar cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns during their interactions with websites and travel blogs, which implies that the differences between the two groups emerged only from cultural divergences. Therefore, apart from the differences we discussed earlier in this section, both groups cared about image themes such as climate, food, and culture. In other words, both cultural convergences and divergences were found between Chinese and American gro-109ups. Destination marketers should undoubtedly keep both homogeneity and heterogeneity in mind when developing marketing strategies and communication practices. Yet but importantly, as we can see, Americans and Chinese groups perceive the same information differently, thus providing different feedbacks. It has been mentioned that Chinese groups do think alike and reach a few major consensus that lead to image formation. Therefore, destination marketers could take advantages of this and keep track of the key image themes or attributes. Additionally, since Chinese culture has a long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority, it is meaningful if destination marketers focus on influencing the perceptions and judgments of the opinion leaders.

5.4.2 Implications Drawn from Different Information Sources

Destination image formation is the process of belief compilation and impression generation based on information processing from different information sources (e.g. Frias et al., 2008). Therefore, different sources exerts diverse influences on destination image formation. This study found that blogs enable naïve travelers to develop a more complicated mental scheme of destination image through establishing multiple image attributes. The result was supported by previous findings. First, destination image is a complex mental map per se. Keller (1993), Choi et al. (2007) defined destination image as internal mental construct representing attributes of, and benefits sought in a destination. Low and Lamb (2000) and Pan et al. (2007) demonstrated destination image consists of mental pictures of destination attributes and respective evaluation of these attributes. Second, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2008, p.309) has concluded that blogs are capable of providing "multiple interrelated information about particularities of a destination". In addition, it should also be noted that the blogosphere is changing in real time, communicating a variety of new information every day. Unlike official website, blog may contain both negative and positive descriptions. For instance, people who enjoyed the materials and perceived positive narratives said, "I like the description of the climate, and the beautiful buildings." or "The language was visually stimulating." On the other hand, people who perceived negative narratives argued that "I would like to hear about it from a native person. I don't trust tourist opinion," and "The material made it seem much more boring and organized than I originally perceived it to be. . . . After reading this blog it sounds like any other boring tourist trap." The independence of blog makes it trustworthy

because readers believe that blog authors have no motive to manipulate readers and blog content reflect the real tourism experience. Therefore, destination marketers may consider a monitoring system for online blogs to understand the performance of a destination in such new media outlets.

Pan et al. (2007) have suggested an automated performance control mechanism and analysis for monitoring blogs in order to provide real-time customer feedback regarding quality of service and destination images. Specifically, researchers would first identify and define the major tasks of blog monitoring and then generate keywords relevant to research questions. The next step would be to search blog sites using identified keywords or RSS (Really Simple Syndication). Selected blogs could be downloaded, aggregated, and analyzed through semantic network analysis or content analysis to assist market analysis and generate quality control reports. Compared to other marketing implications and analytical methods, this mechanism would be cost-effective and provide insightful conclusions.

Compared to blogs, however, DMO's website serve as an official promoting platform or system. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, respondents' pre-visit image projected through DMO's website primarily focuses on two attributes: destination attractions and activities. Obviously, naïve visitors established a less complicated mental scheme of the destination in their minds. This conclusion in turn justifies that the main function of DMOs' website is to distribute information, rather than exchange information or enhance

communication between individual visitors. Further research could be done to investigate other functions of DMO's website such as transaction and relationship.

From a practical perspective, one the one hand, the results of the study can raise management authorities' awareness of the importance of the official website; on the other hand, and more importantly, they may be applicable to official website design concerns when marketing campaigns are created in the future. For instance, the most frequently mentioned disadvantage of the official website was that it provided insufficient background information about Marrakesh. Some examples of complaints include, "Few pictures are given, and the descriptions themselves are not quite clear, kinda hollow," and "Now that I have been exposed to a site with a little pictorial information about it, I am still neutral about Marrakesh." It was demonstrated that despite visual information about tangible cultural heritage, landscapes, and tourism facilities on the website, the images neither were of high quality nor emphasized the tourism experience in Marrakesh. On average, there were only two pictures on each webpage, and few images showcased entertainment and recreation activities or depicted interactions with local residents or service professionals. Mackay et al. (2004) and Day et al. (2002), however, claimed that pictures showing activities and authenticity play a significant role in creating and communicating images of a destination, specifically for North American tourists. Therefore, more interactive and truthful visual information that highlights attractions, entertainment activities, and social encounters is recommended to lure more tourists from both Chinese and American cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, with respect to methodologies used in the research, incorporating information sources into semantic network analysis is conducive to uncovering a wider range of and deeper themes of texts. Actually, since different destination have different attributes that might have different impressions for tourists (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), a combination of qualitative approach (e.g. content analysis) and quantitative approach (e.g. semantic network analysis) was utilized to explore the unique destination attributes as well as to quantify and draw statistical inferences pertaining to the destination's image. Therefore, this approach provides rich data for the assessment of destination image and meanwhile, increases the reliability and validity of research findings.

5.5 Theoretical Contributions

This study brings up the discussion of destination images in the context of different information sources and cultural groups. The findings make a much-needed contribution to destination image research and could be used for competitive advantage analysis and destination positioning in the future.

The present investigation is somewhat unique in that destination image studies have generally lacked an affective aspect and instead dealt only with cognitive attributes. This study offers an applicable way of measuring the holistic image of a certain destination. Therefore, the approach can be generalized in destination marketing settings other than Marrakesh. Moreover, even though a considerable number of studies have been done about online travel blogs and DMOs taken separately, few researchers have conducted comparative analyses assessing the differences between these two sources. This study

compares the two widely used information sources to deepen the understanding of the influences of information sources on destination image formation by engaging information-processing discussions that are rarely embedded in destination image studies. Additionally, this is one of the several cross-cultural researches of destination image, specially focusing on Chinese culture and American culture.

Destination image mapping using semantic network analysis provides insights into destination image research by way of both a network structure comparison and a visual comparison of the perceptual position of image themes. Compared to other qualitative methods, such as content analysis, this approach does not engage professional coding and therefore increases the results' validity and reliability (Hookway, 2008; Jang, 1995; Rice and Danowski, 1993). On the other hand, semantic network analysis can reveal detailed and in-depth information about the characteristics of a destination, information that cannot be easily gathered from scaled instruments and quantitative methods. In addition, this between-subjects study makes use of a cross-disciplinary approach, combining the areas of social network theory, cross-cultural study, and tourism research. Since tourism research is still in its infancy, researchers need assistance from other, more mature disciplines. Besides, thinking outside the box usually leads to new ideas and provides holistic views. Law et al. (2010) suggested that tourism researchers should consider an integrated approach, incorporating theories and empirical findings from other disciplines, when identifying research gaps and solutions to close the gaps.

5.6 Limitations and Future Studies

Despite the significant findings that have been derived from this study, there are several limitations that need to be considered before conducting future research.

First, this study used a convenient student sample to ensure homogeneity and control latent influential elements such as prior travel experience, gender, and age. However, college students have characteristics of low income, young age and lack travel experience. In addition, only Chinese and American groups were compared in this research, which means the findings could not be generalized to other populations. To enhance the applicability and generalization of current results, future studies may wish to consider a larger random sample with different demographic characteristics as well as the effect of other demographic factors. Moreover, people from other cultural backgrounds could be included in such kind of study.

Second, semantic network analysis was applied to gain insight into customer feedback on tourist destinations. It should be noticed, however, that the similarity matrix generated from high frequency keywords was not directed, which means that the emotions behind respondents' expressions are hard to discern. In other words, semantic networks barely show respondents' positive or negative attitudes toward a certain destination. In this sense, content analysis with human coding is superior because it takes emotions into consideration. Future studies may benefit from combining the two methods, as Pan et al. (2007) have suggested.

Third, as a cross-cultural study, this research engages both Chinese and American students who have different levels of English proficiency. Even though Chinese participants were filtered by TOEFL score in order to keep qualified participants who have no difficulties reading in English. Meanwhile, the participants were asked to answer question in their native language to facilitate explicit expression. However, language may be an influential factor in information processing. Future studies may adopt a strict experimental design, which controls as many confounding variables as one could, in order to focus on the main variables of information source and culture. For instance, one or multiple specific typical blog(s) could be selected and translated carefully as stimuli to subjects, with each participant answering the questions in native language.

Fourth, although more than four hundred surveys passed through the filters and served as input data, this study's response rate could be improved upon to get more information from respondents. The nature of semantic network analysis requires as much: the more plentiful the textual data, the better the results. Future studies could offer incentives to the participants

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Example of Sampled Blogs

Solo in Marrakech

(http://www.travbuddy.com/Marrakech-travel-blogs-1082075)

Marrakech Travel Blog

› entry 1 of 1 › view all entries
November 12th, 2010 – by: **travelfan1963**

City walls around the Medina

I had wanted to visit Marrakech, Morocco for years and was a little concerned about traveling as a solo female. Looking through the web and through various guidebooks, it seems like whether to travel in Marrakech solo is a common question, so I thought I would put together a few ideas about my experience. I hope this blog helps other travelers--whether single or in groups--about whether to visit Marrakech.

1. Firstly, do visit Marrakech as the city and its people are wonderful. The security is very good as with secret police in the Medina, as well as the king's emphasis on the importance of tourism to Morocco, visitors are not going to have any serious problems.

Classrooms at the Ben Youssef Medersa

Marrakech is vibrant, historical and filled with amazing sights and shops and I already want to go back. Be sure to visit the Badii Palace, Dar Si Said, Jardin Majorelle, the main square, Djemaa El-Fna (both in the day and at night as the square changes hourly), Ben Youssef Medersa, Bahia Palace, the gardens of the Koutoubia Minaret, the Saadian Tombs and the souqs just as starters. There is so much to see in Marrakech and I was very surprised that one of my guidebooks said that Marrakech is short on sights. I spent five days in the city and easily could have spent more time.

2. If you are staying in the Medina, everything is handled through your riad. I was having a little trouble searching the web, trying to find tour groups and guides.

A typical classroom which was shared by several students

My riad, Riad Assakina (which I highly recommend), advised that they could book tours for me and I took advantage of a half-day tour of Marrakech my first morning in the city. This tour was extremely useful as I quickly got a feel for the layout of the Medina as well as details about some of the city's history. I actually chose a female guide, Nora, who is part of a company called Tours by Locals. With

roughly just 10 percent of all guides being female, I wanted to help out Nora's business. It was also interesting getting a woman's perspective on things, as for instance, one area of the Djemaa El-Fna is filled with women selling goods. These women are sadly very poor, being widowed or divorced, and are trying to make a living selling what few goods they have.

Nora was also quite funny as she was surprised I was not married. She looked up and said a prayer "May God grant you a husband", which I thought was cute. The guides are flexible and will ask what you want to see. While you will be taken to the souqs to shop, my guide was up front that she makes the majority of her pay from commissions and that I was under no obligation to buy anything. I appreciated Nora's honesty, she was extremely knowledgable about the city's history, and I would recommend a guide as a starting point for visitors.

3. Do research. I could tell just leaving the airport what tourists had done no research about what to see, cultural differences, language barriers, etc. as some just rode around in horse carriages with glazed looks.

I read several guidebooks going in, as well reading several websites (including asking for help from some TravBuddies who have been to Marrakech). With all the information available about Marrakech (as this is a major tourist destination), I had a very good idea of what to expect.

4. Be respectful. Dress to fit local culture and learn a few words of Arabic or French. I found that a smile along with a salam (hello) went a long way. Some instances were very funny and one of my favorites was a shop owner calling out if I wanted to visit his shop. I answered "La shukran" ("no thanks" in Arabic) and then said in English that "I'm good". The shop owner answered back "I'm good too". If you are respectful, people genuinely want to help you in return.

I went to the post office to mail a few cards and was surrounded by people trying to help. Between a few words of Arabic, French and English, we worked out together that I was trying to send some postcards to the United States and the United Kingdom. Everyone at the post office was much more helpful than what you would find in the United States.

Someone is always watching out for you in the Medina. Your riad treats you like family and they are a wealth of information of the "dos and don'ts of Marrakech". In addition, if you buy something at a shop, the shop owner will be watching for you and calling out "salam". I visited one herbalist, which was very interesting. Many people cannot afford doctors so there are various shops offering herbal remedies.

Looking down an alley way (derb) in the Medina

As a solo female, I had to laugh that the female clerk was showing me all sorts of remedies from anything from stomach ailments to depression to menopause to even Berber Viagra (!). The shop I visited was in the Mellah (former Jewish quarter) near my riad and anytime I walked past, this clerk would give a big smile and say "salam".

5. Traffic in the Medina is chaotic but that's part of the fun of visiting. Between cars, scooters, donkey carts, horse carriages and bicycles, crossing the street may be the most dangerous part of a visit. Most parts of the Medina do not have traffic lights. I was advised to stay to the right and hold out my hand to stop traffic. Sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't, but if all else fails, get behind a group of locals and follow them.

Another narrow derb

The Medina is a bustling community and it may seem strange going from the peace and quiet at your riad into chaotic streets, but it's part of the experience of Marrakech (and a part I loved!). You will quickly learn the Arabic word "Belak!" which means get out of the way.

6. There will be beggars but this is more a financial reality than anything scary. As with any country in the world, there will be people who are poor. I felt particularly bad for some of the women with small babies and as a rule, 1 to 2 dirhams is what the locals give in donations. I was told not to give any money to child beggars--always give to adults. I was advised that there are few social services, so giving a few dirhams to the people who need it most will be appreciated.

Horse carriages (caleches) for tours around Marrakech

7. You will get lost but that is part of the fun. If you are in the Medina, there are very few street signs and with the narrow alleys (derbs) and coverings in the souqs, you will quickly lose track of where you are. Even with a good map, be sure to pay close attention to landmarks, as many derbs are dead ends, and you will

need to retrace your footsteps. If all else fails, look up for the Koutoubia Minaret, which towers over the Medina. The Koutoubia is on the west side of the Djemaa El-Fna, and if you see the Koutoubia, you will have an idea of directions. I consider myself to be good with directions and still got lost. I ended up at the end of one street where taxis were being repaired and suddenly realized I was the only tourist.

Some of the gardens at the Badii Palace ruins. Visitors can get an idea of what the gardens must have been like.

Several people came up and asked if they could help me find my way.

8. Be sure to wear closed-toe, comfortable walking shoes. Parts of the Medina are very uneven so be sure you have something that's easy on your feet. Also be sure to carry any medicines you may need. While there are pharmacies in the Medina, with the difficulty in directions and the possible language barriers between Arabic, French and English, it's easiest to have any medicines with you.

9. The Medina is constantly changing during the day especially around the Djemaa El-Fna. In the mornings, the main square is filled with orange juice vendors, spice vendors, makeshift dentists constructing dentures, snake charmers (I gave the snake charmers a wide berth as even though the cobras are defanged, I'm afraid of snakes!) and henna painters.

Fresh orange juice every morning at the Djemaa El-Fna

If you are going to get a henna tattoo, be sure to get the red versus the black. I was told by several locals that the red henna is more natural, while the black has chemicals that could cause blisters or burns.

At night, the Djemaa El-Fna is filled with food stalls and story tellers. I loved watching the animated crowds around the story tellers who emphasize their stories with tamborines. Locals in the square are happy to explain what is happening, as I was watching one game with fishing rods, where plastic attachments are looped over coke bottles. Apparently, this is extremely hard to win and one local advised that a few dirhams may be bet on the winner. The square seemed to have more tourists during the day with more locals at night.

Water sellers in the Djemaa El-Fna

10. There are two types of taxis being petit taxis and grand taxis (Mercedes). I never took a grand taxi, but in a petit taxi, be sure to either agree a price up front or make sure the meter works. A "broken" meter is illegal, but it will be difficult to enforce this. A petit taxi may try to charge 100 dirhams to get across the city, which is grossly inflated. I was told that correct rates should be in the area of 20

dirhams by day and 40 by night. Petit taxis are allowed to pick up three passengers total, so do not be alarmed if your taxi stops to pick up others. I mainly walked everywhere but if you want to see the Jardin Majorelle, you will need to take a petit taxi.

11. If you are looking for other tourists to exchange information, try Kosybar in the Kaspah.

I went here a few times mainly to watch the storks fly to the Badii Palace at sunset, but there are several tourists at this bar. While prices at Kosybar are expensive, I met some other solo females as well as some couples traveling and it's a great place to strike up a conversation.

12. There is an open air bus that circles Marrakech that can be picked up at the far end of the Djemaa El-Fna, across from the Koutoubia Minaret. While this bus is expensive (145 dirhams), the ticket is good for 24 hours and you can get on or off the bus at any stop. Information is provided in eight languages and this will give new visitors a general idea of the layout of Marrakech.

13. Public facilities are uncommon and be sure to carry some tissue paper.

Some of the restaurants around the Djemaa El-Fna will let you use the restrooms for 1 or 2 dirham. I found the Ensemble Artisanal (which sells crafts at fixed prices) a good place to stop for facilities and there is a small outdoor cafe for tea and chocolates at the Ensemble as well. Be aware that Morocco is a tipping society and the attendants in restrooms will expect a tip. This is how these individuals make their living and a part of local culture, so respect this accordingly. I was very upset with another American female who was traveling solo who was very rude to a local attendant because she was upset with the tipping culture.

14. I never quite figured out the souqs as some shops will say they have set prices, others will emphasize that they are not the souqs, while others will want to bargain.

About midday in the Djemaa El-Fna

I had to laugh that at one shop, I was told I "bargained like a Berber" (I knocked 50% off the price to start) and it's hard to know what price is actually the correct one. Shop owners are usually helpful, though, and I loved looking through all the amazing handicrafts in different stores. Marrakech is filled with talented craftsmen

and I could easily have brought back another suitcase of goods. One of the couples at my riad had to go out and buy another suitcase.

Overall, I loved Marrakech and already want to go back. The city is an amazing mix of cultures and well worth a visit. As a solo female, while you may have a few comments made, it's more amusing than anything else (and nothing worse than you get at home) as most people are extremely helpful and hospitable.

Setting up for the night market

Part of the reason I enjoyed Marrakech so much was due to its friendly locals. If you are hesitating about visiting Morocco-don't. Marrakech is now one of my all time favorite travel experiences and I would highly recommend a visit to any traveler.

Appendix B Survey Instrument in English (DMO's website)

Q1. Hello! We are researchers from Purdue University, and we are currently conducting a research on visitors' destination image perception. The purpose of the research is to see how visitors from different cultural backgrounds perceive the same destination variously and explore the effects of information resources on the perception generation. We would like to invite you to participate in the study. The participation is voluntary, and the survey will take 10-15 minutes. We will not use your information for any other purposes and all data will be reported in aggregate form. Thank you for your cooperation.

Q2 what is your gender?

- ❍ Male (1)
- ❍ Female (2)

Q3 what is your age?

- ❍ Under 15 years (1)
- ❍ 15 to 24 years (2)
- ❍ 25 to 34 years (3)
- ❍ 35 to 44 years (4)
- ❍ 45 to 54 years (5)
- ❍ 55 to 64 years (6)
- ❍ 65 years and over (7)

Q4 Generally speaking, in which culture have you been raised?

- ❍ American Culture (1)
- ❍ Chinese Culture (2)
- ❍ Other Culture (3)

Q5 what is your permanent country of residence?

- ❍ United States (1)
- ❍ China (2)
- ❍ Other (3)

Q6 If you are an international student, what is your TOEFL score?

- ❍ ⩽90 (1)
- ❍ 91-100 (2)
- ❍ 101-110 (3)
- ❍ 111-120 (4)
- ❍ I don't have a TOEFL score, but I have taken other English Tests such as IELTS and CET-4/CET-6 (please name one of the tests and the score)

Q7 Have you ever heard/read about Marrakesh, Morocco?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q8 Have you ever been to Marrakesh, Morocco?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Now, please click on the link and you will be directed to a web page depicting Marrakesh, Morocco. Please browse it carefully, and then answer the questions in your own words.
http://www.marrakech.travel/

Q9 What three characteristics/attributes come to mind when you think of Marrakesh after browsing the webpage?

Q10 Please describes the general atmosphere/mood that you feel about Marrakesh through the web page.

Q11 Please lists any distinctive/unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Marrakesh after browsing the webpage?

Q12 Overall, what three words would you uses to describe Marrakesh as a place to visit.

Q13 After reading the material, do you like Marrakesh? Why or why not?

Q14 Are you interested in visiting Marrakesh after reading the webpage?

- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q15 Are you interested in recommending others to visit Marrakesh after reading the webpage?

- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Appendix C Survey Instrument in Chinese (travel blog)

Q1 您好，我们是来自普渡大学的研究人员。我们目前正在进行一项关于潜在旅游者对于旅游目的地形象体验感受的研究。我们诚挚地邀请您能够自愿参与这次调查。完成这项研究问卷需要占用您大概 10-15 分钟，所有资料将仅用于学术用途。谢谢您的合作。

Q2 您的性别？

- 女
- 男

Q3 您的年龄？

- 小于 15 岁
- 15 - 24 岁
- 25 - 34 岁
- 35 - 44 岁
- 45 - 54 岁
- 55 - 64 岁
- 65 岁及以上

Q4 总的来说，您在成长过程中主要受到以下哪种文化的影响？

- ❍ 美国文化
- ❍ 中国文化
- ❍ 其他文化

Q5 您现在所持有的国籍是？

- ❍ 美国国籍
- ❍ 中国国籍（包括港澳同胞）
- ❍ 其他国籍，请说明 _____

Q6 您入学的托福考试成绩是？

- ❍ ≤90
- ❍ 91-100
- ❍ 101-110
- ❍ 111-120
- ❍ 我没有托福考试成绩，但是我参加了其他的英语能力测试诸如雅思考试（IELTS) 和大学英语四六级标准化考试（CET-4/CET-6）请说明您所参加的考试名称及所得成绩 _____

Q7 您曾经听说过/读到过有关马拉喀什（即 Marrakesh，位于摩洛哥）的任何内容吗？

- ❍ 是
- ❍ 否

Q8 您曾经去过马拉喀什吗？

- ❍ 是
- ❍ 否

现在请点击以下三个网站链接中的任意一个，您将会看到若干篇描述马拉喀什旅游经历的网络博客。请自由选择您感兴趣的一篇博客进行仔细阅读，然后根据您读后的真实感受，尽可能详尽地回答以下问题 （请务必用中文回答）

http://www.travbuddy.com/Marrakech-travel-blogs-1082075

http://www.travelblog.org/Africa/Morocco/Marrakech-Tensift-El-Haouz/Marrakech/blogs-page-1.html

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/searchResult?q=Marrakesh&search-q-submit=&facet=origin%3Atips_and_articles

Q9 读完博客后，您最先想到的，最能体现马拉喀什当地特色的不同之处是什么？请列举三项。

Q10 读完博客后，请您详细描述一下：您觉得马拉喀什的整体氛围或者带给你的整体感觉是？

Q11 请您列举几个读完博客后，马拉喀什给您留下深刻印象的独特的旅游景点？

Q12 总体来说，如果让您用三个词来形容马拉喀什，这三个词会是？

Q13 阅读完这篇博客后，您喜欢马拉喀什吗？为什么？

Q14 读完博客后，您有兴趣今后去马拉喀什旅游吗？

- ❍ 是
- ❍ 否

Q15 读完博客后，您有兴趣把马拉喀什介绍给别人并推荐他们去那里旅游吗？

- ❍ 是
- ❍ 否