

RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF CHINESE MICRO-STUDY ABROAD CONSULTING SERVICE COMPANIES BASED ON SWOT ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

With the continuous development of China, the study abroad consulting service companies have emerged thanks to the increasing number of Chinese studying abroad while few existing academic papers focus on studying the development strategy of Chinese micro-study abroad consulting service companies.

This research uses SWOT analysis method to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Chinese micro-study consulting service companies and combine them into four groups according to the SWOT matrix namely WO (combination of weaknesses and opportunities), SO (combination of strengths and opportunities), WT (combination of weaknesses and threats), ST (combination of strengths and threats), resulting in four strategies formed.

It was found in this research that Chinese micro-study consulting service companies have the strengths in itself in cost and official flexibility. The weaknesses are mainly represented in the lack of professionals and brand reputation. When it comes to the opportunities that mainly come from the Chinese government's insistence on safeguarding the rights and interests of international students; besides the ordinary families have evolved into the main group intending to study abroad. The threats are mainly the chaos in the study abroad market implicating the damage to the company's reputation, the fierce competition in the study abroad consulting service market, and the new media changing consumer habits. This research proposes four strategies based on these findings.

Keywords: Study Abroad Consultation Service, Micro-Companies, SWOT Analysis.

DEFINITION OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China, the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the National Development and Reform Commission of China, and the Ministry of Finance of China (2011) formulated and issued the "Notice on Issuing the Standards for Classification of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises", which stipulate that micro-enterprises in the business service industry are enterprises with less than 10 employees or with total assets of less than 1 million yuan.

The study abroad consultation service defined in this article refers to the information consultation service for students who intend to study abroad, as well as their parents, including the application requirements of overseas institutions, the selection of overseas institutions, and various issues during study abroad. Therefore, the subject of this article is companies in China mainland whose main business is consulting services for studying abroad, and with less than 10 employees or total assets of less than 1 million yuan.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses SWOT analysis method to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Chinese micro-study consulting service companies and combine them into for groups of according to the SWOT matrix namely WO (combination of weaknesses and opportunities), SO (combination of strengths and opportunities), WT (combination of weaknesses and threats), ST (combination of strengths and threats) , resulting in four strategies formed.

THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS IN SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Cost strength

Cost strength is a key factor in determining competitive advantage. Micro-study abroad consulting service companies is small-scaled and cost-effective.

Office flexibility

High level of office flexibility is shown due to the office characteristics of overseas study consulting services. The Companies can still be carried out normally through the internet during the epidemic when employees and consumers have difficulty reaching the company.

Weaknesses

Few professional talents

At present, the micro-study abroad consulting service companies are numerous in China, but the business level of employees varies. Due to insufficient professional competence of some practitioners, students and parents obtain nothing practical during the consultation process. Much worse, wrong consultation consequences caused by same reason mislead students and parents.

At present, the three main types of talents difficult to introduce are as follow:

1. Foreign language talents: The practitioners of Chinese micro-study abroad consulting Service Company usually need to qualify with a good foreign language level in order to be more flexible in acquiring and studying the overseas information. The lack of foreign language talents is not only limited to the languages talents of English, but others, such as Korean, Japanese, French, German etc.
2. Talents with overseas study background or overseas work experience, who can readily grasp overseas information on policies, culture, education and so on.
3. Talents with professional academic background: The major background of students is diversified, and it is difficult for practitioners to be proficient in multi-disciplinary professional knowledge of studying abroad at the same time. A good case in point, practitioners with the management background have difficulties in being competent for consulting work in the medical profession, so do the practitioners with the science background for the consulting work of the literature major. Therefore, attracting talents from different disciplines to join the company is also the top priority.

Low brand awareness

In China, further education is the major event not only for an individual but for a family. So students and parents are more inclined to the well-known and large-scaled companies when it comes to choosing a consulting service company for studying abroad. Micro companies are small in scale and far from comparable in brand awareness to that of large companies.

Opportunities

The Chinese government protects the rights and interests of overseas students from multiple perspectives

The Chinese government protects the rights of overseas students from multiple perspectives, resolved the masses' worries about studying abroad, and revived their confidence in studying abroad. In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, Chinese students' willingness to study abroad has decreased, and the troubles and problems of students and parents mainly come from the following aspects:

1. From the perspective of learning methods, some foreign institutions are forced to adopt an online teaching model due to the impact of this epidemic, leading to the possible failure in authentication of degree, thus resulting in the worries about studying abroad.
2. From the health perspective, the epidemic in some countries is still not well controlled, and some students and their parents worry about the risk of infection, thus shelving their study abroad plans.
3. From the perspective of the overseas student settlement policy, some students cannot stay abroad for sufficient time due to the impact of the epidemic, resulting in the failure of settlement in some cities in China, thus reducing the willingness to study abroad.

Regarding the degree authentication that are of the most concern to overseas students, the relevant Chinese government departments have implemented policies to guarantee the academic qualifications of overseas students who are forced to adopt an online teaching model due to the COVID-19 epidemic. In 2020, the Study Abroad Service Center of the Ministry of Education of China (2020) issued the "*Notes on the work of degree qualification for returned overseas students under the influence of the new crown pneumonia epidemic*", and in 2021, the Study Abroad Service Center of the Ministry of Education of China (2021) issued the "*Supplementary Note on the Work of Academic Degree Qualification for Overseas Students During the Pneumonia Epidemic*", the Overseas Education Service Center of the Ministry of Education of China has actively responded to the overseas students' concern of degree and academic accreditation matters since the COVID-19 epidemic, protecting the rights and interests of overseas students, and eliminating the worries of overseas students.

From a health perspective, the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council of China (2020) also stated at a press conference that it will give priority to the COVID-19 vaccination for those who go to work or study in high-risk countries or regions. The Chinese government's "*Spring Sprout Action*" is also being actively promoted in more than 120 countries to ensure the health of overseas compatriots, including overseas students. (Wu, 2021)

In terms of the issue of settlement, it has also received the attention from the government. For example, the Shanghai Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau (2021) responded to the questions about the settlement of overseas students through its official We Chat account, and said that during the epidemic, the length of stay of overseas students that does not

meet the relevant requirements will not be the restrictive condition that affects the applicants who have returned from studying abroad to apply for permanent residence in Shanghai.

Ordinary Family Is the Main Body of the Group Intending To Study Abroad

With the continuous development of China, ordinary Chinese families have become the main body of groups who intend to study abroad (Beijing New Oriental Vision Overseas Consulting Co Ltd et al., 2021). Studying abroad is no longer exclusive to elite families, and the market for studying abroad will be broader in the future. According to the "*Report on Chinese Student's Overseas Study*" released by Beijing New Oriental Vision Overseas Consulting Co Ltd et al. (2021), the positions of parents of families intending to study abroad have evolved from being "middle-level leaders" to "general employees" according to survey data for seven consecutive years.

Threats

The chaos in the study abroad market implicated the damage to the company's reputation

There is a saying in China that "*a mouse shit breaks a pot of soup*", which mean "the bad apple", although the Chinese government has continuously strengthened the supervision of the study-abroad market in recent years, there are still some mercenary individuals and companies that openly and illegally provide study-abroad consultation and intermediary services, and a small number of legitimate companies also disregard the law in the face of interests and take risks in pursuit of high profits.

At present, a small group of individuals and companies at home and abroad illegally provide services including study abroad consultation and study abroad application service to students who intend to study abroad by using new media platforms to promote and find customers. The legitimate rights and interests of students may not be properly protected when the interest dispute between students and illegal personnel, leading to that student may not only pay the time costs, but also to pay high losses.

For sure, it would be a blessing in misfortune if they merely paid time and money. Much worse, In the study abroad market, some individuals and companies often use illegal methods such as forging students' graduation certificates, transcripts, work experience, awards and other illegal methods to assist students in obtaining admission notices from overseas universities, thereby earning high "*insurance premiums*" or high "*Insurance fee*", which refers to the cost of guaranteeing a student to be admitted by an overseas university. Certainly, these illegal personnel or companies will not consider the risks students may encounter ranging from being denied admission and disqualification from admission, or in severe cases, they may violate laws and regulations and be punished by law.

Besides, there are other violations in the study abroad market. For instance, the personal background and qualifications of some practitioners are suspected of fraud, the company makes false promises to applicants for studying abroad, and make false publicity on overseas universities or successful cases of studying abroad.

Apart from that, some overseas colleges and intermediaries have opened a large number of online courses for profit under the guise of the COVID-19 epidemic. They usually claim that

students can easily obtain overseas degrees without going abroad. They recruit Chinese students by reducing admission requirements, graduation requirements, or shortening the length of study. Such academic degrees cannot be accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education's Study Abroad Service Center (Chinese Ministry of Education's Study Abroad Service Center, 2021).

These market chaos have a great negative impact on the reputation of companies in the study abroad market even though study abroad consulting service companies are only one type of the huge study abroad market, they are more or less negatively influenced by the market chaos.

The market of consulting services for studying abroad is fiercely competitive

At present, there are enormous consulting service companies for studying abroad in China. Some education companies that did not involve consulting services for studying abroad in the early stage have gradually begun to do business on that. Some self-financed study abroad intermediary companies also carry out the business of study abroad consulting services. Some Chinese universities have also set up relevant departments to provide students with consulting services for studying abroad.

New media platforms have changed consumer habits

In China, new media platforms featuring experience sharing have developed rapidly, and experience sharing platforms, taking "Xiaohongshu" as the example, have become mainstream apps in China. According to the official website of Xiaohongshu, as of July 2019, the number of users of Xiaohongshu has exceeded 300 million, and the number of monthly active users has exceeded 100 million (Xingin Information Technology (Shanghai) Co Ltd, 2019).

Currently, many students or parents with the intention of studying abroad are accustomed to using experience sharing platforms to obtain information about studying abroad. For example, bloggers of international students often share their application experience. The traditional study abroad consulting Service Company, however, does not seem to be the first choice for students or parents anymore.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON SWOT MATRIX ANALYSIS

Table 1		
THE SWOT MATRIX OF CHINESE MICRO-STUDY ABROAD CONSULTING SERVICE COMPANIES		
Internal environment	Strengths	Weaknesses
	S1: Cost strength S2: Office flexibility	W1: Few professional talents W2: Low brand awareness
External environment	S-O Strategy	W-O Strategy
Opportunities O1: The Chinese government protects the rights and interests of overseas students from multiple perspectives O2: Ordinary family is the main body of the group intending to study abroad	SO1: Focus on the use of cost-effective advantages	WO1: The company should do a good job in policy research and provide more comprehensive consulting services for studying abroad WO2: Companies should introduce talents through multiple channels WO3: Cultivate a compound talent team with "one

		specialization and multiple abilities"
Threats	S-T Strategy	W-T Strategy
T1: The chaos in the study abroad market implicated the damage to the company's reputation T2: The market of consulting services for studying abroad is fiercely competitive T3: New media platforms have changed consumer habits	ST1: Attach importance to the construction of business ethics ST2: Develop a new "Internet +" consulting model ST3: Expand business scope, diversify revenue and open up performance growth points	WT1: Focus on the local market and establish a good local brand image

S-O Strategy

Focus on the use of cost-effective advantages

In the "study abroad fever" climate, ordinary families have become the main body of group studying abroad. The company can give full play to its own cost advantages and focus on improving the cost-effectiveness of study abroad consulting services to provide the children from ordinary families with more cost-effective study abroad consulting services.

W-O strategy

The company should do a good job in policy research and provide more comprehensive consulting services for studying abroad

At present, the Chinese government has implemented many measures to encourage students to study abroad and protect the rights and interests of overseas students. The business scope of traditional companies are limited to study abroad consulting service such as study abroad application, school selection, and consultations of study abroad life etc. In response to a special period, the COVID-19 epidemic, companies should do a good job in policy research related to overseas students, and provide more comprehensive overseas study consulting services including policy consultation.

Companies should introduce talents through multiple channels

Generally speaking, large companies often adopt the method of "school-enterprise cooperation" in the channel of talent introduction that cooperate with Chinese universities to introduce high-quality industry talents, which is a win-win that the Language talents and subject professionals can be continuously maintained for the companies, meanwhile, universities could solve the problems of students employment. But for micro-enterprises, this approach is difficult to be feasible because of the small size and small-scaled personnel demand and school-enterprise cooperation difficulty.

Therefore, micro-enterprises need to open another channel to find interdisciplinary talents. International students are the kind of them. The group of international students is not characterized with professional background and language proficiency, but also is familiar with the details of overseas study and life through their own experience. In addition, their good foreign language proficiency and professional background basically meets all the requirements

of micro companies for talents. Therefore, it is significant to choose what kind of channel to attract overseas student talents.

The company can choose to convene talents with overseas learning backgrounds through the platform of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Secondly, the company can also publish talent recruitment on overseas Chinese online platforms, such as the "*www.icnkr.com*" in South Korea. The "*www.icnkr.com*" is the largest and most active Chinese online community in South Korea. It currently has more than 2.5 million registered members (ShinWha Co Ltd, 2021). In addition, companies should set up a competitive salary system to attract talents. Although micro-companies can hardly be compared with the well-known brand companies in terms of basic salary and benefits, they can still adopt high commissions and other incentives to attract talents to join.

Cultivate a compound talent team with "one specialization and multiple abilities"

The company should attach importance to the cultivation of "*one specialization, multiple abilities*" for in-service employees, and promote the overall improvement of employees qualities. They can not only be competent for their own positions, but also can take on other tasks of the company when necessary. For example, a professional study abroad consultant can also perform the marketing and publicity work during the off-season of the demand for study abroad consulting services each year. As a micro company, it is extremely important to cultivate a compound talent team with "*one specialization and multiple abilities*" in the actual situation of scarce number of employees.

S-T Strategy

Attach importance to the construction of business ethics

Companies must hold the bottom line of business ethics. The company should ensure that the price of consulting services for studying abroad is clear and transparent, and accept the supervision of the government and the masses. The company must ensure that the personal educational experience and work experience disclosed and free from fraud by the practitioners. For students who are successfully admitted through the consulting services provided by the company, the successful case can only be publicized with the consent of the person concerned, and no exaggeration can be done in the publicity. The company shall carry out business activities in strict accordance with the business scope registered in accordance with the law. For example, when the intermediary services for studying abroad at its own expense, for private entry and exit intermediary services, translation services and other services are not included in the business scope of the company registration, it shall not carry out illegal business activities beyond the business scope.

Develop a New "*Internet +*" consulting model

The company should actively carry out marketing activities through Internet platforms such as "*Xiaohongshu*", "*Zhihu*", "*Tik Tok*", and "*Weibo*" to cater to the changing habits of consumers. On this basis, the company can give full play to the features of office flexibility and carry out Internet-based consulting services for studying abroad.

Expand business scope, diversify revenue and open up performance growth points

The company can change the company's business scope according to market demand, and carry out more diversified business activities after the government approves the company's application of business scope registration change. Generally speaking, the businesses study abroad consulting service companies can choose are self-funded study abroad intermediary services, translation services, and so on.

W-T Strategy

Focus on the local market and establish a good local brand image

Unlike the national distribution marketing of large companies, micro companies should focus more on the local market, which can not only reduce the excessive marketing costs used to expand foreign markets, but also conduct more in-depth research on the local market so as to scientifically formulate marketing strategies tailored to local conditions, thereby creating a good local reputation and establishing a good Local brand image.

CONCLUSION

The development of Chinese micro-study abroad consulting service companies is deeply influenced by the internal and external environment. Therefore, companies need to take the initiative to give full play to their strengths, overcome weaknesses, make good use of opportunities, and defuse threats in order to enable companies to develop scientifically.

At present, there are few existing academic papers on Chinese micro-study abroad consulting service companies. This research provides a reference for researchers to understand this industry in China.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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