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Value Proposition in Oversea Study Agency industry

A case study of Huashi overseas study agency

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Abstract

Background and purpose: With globalization development, education cooperation and competition among countries are becoming more and more frequent, which makes many students want to go abroad for further study to learn more professional knowledge. China is a country with the largest number of students studying abroad, promoting the development of oversea study agencies. However, as more and more companies enter the industry regardless of their qualifications, the uneven quality of services has led to a decline in customer satisfaction for many companies. The value proposition canvas is a tool that can help a company provide products or services that correctly matches the needs of its customers. The purpose of the research is to make use of the value proposition canvas in order to make the value proposition more explicit and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business.

Methodology: The research conducted qualitative research by the inductive approach. The research used a single case study and collaborated with Huashi oversea study agency to get a thorough understanding of the research questions. Thus, the research made two interview guides for the case company and their customers and conducted eight semi-structured interviews. In addition, the thematic analysis was used in the research to analyze data by dividing the interview content into different codes.

Findings and conclusion: The findings and conclusions summarized the value proposition canvas from the interviews, as well as some suggestions on customer profile about how to improve its services. The conclusions focus on customer needs to create value, extend services to make sure that the scope of the company's services should be able to cover the needs of customers, and enhance communication with customers.

Key words: oversea study, value creation, value proposition, value proposition canvas

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1. Introduction

The chapter introduces the background of global education in China and the development of the industry of oversea study agencies. In addition, the research problem, purpose, and research question are stated in the chapter.

1.1. Background of oversea study agencies

With an increasing number of international collaborations, globalization promotes the relationship between all countries in the world, which makes all countries to be a whole. With the development of globalization, it is a normal phenomenon that the flow of various resources such as human resources and material resources between different countries and regions. The flow of talent resources has shown in education, and educational resources are also flowing among different countries. The interaction and competition in the field of education are more frequent among different countries (Wang, 2015). With the development of globalization of education, a large number of people want to study abroad and learn more professional knowledge. Thus, globalization also promotes the growth of the oversea study market. International student recruitment is growing rapidly, with international students doubling to 5 million from 1990 to 2014. By 2025, that number estimated to increase to 8 million. Therefore, it is clear to see that the value of studying abroad is growing steadily in the long run (QS, 2020).

China is becoming more open than before. There is an increasing number of Chinese students intending to study abroad due to the decrease in the cost of studying abroad and the relaxation of policy requirements of visas (Zhang, 2019). Chinese students are the main source of international students in the world. China is the country with a massive population of 1.4 billion, which has more students studying abroad than any other country (Chinapower, 2020). In recent years, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has kept a steady growth. In 2018, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad was 662 thousand. Among them, around 30,200 students studied abroad funded by the state, approximately 35,600 students are employees who studied

abroad funded by their companies, and about 600 thousand furthered study abroad at their own expense (Chinabaogao, 2019). Thus, those students who intend to further study abroad at their own expense are the mainstream in the market. The increasing number of overseas students develop oversea study market boomingly, and more and more overseas study agencies have emerged. The number of companies in the industry is more than 100,000 (Ocn, 2019).

An oversea study agency plays the role of intermediary between students and oversea education institutions. Oversea study agencies are essential to provide services in applying processes for students, such as the help of application between students and universities and the application of visas (Zhang & Hagedorn, 2014). Oversea study agencies grasp the most suitable proposal to help their customers to apply oversea schools (Collins, 2012). Among these oversea study agencies, some of them provide additional services such as visa and accommodation (Austin Community College, 2012). Figure 1 states the role of oversea study agency.

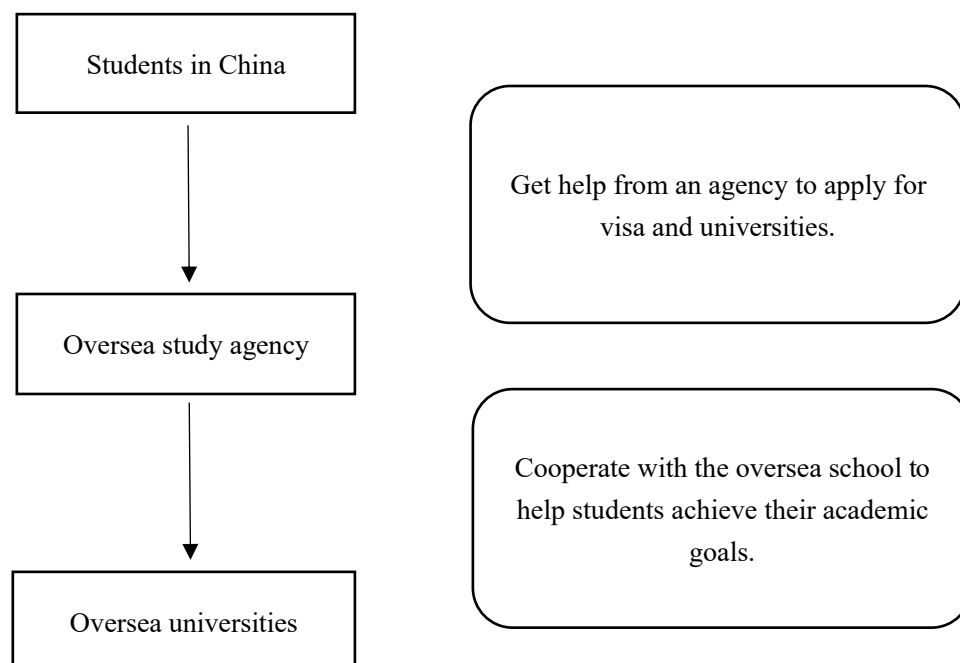


Figure 1 The role of overseas study agency

1.2. Research problems

With the development of overseas study agency, an increasing number of companies enter the market, which leads to the number of overseas study agencies overgrow. There are about 100,000 overseas study agencies in the market. Among these overseas study agencies, many of them are established within two years (about 70,000). Among these established overseas study agencies, SMEs are the majority in the industry (Ocn, 2019). More and more people are optimistic about emerging markets and enter the market without considering their skills and abilities, which results in uneven service quality. Among the students who choose to use study abroad agencies, 35.71% are dissatisfied with their service (JSJ, 2015). Some overseas study agencies cannot satisfy their customer needs, even have some legal issues. According to China's sky eye survey, there are more than 4,000 relevant companies with operational problems, and more than 900 overseas study agencies have legal issues (Study abroad supervision network service, 2020). Thus, creating satisfying services to customers and surviving in the market is a question that needs to be considered.

1.3. Research purpose and questions

The purpose of the research is to make use of the value proposition canvas in order to make the value proposition more explicit and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business. The research was to connect with the case company-Huashi overseas study agency and investigated what their customers' pains, gains and customer jobs are. In addition, the case company made a series of services to explore their customer group, so the research also investigated what the disadvantages of the old service model are and the evaluations of the current services. Then, the thesis analyzed how the case company makes the value proposition more explicit and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business.

The value proposition canvas was developed by Alexander Osterwalder and consists of two parts, value map and customer profile (B2B international, 2020). It is a tool that can help a company provide a product or service that correctly matches the needs of its

customers. The value proposition canvas comes in handy when creating new products and services, or when a company wants to improve its products and services. Thus, the purpose of the research is to make use of the value proposition canvas in order to make the value proposition more explicit and through that find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business.

Based on the context, the research questions are coming out:

- What is the value proposition of Huashi oversea study agency?
- How can the services of the company be improved?

1.4. Delimitation

- Oversea study agencies play the role of intermediary to connect oversea universities and students. The thesis only focused on the connection between agency and students, which value and what service should provide to customers. Because how they collaborate with oversea universities and build the relationship is confidential, thus, how the agency works with oversea universities is not covered in the thesis.
- For reasons of confidentiality, financial information will not be covered in the thesis.

2. Literature Review

The chapter is the literature review part, which includes a large amount of literature on overseas study market, value creation, and value proposition.

2.1. Oversea education market

In the past 40 years, international higher education has become a commodity and has formed an increasingly competitive market (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016). Due to political reforms and economic opening, the internationalization of higher education has expanded from traditional students and scholars abroad to a broader range of groups (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). International students from China account for a significant component of the international education market, for example, from 1978 to the end of 2009, about 1.6 million Chinese students studied or completed their studies at foreign universities (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011 referred in Xinhua Press, 2010). There are several reasons motivating students to study abroad further: overseas educational quality is better than domestic. The other factors are the ability to integrate into the overseas environment, the grasp of a different culture, and migration (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

There is a phenomenon that students from China to other countries are getting younger and younger, especially in English-speaking countries such as the UK, America, and Australia, which reflects in the number of Chinese overseas bachelors than masters (Fang & Wang, 2014). As more and more students intend to study abroad, this also leads to intense competition in the applying process, especially in universities with high rankings and good reputations. This intense competition leads to longer review times for overseas schools to grasp students' profiles (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). With the vigorous development of the overseas study market and the competition between applicants is becoming fierce, students will have some difficulties in the application process for this phenomenon.

Hagedom & Zhang (2011) state several difficulties for students to apply overseas school: firstly, students believe that the most challenging part of the application process is

standardized English exams such as IELTS and TOEFL. Because a large number of students do not have long-term plans, they always decide to study abroad in the next semester. Such short time to prepare English exam has caused huge pressure on students. Secondly, despite the high pass rate for Chinese students applying for visas, the vast majority of students report that visa is a problem, especially in the United States; Another problem is the difficulty of choosing schools. For most Chinese students, in China's middle and high schools, few students explore their interests and participate in extracurricular activities; there are some students said they hope to get some advice from their oversea study agency about how to choose a university and major because they are not familiar with overseas schools themselves. Finally, many students said that it is also difficult to find a suitable agency. They usually get information from their parents and friends. The feedback and successful cases from friends are an important criterion for students to choose a relevant agency.

2.2. Oversea study agency

Overseas study agencies have created a new market. For this new market, different people also have different views. Some people think it is extremely necessary to choose an oversea study agency if they want to study abroad, while others do not think so.

2.2.1. The role of oversea study agency

In this competitive market, some universities use oversea study agencies to recruit students (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016). Different scholars have defined the oversea study agency from different aspects. Oversea study agency has become a bridge for the international student recruitment industry, communicating on the admissions process on behalf of their institutions and students (Coffey, 2014). Oversea study agency is the individuals, companies, or other organizations that provide services in a commercial form to help students and their parents obtain overseas study opportunities (Krasocki, 2002). Oversea study agencies not only receive consulting fees from students but also receive commissions from some overseas universities. After each admitted student paid the tuition fee, the agency will get a commission, which is a

certain percentage of the total tuition fee in the first year. The number is different for different countries and different schools (Coffey, 2014). Nikula & Kivistö (2018) defines overseas study agency as a for-profit company. They help recruit international students for income and commissions, but there is a narrow definition in his research. These agencies are also salespeople. They recruit students to exchange for commissions in other countries, and it also provides study consultation, application services, visas, and accommodation advice.

The difficulty of communication due to regional differences and language differences makes overseas study agency play an important role in the entire applying process. In this process, overseas study agencies make a series of detailed services (Collins, 2008). Some overseas study agencies explore their service scope, such as living services, including ticket reservations and overseas accommodation arrangements (Zhang & Hagedorn, 2014). Some agencies also contact overseas universities to provide some bridging courses. The bridging courses aim to improve the English skills of applicants and contribute with the foundation for the upcoming courses (Coffey, 2014).

Overseas study agencies are popular in the Chinese market; around 70% of international students choose overseas study agencies to help them apply for overseas school (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). A survey of higher education institutions in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand in 2012 showed that as many as 38-53% of all internationally offered international courses are provided through overseas study agencies (OBHE, 2014; Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). In some countries and regions, the status of overseas study agency is more important. In Australian universities, the number of students applying for international study agencies has reached about 80% (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018; Productivity Commission, 2015). In the UK universities, their commissions for overseas study agencies reached 120 million pounds per year (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018, referred in Paton, 2013).

2.2.2. The reasons why some students use agency services

Some scholars have studied the reasons why students choose to use overseas study

agencies. A trusted overseas study agency could help students with application forms, visa interviews, travel arrangements, insurance, entrance exams, and other university preparation requirements. Overseas study agencies can also provide valuable advice to students, helping them make institutional choice decisions and university professional decisions. Reliable agencies can save students time by providing useful information about study locations, local transportation, cost of living, weather, social and cultural life, and other important issues (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). According to Hagedom & Zhang (2011), there are several reasons why students would like to choose an agency to help them. One of the most important reasons is that they know little about the application process about foreign universities. Secondly, some students need more help with visa applications and more information of universities. Also, one of the significant reasons is that students believe they will have a more successful rate when they use an overseas study agency if they use an overseas study agency. Overseas study agencies can help their customers make a suitable proposal to meet the requirements and plan a good future through their connections (Collins, 2012). In addition, the pressure from time is a major reason why they use an agency. Many students think that they need to prepare a lot of materials and take exams in foreign universities. At the same time they also need to complete the courses that must be completed in China, which leads to high pressure on the allocation of time (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011).

2.2.3. The reasons why some students do not use agency

Firstly, the trust issue is the main reason why applicants do not get assistance from overseas study agencies. The overseas study agencies claim that they are maximizing the interests of students. In reality, it is difficult to ensure that they do not have moral issues (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). There are a series of unethical behaviors among overseas study agencies in the industry, including providing false information to students, interfering with the application process such as writing letters instead of students, or consultants charging students privately (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). Whether students or overseas universities, they usually pay attention to the word of mouth when choosing to cooperate with overseas study agencies (Krasocki, 2002).

The major overseas study agencies conflict in the process of cooperation is inconsistent goals, mentioned in many works of literatures. It is common for the customers and overseas study agencies to have conflicts of goals. The conflict of goals refers to the difference in expectations and interests (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). Overseas study agency is a kind of for-profit agency. They not only receive consulting fees from students but also receive commissions from some overseas universities (Coffey, 2014), while students want to achieve information from overseas study agencies and get assistance from them (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). The key point of agency theory is that the customers often encounter a situation where it is difficult to control the agency when they delegate power to the agency (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). It will result in overseas study agencies usually paying more attention to their interests than the interests of their customer. Those overseas study agencies with lower responsibilities may provide unreliable information or mislead students in order to provide their financial benefits, thereby harming students' learning and life (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). In addition, inconsistent goals mean that the two parties have different views on the goals. There are different opinions on how to reach a consensus result (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016; Jap & Anderson 2003; Dou et.al., 2010). The customers and the agency assess the risk based on their own interests as their motivation, which means overseas study agency assess risk from their profit view and students assess risks from their study (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016).

The second problem is information asymmetry. Information asymmetry takes the form of "hidden information" before signing and "hidden action" after signing (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016). Information asymmetry will make it difficult for students to determine whether the fault in the application is based on the purpose of the overseas study agency or is out of the agency's control (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). Some overseas study agencies tell their customer information selectively, but not all the information, which causes the students to have difficulty in the pre-contract stage about choosing a suitable overseas study agency, while another difficulty is caused by information asymmetry after the contract. It is difficult to monitor the agency's activities at the stage

(Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016). During the applying process, it is not possible that students monitor the chosen agency all the time, which leads to information asymmetry, which indirectly leads to the oversea study agency sometimes not performing their duties per the contract, or may provide some untrue information so that the oversea study agency may pursue their own interests instead of the principal's interests (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018).

2.3. Value creation

Some literature makes some categories focusing on main elements in business model innovation as the value proposition, value creation and delivery, and value capture system, which is shown in Figure 2 (Bocken et al., 2014 referred in Richardson 2008).



Figure 2 Business model innovation

There are many different definitions of value creation. More and more companies put value creation as the core to meet the needs of the end customer (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2013). Value creation is the core of business model innovation; capturing new business opportunities, new markets, and revenue streams is the leading way to capture value for companies (Bocken et.al., 2014 referred in Beltramello et al., 2013 & Teece, 2010). The importance of value creation is also shown by other researchers. A company should make an effort to create values of its products and services because it is the reason why a company exists (Hsu, 2018; Slater, 1997). Pagani (2013) defines value creation is the process by which a company creates benefits for its customers by providing its products and services. Value creation is based on the collaboration of participants from different technical and functional backgrounds (Bouncken, Laudien, & Fredrich, 2018). Value creation is a series of related steps are linked together, rather than a single-stage, which

is like a production process, for example, it is made up of machines, material, and other tangible resources, who together create a process of value creation (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000). Bouncken et al. (2018) also state that value creation is a cooperative process, resulting from the interaction between customers, consultants, cooperative specialists, and externals.

Customer value is what customers want and are willing to pay for (Smith & Colgate, 2007). Woodruff (1997) defines customer value as the customer's evaluation and preference for the product, such as from the attributes and functions of the product, contributes to these results, and helps to achieve the customer's goals and objectives in the use case. Grönroos (2011) states that the value-in-use is an essential factor. For a company, value creation is based on the value-in-use, which includes customers' psychological factors and the use of functions. However, if the customer did not join the value-adding process, value creation is meaningless to the customer. Kambil, Ginsberg, & Bloch (1996) highlight the importance of customer need; value creation is only through the "fit" between products or services and customer demand. Therefore, based on the above literature, understanding customers' needs is the basis for a company to create value to its customer.

It always has differences between companies defining what customers need and what customers actually need (Sharma & Douglas, 1994). According to Doyle (2011), value creation needs to be checked if it is consistent between the actual need of the customer and the company defined value of customers over time. The problem of difference can be solved by the feedback from customers (Woodruff, 1997). Customer integration is defined as a form of industrial value creation in which consumer participation in activities and processes that were previously considered to be in the company's domain (Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004). Customers often work together with the company when faced with a problem and then choose a specific arrangement to solve the problem (Bouncken, Laudien, & Fredrich, 2018). Co-creation of value is an ideal goal. Incorporating customers into value creation is critical because it helps organizations highlight customer feedback and improve the front-end process of identifying customer

needs and wants (Lusch & Vargo, 2006).

2.4. Value proposition

The value proposition is the first factor of business model innovation (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014). The value proposition is a basic strategic tool that companies can output the central advantages of a product to the market and internally deliver the expected benefits (Saarijärvi, 2012). The value proposition is usually associated with products and services that generate economic returns, in a sustainable business, the value proposition will be coupled with economic value to provide measurable ecological and social value (Bocken et.al., 2014 referred in Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013). The value proposition connects the critical components of what is delivered to the target customer (Gassmann, Frankenberger, & Csik, 2014).

There are many different definitions of the value proposition. The value proposition is defined as the benefits that target customers received can fulfill their requirements (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The services or products a company provides should connect strictly to the needs of customers (Johnson, Christensen, & Kagermann, 2008). Newness, performance, customization, “getting the job done,” design, brand/status, price, cost reduction, risk reduction, accessibility, and convenience/usability are defined as the main elements of value creation to the customer (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Due to different situations, different industries, and different target customers, it is difficult to define which method is the best way to create value.

The value proposition is the core part of the business model (Chesbrough, 2010). Gassmann et al. (2014) introduce different elements in the business model. One of the elements is the value proposition. The company needs to be aware of what they should provide to customers and fulfill their demands. To achieve an explicit value proposition, companies should do what they can to create value for their customers and relieve their pains as much as they can (Saarijärvi, 2012). To understand customer, Osterwalder et.al. (2014) draw the value proposition canvas to analyze how the products and services create gains and solve the pains of customers.

The value proposition canvas is a tool to check if the created value matches the needs of customers and what needs to be created to customers (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). The two parts of the value proposition canvas are the value map and the customer profile. The customer profile is made up of customer jobs, pains, and gains. Pains are defined as “bad outcomes, problems, and characteristics, obstacles and risks” of customers. Gains of the customer are the advantages customers need and expect. Customer jobs are described that the work customer needs to finish to fulfill their needs and deal with their problems. The value map is described as a tool that shows the direction to service or products to create value for customers. The value map consists of gain relievers, gain creators, and products and services fitting the value proposition. Gain creators are how the services and products create the gains of customers. Pain relievers show how companies’ products or services solve customer pains. The value map is to solve the pains of customers and create more benefits to customers; a company should create a "fit" situation so that the customer profile and the value map can correspond to each other (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). Customers always expect a lot, while struggle in lots of pains, focusing on those pains and gains will help the company achieve value proposition (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). The value proposition canvas is shown in Figure 3.

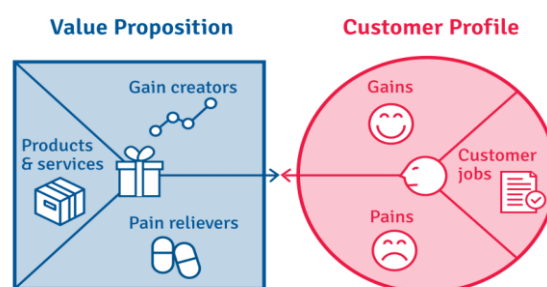


Figure 3 Value proposition canvas (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014)

3. Methodology

The chapter is to state the methods and approach of the thesis. Qualitative research approach and case study are applied in the research. The choices of interviewees and the process of interview are stated in the chapter. The last part is the research quality.

3.1. Research strategy

The research conducted the qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research can collect lots of insights and opinions, which is beneficial to gather rich data and information, analyze people's opinions, and answer the research questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). Thus, to achieve an in-depth investigation of the interviewees, qualitative research was conducted in the thesis. In order to obtain rich research data, this research conducted interviews with different focus groups (the case company-Huashi oversea study agency and their customers). Therefore, a large number of data in this research derived from interviewees' dialogues and opinions, divided them into different codes and themes, and then analyzed them to obtain the answers to the research questions.

An inductive approach was used in the research. The inductive approach is the most suitable method for qualitative research, which is to create a new theory based on the collected data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, the result of the generated theory of the inductive approach is based on the collected conversation from interviewees and some secondary data. In order to fully understand the value proposition, the research investigated the services in the case company and the customer profile of its customers. Then, the theory was generated about how to make the value proposition more explicit by the value proposition canvas and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business the customer profile. So, connected to the purpose of the research, the inductive approach was applied in the thesis.

3.2. Research design

The research conducted a single case study with Huashi oversea study agency to

connected to the purpose of research. The advantage of the single case study is to provide a deep understanding of a single organization or individual (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). So the single case study is more specific than other research designs. Based on the purpose of the research, the researcher gathered data from both the company level and customer level in order to get a full understanding of the value map and the customer profile. Firstly, the researcher observed and analyzed customers' pains, gains, and customer job to be done. Then, the research also investigated how the approved company's services create value to its customers.

One thing that needs to be mentioned here is data collection needs to gather from different aspects when conducting a case study in order to get a fully understanding of the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, the focus groups included Co-founders, employees in the company, and customers. The research not only collected primary data from different focus groups, but also obtained some secondary data from company brochures.

3.3. Data collection

There are two kinds of qualitative research data: primary and secondary data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). Those of two kinds of data were used in the thesis. In the thesis, the secondary data is from the case company service brochure, which mainly introduces the current services and the role and the advantages of the services. The brochure provides a basic introduction to the research. In addition, the majority of data is from primary data. All of the primary data derived from the qualitative interview. The research conducted eight interviews with the case company and the customer of the case company, which provided most data.

3.3.1. Interview samples

There are three types of interviewees in the research: the co-founders in the company, the employees in the company, and the customers in the company.

When selecting interviewees, there are several criteria:

1. Company's co-founder: (1) having the right to decide on the company's strategy; (2) understanding the company's development history; (3) having long working experience in the industry.
2. Company's employees: (1) having direct communication with customers; (2) receiving customer feedback.
3. Customers: consuming the company's services.

After screened and approved by interviewees, two Co-founders participated in the interview. Both of them have long working experience in oversea study agency industry, especially co-founder 1, who has worked in the oversea study agency industry for about 15 years and has a deep understanding of the industry. Since the establishment of the company, they have worked in the company and have been involved in many services.

The other interviewee group is the employee of the case company. Two employees were selected as interviewees and accepted the interview. They provided a large number of communication experiences and work cases with customers in interviews. At the same time, these employees communicate with those customers so that employees could receive feedback from customers directly, and they own their insights based on their work experience.

Four of the company's customers were interviewed. They are the end-users of this industry, and their needs are the basis for companies to develop services. The interview samples are stated in the following tables.

Name	Descriptions	Date	Duration
Co-founder 1	Decision maker (working experience around 15 years)	2020. 04. 15	50 min
Co-founder 2	Decision maker	2020. 04. 15	45min

Staff 1	Direct communication with customers	2020. 04. 15	40 min
Staff 2	Direct communication with customers	2020. 04. 15	45 min

Table 1 Company interview sample

Name	Services attended	Date	Duration
Customer 1	International study tour, internship, application, tracking system	2020. 05. 15	45min
Customer 2	Research projects, application	2020. 05. 10	45 min
Customer 3	Internship	2020. 05. 08	45 min
Customer 4	Application	2020. 05. 12	45min

Table 2 Customer interview sample

3.3.2. Interview guide

Because the research chose qualitative research, the research chose to conduct different interviews and different classes of people. Before conducting interviews, the first thing to do was to design interview questions. In order to give interviewees a flexible interview, the semi-structured interview is chosen. A topic guide is useful to conduct a loose structure interview (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). The interview guide is stated in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Interview guides are a series of informal questions and topics, which have no fixed order. Interview questions avoid some academic discourse, use some easy-to-understand language, and avoid asking research questions directly.

Remote interviews are not a good way to conduct interviews for the researcher compared with face-to-face interviews (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015).

However, due to the distance gap between Sweden and China, and the current situation of COVID-19, it is difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews, so the interviewees chose to conduct different individual online interviews. Due to different level of interviewees, the interview guides also have two different visions. One is for the case company, the other one is for the customer interviewees.

In the beginning, the interviews first introduced the research topic, which is about the value proposition of the overseas study agency industry. At the same time, it was also important to introduce some academic words such as what is value creation and value proposition. In this way, interviewees avoid confusion during the interview. Next, the interviewees made a brief introduction of their basic information such as their identity, their position in the company, and their working time in the industry. For the interviewees at the customer level, some questions about their basic questions about their age, their services, and why they choose such services were asked. Then, the central part of the interview with the company is about the interviewees' views on the industry of overseas study agencies, the development of overseas study agencies, the scope of the company's services, and the benefits of company's services. The interview questions for students are about why they choose to use an overseas study agency, how they choose to an overseas study agency, and what their pains and gains are. Finally, the researcher thanked them for their participation in those interviews.

3.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis is applied as the data analysis approach in the research. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), thematic analysis is one of the most common strategies to analyze data, which is to search the theme through the interview transcript. The researcher divided the interview content into different codes based on the research question and formulated interview guides. This research collected data from interviews with the case companies and their customers. Before conducting interviews, the researcher created different interview guides for a different level of interviewees. According to interview guides, the preliminary structure of interview content has been

classified, such as the pains, gains, and customer jobs to be done of the customer. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure that nothing was lost during the interview. After the interview, the researcher immediately conducted a transcript of the interview. During the transcribing process, the investigator needs to be transcribed as soon as possible so that the investigator can more fully understand the content of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

At the same time, because some of the interview guides are open-questions, there are indeed some interview contents inconsistent with the research purpose and questions, and these irrelevant interview contents were ignored to extract the core finding close to the research purpose. Because an extended, detailed, and informative answer is confusing to get focused code in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The collected data were then transcribed and could be initially scanned and classified. There were four interviewees in the interview with the company. Similarly, there were four interviewees in the interview with the company's customers. Two or more similar topics, keywords, and opinions that appeared in the interview were summarized into a code. These codes, composed of different points of view, were also not difficult to obtain, as interview guides are closely linked to research questions. Finally, different themes were found due to the correlation and similarity between different codes.

3.5. Research quality

There are two main criteria to measure the quality of research: reliability and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which were used in the thesis to ensure the thesis research quality.

3.5.1. Reliability

Reliability is an essential factor in qualitative research. Reliability is the basis of the consistency of measures, to check if a measure is stable, so that the results provide confidence that does not change much for the same group of samples, or see if the results of the thesis can be can get consistent results in similar research (Bryman & Bell,

2011). There are two types of reliability: internal reliability and external reliability. Internal reliability is “the consistency of results across items within a test”, while external reliability is applied to measure change from one to another (McLeod, 2013).

About the external replication, it is difficult to obtain complete reliability, because it is limited by many external conditions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). China's overseas study intermediary market is a rapidly developing industry. It is also restricted by various factors, such as the impact of the Trade war between China and the United States, the control of host country visas, and the development of the national economy. Due to various fluctuations, it is hard to determine whether other researches can get consistent results in the future.

3.5.2. Validity

Validity is considered to be the most crucial factor in measuring the quality of a study. Validity is to generalize and apply the results to other similar researches. There are two types of validity mentioned by Bryman & Bell, ecological validity, and external validity. Ecological validity is the ability to generalize the results to people’s daily lives, while external validity is the ability to generalized the results to a broader group than the research sample (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

However, it is tough to achieve completely high validity, but some approaches can be achieved to improve the validity of the research quality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Firstly, the research question is to well-formulated based on the background and the research problems. Then, the chosen case company is Huashi oversea study agency, which is a small oversea study agency, as described in the chapter one background, in the industry, most of the agencies are small and medium enterprises without much capital, so the Huashi agency is a typical representation in the same type of intermediary companies. In addition, the research conducted interviews from different level interviewees such as the co-founder and employees in the company and four different customers, which is able to get different opinions from different aspects, so that the research is not very one-sided. Those approaches are applied to increase the validity of the research.

4. Empirical findings

The chapter is the empirical findings of the case company. The first part is the background of the company. The second part is the interview with the customer of the company to investigate what their pains and gains are. The last part is the interview with the case company to investigate the disadvantages of the traditional service mode and the evaluation of the current services.

4.1. Introduction of Huashi oversea study agency

Huashi oversea study agency, established at the end of 2012, is a small-sized agency with 28 full-time employees. The customer group mainly between 12-18 years old. The services of the company provides are introduced in the below chapter.

4.1.1. Background of the company

Huashi oversea study agency provides consulting services to students, but also some services such as visa application, air ticket booking, internship, international study tour, language training, and public courses. The main difference between Huashi and other traditional oversea study agencies is that Huashi is a high-end level agency, “High-end” does not mean the high price, but Huashi oversea study agency always customized a completely covered proposal to their customer with 1 to 1 service.

Co-founder 1 works in the industry for around 15 years, who worked in a big oversea study agency as an employee in the beginning. At the end of 2012, she established Huashi oversea study agency with the other two co-founders. The company applied the same service model as the traditional large-scale overseas study agency. Traditional oversea study agencies analyze students' profiles, including school scores, English scores, and the country applied, then recommend schools that match their profile and make proposals. Also, some agencies in the industries create a production line that different employees have specific divisions with efficient cooperation. The mature production line provides high a success rate for the applications. This kind of

“production line” was applied early in the establishment of the company, but they found the problems soon.

In the beginning, there was a small increase in the number of customers who came to consult. With the increasing number of overseas study agencies in the industry, the company’s customers started to decline. In view of the decrease in the number of customers, the company has made some preliminary understanding of this phenomenon. The reason the number of customers reduced is that their customer is not satisfied with the service provided by traditional production line. After realizing the source of the problem, the leaders of the company took the employees to make some visits to their customers through face-to-face or telephone interviews. In view of the problems, the company's leaders and employees made a series of measures to get more customers. Huashi oversea study agency achieved more customers through customized service, in-depth communication, and new services, which are the main reasons they survive and succeed in the industry.

4.1.2. Innovative services of the company

The innovative services are introduced by both the four interviewees in the company and the company service brochure. The company not only provide services to match students profile as traditional services but also includes the service to improve the students profile and increase the success rate to apply for oversea university successfully.

1. Internship

The internship is that the company collaborates with different famous enterprises such as Google and PWC. Students will have several months, generally from 1 month to 3 months, to be interns in the company, after the internship, they will get a recommendation letter from the company.

2. Research projects

Research projects collaborate with different professors in some high-ranking universities such as Harvard, Oxford, and Yale University. Research ability and academic writing became the main problem for Chinese students in foreign study. The service is to research in different projects and different majors, which provides research skills to them. In addition, they will get a recommendation letter from professors.

3. International study tour projects

The international study tour is a short-term tour, mainly 2-4weeks, combining the feature of “study” and “travel”, which mainly cover language trainee courses, visiting schools, and living in host families. The tour aims to cultivate student’s language skills, cultural integration, and grow personal autonomy.

In addition, the company also provides free public courses and a tracking system used to monitor the service process.

1. Tracking system

To fulfill the requirement of “completely covered” services, the company has a tracking system, which assigns different teachers to visit students’ lives irregularly in those countries with more customers to help them solve some problems.

2. Public courses:

The agency offers some free courses to relieve their confusion in order to make it easier for students to study abroad—this service of providing courses to support students’ life after getting offers. The free courses provide a big help to study since the courses are free, so lots of customers and students will attend and solve their issues.

4.2. Interview with customers

The research interviewed with the case company and their customers. Four customers were interviewed in the research, and the main interview contents with customers were presented in the chapter.

4.2.1. Customer profile

The interview contents were roughly divided into customer jobs to be done, pains, and gains, which make up the customer profile. According to the interview, many opinions in customer jobs are the same as the pains and gains of customers. In other words, because customers are often struggling with some troubles and risks, and at the same time, they will get what they expect. These pains and gains constitute customer jobs. Therefore, some of the opinions in this section also appear in pains and gains later.

4.2.1.1. Customer jobs

The customer jobs are summarized in three points as below:

1. Preparation

The first job needs to do is preparation, which includes to fulfill the requirements and constantly enriching their ability and resume is necessary to do because the competition with other candidates is fierce, they must gain more advantages to improve the success rate.

Customer 4 mentioned that language skills are limited, but it is the mandatory requirement of the oversea study. Almost every overseas' school has a language requirement, which is also what they must do when they prepare to study abroad. However, Chinese is very different from English than other languages, which is a challenge for Chinese students. Customer 1 reflected that a university could not have only one requirement. Sometimes, they need to prepare different requirements at the same time, such as GMAT and IELTS. Also, they need to ensure the quality of domestic undergraduate performance, which is a stressful process.

Customer 1 pointed out that intangible advantages are important for them to win bargaining chips with more investment in education. The ability of a person is not only reflected by transcript but also includes some extracurricular activities. Some bonus points will make students more competitive in the application, which is beneficial for

students' application. They would like to attend some activities to achieve more competitiveness in the applying process. Customer 4 pointed out that intangible advantages will cover up some disadvantages during the applying process. Customer 4 explained this point with an example, an applicant's academic performance is average, but he has a wealth of work experience, which will make up for his shortcomings. Customer 2 mentioned that the unique experience would take them a new insight into the world due to the experience of living alone in a foreign country, different cultures, languages, and lifestyles, which will enrich their life experiences.

“The bonus points are important during application, although oversea schools do not have specific requirements on that, but intangible advantages such as good internship in big company are the bonus in the intense competitions,” Customer 1

Those requirements and intangible advantages are in the preparation process, they must enrich their abilities so that they can apply oversea university successfully.

2. To choose a suitable oversea study agency

The second one is to choose an oversea study education agency, as one of the pains of customers, exaggerated information, and uneven quality of services resulted that they have to ask their friends and check word of mouth.

Every customer mentioned exaggerated information because many companies will exaggerate their services in order to get more customers. When students become their customers, they will find that what they get from the agency is not as described before. Customer 3 complained of exaggerated services from advertisement, which is hard to judge authenticity. Around their cram school of IELTS, there are a lot of advertisements for overseas study agencies. In order to attract customers, they usually tout their services as much as possible. Customer 4 also stated some agencies have cooperation with oversea universities. When they apply that school successfully, the agency will get some commission from the tuition fee. These kinds of schools are the first choice to recommend to customers. The problem of commission can make it difficult to ensure

that students apply to the universities they want to go to, but the ones recommended by agencies. They do not like to choose this kind of agency. Customer 2 stated it is important if the agency can fulfill their needs because there is a possibility that the agency's scope of services cannot fulfil their requirements although they have excellent publicity. Customer 4 mentioned that attitudes of consultants change very quickly after the contract is signed. Some agencies' consultants often contact us before signing the contract, but after signing the contract, it is difficult for us to contact them. Customer 1 mentioned for services of varying quality, students have to consult others for some help.

"I would like to ask my friends who understand the environment of oversea study, so I can get some experience from them. For example, in some agencies, they always reduce customer requirements and make application proposal which is easy to succeed rather than focus on what customer request." Customer 1

Due to the different quality of services in different oversea study agency, the customer in the industry must choose a suitable agency to assist and achieve the goal to study abroad successfully, which need to the customer to ask word of mouth to their friends or other people.

3. To overcome the living issues after study abroad

The third one is to overcome living issues such as frustration and get more support and motivation. Also, they need to build a career plan and achieve that. These kinds of jobs are categorized as the jobs need to be done after study abroad.

The challenges are mainly from migration and family reunion. Customer 1 stated the career development, a part of international students, including him wanting to find a job and migrate, but the process is difficult as an international student. Customer 2 mentioned that family members who want to visit them abroad are also a problem due to visa restrictions and other factors. If their parents want to visit them from China, but they need to apply for a visa to come here, the process is not hard but it takes time. So, it is a problem since their parents need to work during weekdays.

“I want to find a job here and migrate, because the salary and welfare are better than China. But the problem is that I lack some sources to find a job as an international student, which is a challenging process.” Customer 1

Due to the differences in educational methods between China and the western countries, many Chinese students studying abroad said that they would feel stressed or even frustrated at the initial overseas study. Customer 1 said that due to the differences in academic standards, they would encounter many difficulties when doing homework. Academic writing makes them feel stressed since they have different educational experiences and content compared with western countries. In addition, Customer 2 said that due to the different emphasis on the exam, it also brought pressure on his study. The exams in overseas schools usually require an open and reasonable answer, while in China, there is only one correct answer. All these differences will have a direct impact on their performance. Customer 4 owned the a similar view, and he highlighted the gap in educational methods between different countries. It is embodied in different academic norms, academic requirements, and teaching methods, which is the main challenge after study abroad.

Customers still face some troubles that need to be fixed after they study abroad, summarize the content above, solve the study issues, migration and family reunion, and those jobs constitute the issues after they study abroad.

4.2.1.2. Gains

Through interviews with four customers, the main expectations of students (customer) are stated as below:

1. A better environment

Customer 1 mentioned that the better educational environment, the fundamental reason for the difference in infrastructure is the different allocations due to the different levels of the government emphasis on education and welfare. This point also gets agreed upon by the other three customers. Customer 2 highlighted state subsidies for education.

Some European countries spend more on education than China because of their higher welfare and taxes, so if they study abroad, they think they will access better educational resources. Customer 4 also reflected from the stress of study, he said that is so difficult to study in a high-ranking university in China. However, it is competitive to study foreign universities, they will take on more stress if they prepare the exam for bachelor or master in China, so, applying to a highly ranked school abroad is a shortcut to preparing for exams at home.

“China is a developing country, compared with some traditional developed countries such as the US and the UK, the investment in educational infrastructure is still very different. I feel I can have a better educational environment in some developed country.”

Customer 1

2. Intangible advantages

The point of intangible advantages is shown in one of the customer jobs to be done. Through the interviews, the customers reflected that they want to achieve intangible advantages, meanwhile, which is also a job for them to improve the success rate in the application.

Customer 1 pointed out the importance of extracurricular activities. Some bonus points, such as internships, will make students more competitive in the application, which is beneficial for students' application. They would like to attend some activities to achieve more competitiveness in the applying process. The bonus points are important during the application, although oversea schools do not have specific requirements on that, intangible advantages such as a good internship in a big company, which are exactly what Chinese students are striving for to cover up some of the shortcomings in the competition, so they make an effort to enrich their resume for the application. Customer 4 pointed out that intangible advantages will cover up some disadvantages during the applying process. They would like to attend some activities to achieve more competitiveness in the applying process. A rich resume can cover up some disadvantages, such as mediocre grades. Customer 2 stated that the different experience,

the special experiences will give them intangible benefits in the future. The benefits are the different insights to the world after they study abroad.

“The knowledge we learn, the different places we visit, all these special experiences bring different changes to us. The return of education is usually not for several years, but for several decades.” Customer 2

3. A career direction

Customer 3 stated that studying abroad get more opportunities and advantages than the students in the domestic country. They can apply for jobs in both study countries and China. Because they have the opportunity to choose to work both at home and abroad, and even in more countries, such as students studying in Europe, they usually have more opportunities to work in more countries. Customer 1 also mentioned that overseas students could find relatively higher-end jobs with higher salaries compared with students at domestic universities. Some students will choose a less satisfying job after graduation if they cannot find an excellent job opportunity. Usually, the salary for this job is not very high in China.

“Different environments will give more opportunities to get a job. We will get more choices in both the home and host country than the domestic students.” Customer 3

4. Migration

Customer 1 mentioned the people who want to migrate, studying abroad, then applying for a job in studying country is a common way to migrate. Also, they can learn more languages and culture during the study process. He will also consider migration through studying abroad because applying for migration directly in China is a tedious process that requires a lot of money. Studying abroad can help them better understand of the local language and culture, which is a transitional process. Although the other three customers did not show their willingness to immigrate, all the other three customers mentioned that they have some classmates or friends intending to migrate in this way.

“Migration through study abroad is a common way, but it is also very difficult to achieve that, since it also depends on a country's policies, local employment environment, major and other factors, not everyone who wants to study abroad and emigrate can succeed.” Customer 3

4.2.1.3. Pains

After interview the four customer interviewees, the troubles and risks are explained as below:

1. Requirements of oversea universities

Some requirements of oversea universities are the trouble of students. Customer 4 mentioned that English is a very important part when they apply oversea schools. However, English is quite different from their mother tongue, which results in a problem. Customer 1 reflected that a university could not have only one requirement. Sometimes, they need to prepare different requirements at the same time, such as GMAT and IELTS. Also, they need to ensure the quality of domestic undergraduate performance, which is a stressful process. If they cannot fulfill all the requirements on time, they will face the risk of being rejected by the oversea school.

“There are some mandatory requirements we must fulfill, such as language skills. Language skills and grades in bachelor are almost needed in every oversea school. The higher score, the higher the success rate. However, China is a country with Chinese characters, not in the English system. The popularity of English is not high, which results in the difficulties of studying English for us.” Customer 4

The point is not only shown here but also in the customer jobs to be done. Since the requirements of oversea universities are trouble which makes students feel stressed. In addition, students need to make themselves qualified for the requirements of oversea schools. Thus, the pain of requirements of oversea universities results in the customer jobs to be done.

2. Different academic norms

The point of different academic norms is shown both the pains and the customers jobs to be done. This also appears in “to overcome the challenge after study abroad” in “Customer jobs” because academic pressure brings pain to students and causes them to have to overcome the challenges brought by the study.

Many Chinese students studying abroad said that they would feel stressed or even frustrated at the initial overseas study. Customer 1 said that due to the differences in academic standards, they would encounter many difficulties when doing homework. Academic writing is a trouble, since they have different education experience and content compared with western countries. In addition, Customer 2 said due to the different emphasis on the exam, it also brought pressure on his study. Foreign exams usually require an open and reasonable answer, while in China, there is only one correct answer. All these differences will have a direct impact on their performance. Customer 4 owned the similar view, he highlighted the gap of educational methods between different countries, which is a main challenge after study abroad.

“The Chinese way of education often have only one specific answer in the exam, which is a big difference from the open thinking in some oversea countries. The difference results in the difficulty in the study.” Customer 4

3. Exaggerated information

Exaggerated information causes students' distress because it is related not only to whether they can receive professional services, but also whether they can study abroad successfully. Therefore, it is essential for students to choose a suitable overseas study agency, which also leads to students’ “customer jobs”. So, similar views appear in “To choose a suitable oversea study agency” in customer Jobs.

Exaggerated information is distressing as every customer mentioned because many companies will exaggerate their services in order to get more customers. When students become their customers, they will find that what they get from the intermediary is not

as described before. Customer 3 stated exaggerated services from advertisements, which is hard to judge authenticity. They can receive advertisements from similar study abroad agencies in many places, such as IELTS cram schools. However, the information and services are often overly exaggerated, and it can be difficult for new students to know if the information is real. Customer 4 also stated that some agencies have cooperation with overseas universities. When they apply to that school successfully, the agency will get some commission from tuition fees. The cooperated schools are the first choice to recommend to customers. So, if they choose this kind of agency, they may not get an offer from the desired school. Customer 2 stated if the agency can fulfill their needs because it is possible that the agency's scope of services cannot fulfill their requirements although they have excellent publicity. Customer 4 mentioned that attitudes of employees in overseas study agencies change very quickly after the contract is signed. The attitude of the employee is an important factor that customers need to consider. They get some feedback from the people around in their lives, some agencies changed attitude quickly after they signed the contract and paid the consulting fee. In the beginning, the agencies contacted them frequently with a positive attitude, and then the agencies were very hard to contact. Customer 1 also mentioned that they would ask their friends and check some comments or evaluation online. They always need to collect different opinions from different perspectives in order to achieve real quality of services.

“Overseas study agencies always have a lot of advertisement. We need to judge and measure whether the information is exaggerated because some agencies always oversell their services to attract more customers.” Customer 3

4. The challenge after application

The challenges are mainly from migration and family reunion. Then customer 1 stated that career development, a part of international students wants to find a job and migrate, but the process is difficult as an international student. High welfare and high salary are usually desirable. However, due to different resources, relationships, and other factors,

it is not easy for international students to find a job in the local area. Customer 2 mentioned that international students usually do not study overseas with their parents, so they need to reunite with their families. However, family members who want to visit them abroad are also a problem due to visa restrictions and other factors. The troubles is also shown in the “customer jobs”. Sometimes, students need to visit their family, however, visa restrictions are the problem for the students and their families, which also leads to a job that students need to do is to apply for a visa for their family members.

“My parents want to visit me from China, but they need to apply visa come here, the process is not hard, but it takes time. So, it is a problem since my parents need to work during weekdays.” Customer 2

4.3. Interview with company

Four interviews were conducted with the company. In the four interviews, there are two different levels of interviewees: Co-founders and employees. They introduced the company's services and the benefits brought by the services.

4.3.1. The customer profile from company investigation

After the company found that the traditional service model caused losses to customers, the agency conducted some investigations on customers. Through this survey, the company analyzed some customers’ views on the service mode in the market and gained insights about customers’ expectations and problems in the market.

1. Pains: The inflexibility of the service

The first problem is the inflexible service style. Co-founder 1 mentioned the rigid service mode of the production line. In the traditional “production line” service mode, students usually need to communicate with different people, which results in the inconvenience of service. Co-founder 2 also mentioned that some students do not know whom they should communicate with due to different employees work in different positions in the whole “production line”.

“Some customers complained that under this service model, they need to tell the same thing to different people. For example, their IELTS scores need to provide to three different employees, which is a tedious process. Each consultant is responsible for different small tasks, resulting in an inflexible work style that inconveniences the customer.” Co-founder 1

2. Pains: Reducing the expectations of customer

Another reason is described as unfulfilled expectations or requirements of customers. Co-founder 1 states her view of the “production line” service. This kind of service is more suitable for students with ordinary qualifications. Because highly qualified students often have high demands on the schools they apply to, this makes it more difficult to apply. Co-founder 2 also agreed with the opinion. Customers with similar profiles get similar proposals. The traditional way prefers ordinary students with standard requirements and qualifications. Because such students usually do not have high requirements for the schools they apply to, for example, high-ranking schools, so the chances of success are very high. Employee 2 also complemented the success rate. Some overseas study agencies usually ensure a success rate, that is, to ensure that every customer can successfully apply to an overseas university in order to persuade customers to lower their expectations or requirements, which is the main reason why customers are disappointed in the services.

“Usually, customers will have some schools they expect, and these overseas schools will have some requirements, such as the students' undergraduate grades or English grades. However, there is a situation in which the students meet the requirements of the school, such as Cambridge university require IELTS score must be at 7, the applicant's English has reached 7, but we do not recommend the applicant to apply for this school, because he will have more competitors with IELTS at eight are also applying to this school, that is, considering the student's competitiveness, we usually suggest to apply for other schools.” Employee 2

3. Gain: more choices of services

Employee 1 also mentioned that some students came here to ask some services Huashi cannot offer in the first few years after the company established. With the booming development of the industry, customers are increasing more and more demands and requirements to the agency. If the services oversea study agency can provide, the customer will be disappointed in the company. Employee 2 reflected the similar opinion that if they do not provide the services that students need, they will lose customers because customers lose confidence in the company's services. If they cannot provide some of the services that a competitor can provide, their customers will go to the competitor's company. Co-founder 1 also mentioned that they need to improve their services over time with customer needs changes. Since customers' requirements are changeable, they will add new requirements every year, so it is necessary to improve the service according to their requirements.

“It is essential that to see if the services of the agency can cover all the needs of customers, for the traditional way, most of the agencies just provide application service and consulting service, but studying abroad is a long-term plan, some parents want to let students experience the foreign environment in advance, or to promote the language level of academic students. If their needs cannot be fulfilled, they will not become the agency customers.” Employee 1

Co-founder 2 also mentioned the importance of satisfaction, being able to provide the services required by customers can increase satisfaction and thus improve the company's reputation. On the contrary, if the customer's requirements cannot be met, the company will lose customers directly and indirectly. Customers do not represent themselves; instead, they represent more people. If they let customers feel disappointed, they tell more people, and the company's reputation goes down.

“Word of mouth is significant because we can get more customers through positive word of mouth. International students are not an individual, but a group and they usually know other people who are going to study abroad, for example, they will know other students planning oversea study when they are preparing for the IELTS. When a student

comes here to consult, we use the process of the production line, which may cause dissatisfaction. If they are not satisfied, they will not introduce other potential customers to us. Our purpose is to find more customers, so satisfaction is very important for us.” Co-founder 2

Therefore, the inconvenience of service mode, reduced customer requirements and unfulfilled customer needs are the main reasons why the number of customers was reduced in Huashi oversea study agency.

4.3.2. The value map

The company made some changes to solve the problems of the traditional service mode in the industry, the main features of the improvement can be summarized as changing the old service style, communication, and service expansion.

4.3.2.1 Pains relivers

1. Customized services

To attract more customers and create more value for them, the company changed its service to customized, one-to-one services according to the needs of the customer. Employee 2 stated that they are a customized, completed covered agency. Customization plays a key role in capturing the needs of the customer. An employee is responsible for a student and develops a study abroad plan for a student in all aspects. Employee 1 complemented that the new service mode can create more convenience for the customer because it reduces time consumption in the process. Students do not need to communicate with different employees, which saves a lot of time. Co-founder 2 mentioned that improved service mode could have a better understanding of the needs of customers; meanwhile, the abilities and qualifications of employees need to be higher than before.

“The advantage of this method is that it can better meet the customers’ requirements, which also requires that each employee must be able to handle any problems in the

application process of students. Therefore, we have improved the qualification of consultants.” Co-founder 2

However, Co-founder 1 analyzed the improvement from the cost of company, although this approach increased labor costs, but customer satisfaction increased, which results in more customers becoming to their customers due to word of mouth. This way also increases our labor cost. For example, the number of consultants in charge of applying for Australia has increased from 2 to 6, and the office also needs to be expanded accordingly. Although the cost increases, as the customer satisfaction increases, they achieve word of mouth in the process.

2. Communication

The role of communication is highlighted in the interviews. Employee 1 reflected that communication is the foundation to get the customer needs. Every student's purpose in studying abroad and profile are different. No student is the same as others, so communication is very important. Co-founder 2 has a similar opinion on it because each customer only needs to communicate with one employee so that the customer's situation can be better understood. If a consultant only knows part of a student's information, it may lead to misunderstood or ignored student needs. Employee 2, as basic staff, also complemented the importance of communication, they can get more needs of customers through in-depth communication, which enables them to make detailed and appropriate plans for students.

“In-depth communication enables us to understand the needs of customers better. Every student has a different purpose in going abroad. Some students choose to study abroad to go abroad while others want to go to a specific school. For example, some people choose to study in the UK because they want to go there, and some students want to study at Cambridge. This communication is critical to the overall flow of the service.”

Employee 2

4.3.2.2. Gain creators

1. Service expansion based on customer needs

For the company's services cannot meet customer demand, the company expands their service area. Co-founder 2 stated that they are making an effort to establish all kinds of cooperation with other institutions or companies to expand the scope of business through the way. If they cannot cover customers' needs, they will lose many customers. In this regard, the company has formulated some new services in response to customers' previous requirements that they have missed. They add internships, international study tours, and research programs in our business, collaborating with different companies or schools.

Co-founder 1 had a description of the internship, the agency collaborated with different companies, to make up for the lack of work experience for Chinese students before they graduate from university. Employee 2 also pointed out that help young students find the direction of their career. Employee 1 mentioned the feedback from customers. The advantages of the services are the enriched customer resume, and career direction can be identified. It is worth mentioning that the service also attracts the customer in the industry and some students who want to get a unique internship experience. From customers' feedback, the service is beneficial for them to identify the direction of their career. Because work is different from the theory from class, if they do not have a clear goal and direction, they will have no clear applying proposal to make such as choosing majors. The service also enriches customers' resumes, which get more opportunities to be interviewed by HR. The service attracts students to study abroad, and the current students in the university intending to enrich their profile for the future.

“Most of the young students do not have any working experience, which is often a disadvantage for Chinese students to compete with other countries students, in traditional Chinese educational way, people will get educated from middle school to higher education without a break, which is different from some western countries they will choose to work and go back to study, which is also result in a disadvantage when

they apply because of lacking some working experiences.” Co-founder 1

The second new service is research projects. Co-founder 1 mentioned that is to improve the students' academic skills through collaborating with foreign universities to do some projects, so students have a new understanding of overseas academic norms. Co-founder 2 also explained why research ability is essential to students. Some experience of working with famous overseas universities to do research projects can make the applicants more competitive in the applying process. What experience the applicants have is a crucial question when foreign university screens resume; the answer is scientific research ability; the number of published articles represents scientific research ability. Some research experiences in a relevant area can show the applicants are academically trained and understand the whole process of publishing articles, as well as the academic norms, which will be a plus for applicants. The students with two or more research projects are more competitive than other students in the application process. Employee 1 mentioned the importance of the research projects from customers' view. Due to the difference in academic norms between different countries, academic writing usually makes students anxious. Most of the young students do not have any working experience, which is often a disadvantage for Chinese students to compete with other countries' students. In traditional Chinese educational way, people will get educated from middle school to higher education without a break, which is different from some western countries they will choose to work and go back to study, which is also result in a disadvantage when they apply because of lacking some internships or working experiences.

“Most students mentioned that they have problems with essay writing, the anxiety of paper writing, the difference between Chinese and foreign academic environments, and the unfamiliar academic norms lead to the fear and even rejection of paper writing. Students also can grasp academic skills in the research projects.” Employee 1

The third one is the international study tour, a unique service as Co-founder 2 mentioned. Through the study tour, students can understand more local culture and language, which

is beneficial for studying abroad. Co-founder 1 also stated that some students do not have a clear plan to study abroad. The international study tour is a pathway for them to understand if they are suitable to study abroad or find the disadvantages, they need to improve themselves. Employee 1 mentioned that the service could provide a positive record for students applying for a visa. Employee 2 stated that there is no clear plan for young age students. They do not know what they should do in the future, there are so many possibilities in their life, so they need to find their potential. A large number of students hesitate to go abroad because the decision includes the whole career, which also takes some challenges such as cultural differences and language issues. Employee 2 highlighted the importance of language. The international environment is beneficial for students to learn the local language. Some students do not fulfill the requirement of overseas students, such as English. Some services in the company, such as international study tours, can help them achieve the requirement of overseas university.

“The requirement of English is almost applied in every country. IELTS or TOEFL result is mandatory material for every country. However, China is not an English-speaking country, and English penetration is not high, so language is the main issue for most students. The tour can provide an “English-only” environment that is beneficial to quickly grasp a different language.” Employee 2

2. Share knowledge customer cannot get

The company provides a tracking system to help young students in countries where there are many international students by assigning teachers to visit their lives. Co-founder 2 pointed out that the system can deal with some problems in their daily lives since excessive love from family leads to inadequate living capacity. Influenced by some political factors, many families in China have only one child, which leads to parents' excessive love and care for their children. The tracking system solves the problem of parents' worry; meanwhile, students can also get help when the students struggle in some trouble.

Due to the accumulation of work experience over the years, the company provides

public courses to their customer to deal with the challenges and their lives and fix their troubles in current lives. Co-founder 2 stated that free courses for relieving their confusion make it easier for students to study abroad. The content of the course is to share some methods to deal with the difficulties of studying abroad. Employee 2 points out that the appeal of “free” because it is free and useful, that will attract some customers. Co-founder 1 also mentioned the similar point, due to Covid-19, a lot of Chinese students studying abroad has been affected because they lack knowledge of preventing disease and materials, many students suffer from excessive anxiety as a result. The company provides some online prevention guidance course and connect to doctors online, which solves health problems to a great extent.

“The service of this free course support students’ life after getting an offer. The public courses include some training before going abroad and some courses in basic subjects such as mathematics. For some students at the beginning of studying abroad, they miss some mastery of terminology. The service aims to help with their homework.” Co-founder 2

5. Analysis

The chapter is to analyze the data combined with the theoretical framework. The first part is to analyzed what value create need to customer through value proposition canvas.

5.1. Customer profile

Value proposition canvas is a tool to check if the created value is fit to the needs of customers and what needs to create to customers (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). The two parts of the value proposition canvas are value map and customer profile. The value map is presented below.

5.1.1. Customer jobs need to be done

Customer jobs are described that the work customer needs to finish in order to fulfill their needs and deal with their problems (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). Connected to the pains and gains of the customer, the customer jobs need to be done are categorized by three types.

Customers jobs	Customer 1	Customer 2	Customer 3	Customer 4
Preparation	✓	✓		✓
To choose a suitable oversea study agency	✓	✓	✓	✓
To overcome the living issues after study abroad	✓	✓		✓

Table 3 Customer jobs

1. Preparation

From interviews with customers, in the preparation stage, students usually need to meet

the requirements of some overseas universities such as English scores and some application materials during the preparation stage. In addition, they need to increase their advantages, such as participating in extracurricular activities. Those codes, both requirements and intangible advantages are in the preparation process. They must enrich their ability so that they can apply for overseas university successfully. From literature research, many students think that they need to prepare a lot of materials and take exams in foreign universities, while they also need to complete the courses that must be completed in China, which leads to high pressure on the allocation of time (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). According to Hagedom & Zhang (2011), most students do not have a long-term plan. They always decided further study abroad next semester, which results in limited time to prepare. Thus, the preparation job is the first job customer need to be done.

2. To choose a suitable overseas study agency

The second one is to choose an overseas study education agency, as one of the pains of customers, exaggerated information, and uneven quality of services resulted that they have to ask their friends and check other ways such as word of mouth. Trusted agencies can help students with application forms, visa interviews, travel arrangements, insurance, entrance exams, and other university preparation requirements (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). However, it is difficult to find a suitable agency for students. There are a series of unethical behaviors among overseas study agencies in higher industries, including providing false information to students, interfering with the application process such as writing letters instead of students, or consultants charging students privately (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). So students usually get information from their parents and friends. It is also showed in literature, whether students or overseas universities, they usually pay attention to the word of mouth when they choose to cooperate with overseas study agencies (Krasocki, 2002). The feedback and successful cases from friends are an important criterion for students to choose an agency.

Every customer mentioned exaggerated information because many companies will

exaggerate their services in order to get more customers. When students become their customers, they will find that what they get from the overseas study agency is not as described before. Customer 4 also stated some agencies cooperate with overseas universities, when they apply for overseas schools successfully, the agency will get some commission from tuition fees. These kinds of schools are the first choice to recommend to customers. This point is also shown in the literature. The overseas study agency not only receives consulting fees from students but also receives commissions from some overseas universities. After each admitted student pays the tuition fee, the agency will get a commission, which is a certain percentage of the total tuition fee in the first year (Coffey, 2014). Nikula & Kivistö (2018) also point out that agencies help recruit international students for income and commissions. Students worry that overseas study agency will change the requirements of students for their own benefit. It is easy for the principal and the agency to have conflicts of goals. The conflict of goals refers to the difference in expectations and interests (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). The principal and the agency assess the risk based on their own interests as their motivation (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016). Inconsistent goals mean that the two parties have different views on the goals, or there are different opinions on how to reach a consensus result (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016; Jap & Anderson 2003; Dou et.al, 2010). Thus, for this situation, students have to ask their friends to get opinions about a suitable agency.

3. To overcome the living issues after study abroad

Customers still face some troubles need to be fixed after they study abroad, to summarize the content below, they need to solve the study issues, migration and family reunion, those codes constitute the theme of the issues after they study abroad.

The third job is to overcome living issues such as frustration and get more support and motivation. This point is not shown in the literature, but it is described in the interview. Students need to build a career plan and achieve that. These kinds of jobs are categorized as jobs that need to be done after study abroad. The challenges are mainly from migration and family reunion. The challenge is mainly from migration and family

reunion. Some students want to migrate through finding a job abroad, but they lack some career advantages than local people. Also, after finding a job, the family reunion is another issue for them. In addition, due to the differences in educational methods between China and other countries, many Chinese students studying abroad said that they would feel stressed or even frustrated at the initial overseas study. The differences in academic standards would result that students encounter many difficulties when doing homework. Thus, the following issues after they study abroad successfully is a job for students to do.

5.1.2. Pains of customers

Pains are described as “bad outcomes, problems and characteristics, obstacles and risks” (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). Connected to the interview with customer, the pains are summarized below:

Pains	Customer 1	Customer 2	Customer 3	Customer 4
The requirements of overseas universities	✓			✓
Different academic norms	✓	✓		✓
Exaggerated information	✓	✓	✓	✓
The challenge after application	✓	✓		

Table 4 Pains of customers

1. Requirements of overseas universities

Hagedom & Zhang (2011) state several difficulties for students to apply overseas school. Students believe that the most difficult part of the application process is standardized English exams such as IELTS and TOEFL. Because a large number of students do not have long-term plans, they always prepare to study abroad in the next semester. Such a

short English exam time has caused high pressure on students. Connected with empirical finding, two customer interviewees mentioned the requirements leads to the trouble to customers, and that will be a risk they cannot further study abroad. Customer 4 mentioned that language skills are limited. However, it is a mandatory requirement for every university, although some students with high-pass IELTS results, but which does not mean they grasp English proficiency since the Chinese language system is different from the English language system. Customer 1 reflected that they must try to fulfill some requirements simultaneously which is a laborious process since every requirement is not that easy to achieve.

2. Different academic norms

The theme is not found in the literature. However, three of four customer interviewees mentioned the problems of academic norms because of the differences in educational methods between China and the western countries, which resulted in them feeling stressed or even frustrated at the initial overseas study. Customer 1 said that due to the differences in academic standards, they would encounter many difficulties when doing homework. In addition, Customer 2 said that due to the different emphasis on the exam, it also brought pressure on his study. Customer 4 owned a similar view, he highlighted the gap of educational methods between different countries, which is the main challenge after study abroad.

3. Exaggerated information

There are a series of unethical behaviors among oversea study agency industry, which is shown in the literature, including providing false information to students, interfering with the application process such as writing letters instead of students, or other employees charging students privately (Nikula & Kivistö, 2018). In addition, oversea study agencies with lower responsibilities may provide unreliable information or mislead students to provide financial benefits, thereby harming students' learning and life (Hagedom & Zhang, 2011). Those behaviors are due to inconsistent goals. Overseas study agencies over-advertise their services for profit, instead of considering students'

needs and expectations. Nikula & Kivistö (2018) points out a similar opinion, the use of unwelcome methods to serve the agency own interests, rather than the customers' interests. The goal of students is to study abroad in a suitable overseas university, while the goal of agency is to earn money and commission. This has led the oversea study agency to promote some unreal services in order to obtain their own interests. Every customer mentioned exaggerated information from different views because many companies will exaggerate their services in order to achieve more customers. When students become their customers, they will find that what they get from the agency is not as described before. Customer 3 complained of exaggerated service from advertisement, which is hard to judge authenticity. Customer 4 also stated some agencies have cooperation with oversea universities, when they apply that school successfully, the agency will get some commission from tuition fees. These kinds of schools are the first choice to recommend to customers. Customer 2 stated if the agency can fulfill their needs because there is a possibility that the agency's scope of services cannot fulfill their requirements although they have excellent publicity. Customer 1 also mentioned that they would ask their friends and check some comments or evaluation online. They always need to collect different opinions from different perspectives in order to achieve real quality of services. Thus, the quality of service the agency provided becomes the pain of customers.

4. The challenge after application

The challenges are mainly from migration and family reunion. One of the reasons motivating students to study abroad further is migration (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, there is no literature found about the family reunion for international students. In the interview with customers, two customer interviewees mentioned relevant views about the challenge after application. Customer 1 stated that career development, a part of international students, including him, wants to find a job and migrate, but the process is difficult as an international student. Customer 2 mentioned that family members who want to visit them abroad are also a problem due to visa restrictions and other factors.

Thus, customers' pains are mainly to fulfill the requirements of oversea universities, the different academic norms and educational methods, exaggerated information of oversea study agency, and the challenge after application.

5.1.3. Gains of customer

The gains of the customer are the benefits customers need and expect (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, & Smith, 2014). Connected with the interview of customers, the gains of customers are as below:

Gains of customers	Customer 1	Customer 2	Customer 3	Customer 4
A better environment	✓	✓	✓	✓
Intangible advantage	✓	✓		✓
A career direction	✓		✓	
Immigration	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 5 Gains of customers

1. A better environment

A better environment is present is Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). The high quality of overseas schools is one of the important factors to attract international students. Customer 1 mentioned that the better educational environment, the fundamental reason for the difference in infrastructure is the different amount of allocations due to the different levels of the government's emphasis on education and welfare. In addition, Customer 4 also reflected from the stress of study that it is so difficult to study in a high-ranking university in China, although it is competitive to study foreign universities, but they will take on more stress if they prepare the exam for bachelor or master in China.

2. Intangible advantages

Intangible advantages make the applicants more competitive in the process. Most of the interviewees mentioned they want to have some experience to increase their competitiveness in the applying process. Hagedom & Zhang (2011) points out in China's middle and high schools, few students explore their interests and participate in extracurricular activities, which is reflected in the interview content. Customer 1 and Customer 4 pointed out that intangible advantages will cover some disadvantages during the applying process. They would like to attend some activities to achieve more competitiveness in the applying process. Customer 2 stated that the different experiences and unique experiences would give them intangible benefits in the future. The benefits are the different insights to the world after they study abroad. Thus, they desire to have some apparent advantages to increase the success rate.

3. A career direction

Career is not found in the literature, but two of the customers mentioned in the interview. Customer 3 complemented that studying abroad get more opportunities and advantages than the students in the domestic country. They can apply for jobs in both study countries and China, so they have more choices than the students studying in their own country. Customer 1 also mentioned that compared with students at domestic universities, overseas students could find relatively higher-end jobs with higher salaries. Those two interviewees clearly point out the advantages of the career they want to achieve in the future through studying abroad.

4. Migration

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), migration is an essential factor that attracts international students' numbers for a country. All of the customer interviews mentioned that migration is a reason for students to study abroad. Customer 1 mentioned the people who want to migrate, studying abroad, then applying for a job in studying country is a common way to migrate. Also, they can learn more language and culture during the

study process. All the other three customers mentioned that they have classmates or friends intending to migrate in this way. Thus, some students want to migrate after graduation, which can be seen as a customer gain.

5.2. The value map

The value map is described as the tool that shows the direction to service or products to create value for customers (Osterwalder et.al., 2014). The value map consists of gain reliever, gain creator, and products and services to check the service to achieve the value proposition. Based on the interview with the company and company service brochure, the company innovated its service scope through international study tours, research projects, internship projects, the tracking system, and public courses in the customized service model.

5.2.1. Gain creators

Gain creators are how the services and products create the gains of customers (Osterwalder et.al., 2014). The gains of customers are to achieve a better educational environment; to achieve the intangible advantage, which is beneficial to increase their competitiveness in the applying process; to migrate through studying abroad and working abroad.

Gains creator	Co-founder1	Co-founder2	Employee 1	Employee 2
Service expansion based on their need	✓	✓	✓	✓
Share knowledge customer cannot get	✓	✓		✓

Table 6 Gains creators

1. Service expansion based on needs

Through the interview with the company, the improved services can provide the gains of customers. Customer value is what customers want and are willing to pay for, so the

most important task for companies is to understand the behavior and demand (Smith & Colgate, 2007). However, if the customer did not join the value-adding process; value creation is meaningless to the customer. Kambil, Ginsberg, & Bloch (1996) also highlight the importance of customer need, value creation is only through the “match” between products or services and customer demand. Thus, connected with the article’s point, the most important thing for Huashi is to understand the need of customers and then make suitable services to Huashi’s customers. After the company investigated their customer, the company create some new services. Based on the interview with the company and company service brochure, the company innovated its service scope by international study tour, research projects, internship projects, tracking system, and public courses in a customized service model.

The agency provides customized and one-to-one service, provide a more professional and proper proposal to customers, which can solve the disadvantages in the industry such as inflexibility of service, and unfulfilled requirement and expectation from traditional “production line” service mode.

The better environment and unique experience are the environments the customers expected compared with the domestic educational environment. A better educational environment and a unique experience can be achieved by oversea study agencies that successfully assist students in studying abroad in their desired university. To study in the desired university, the agency needs to understand students’ needs and expectations and create some services to achieve their goals based on their needs.

Intangible advantages are those experience which can increase the competitiveness in the applying process, such as internship and research projects. Co-founder 1 pointed out that most young students do not have any working experience, which is often a disadvantage for Chinese students to compete with other countries' students. Internship improves the skill to combine theory and practice. Some schools focus on the abilities of students, internship and some recommendation letter are beneficial for them to be more competitive.

In the research projects, students can do projects with different professors in different high-ranking universities. The high-quality research process cultivates the research ability, which is also the universities pay attention to.

Migration is one of the gains of customers through studying abroad, but there are no services that can help them migrate connected to the company's services. Thus, making some services about migration is a value that is a potential market to create value for customers.

2. Share knowledge customer do not have

Mitchell and Coles (2004) state that companies provide knowledge based on their professional experience, which will create more value for customers. The agency provides some free courses to give some advice based on their experience and the challenge most customers will face in the future. The knowledge customers lack and need will create more value for customers. Based on the agency's experience, they faced a large number of customers during recent years and understand what the customer of the problem will face in the future, sharing the accumulated knowledge to customers is an advantage of the agency. Connected to the Co-founder 2 interview, most Chinese families only have one child. Oversea study agencies will compensate for the lack of living ability caused by the doting of some families in the form of free courses and tracking systems.

5.2.2. Pain relievers

Pain relievers show how the companies' products or services solve customer pains (Osterwalder et al., 2014). The pains of customers are mainly to fulfill the requirements of oversea universities, the different academic norms and educational methods, exaggerated information of oversea study agency, and the challenge after application.

Pains relivers	Co-founder1	Co-founder2	Employee 1	Employee 2
Customized service	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication		✓	✓	✓

Table 7 Pains relivers

1. Customized service

Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) mentioned that customization is one of some factors to create value. Saarijärvi (2012) stated that some improvements could rebuild the relationship with customers and firms through a cooperative process of value creation. The customer started to join the process to create value, which is beneficial to fulfilled customer requirements. Thus, customization is a way to create value for the customer. Customer integration is defined as a form of industrial value creation in which consumer participation in activities and processes that were previously considered to be in the company's domain (Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004). Co-founder 2 stated that they changed the traditional service model to a customized, one-to-one service. The advantage of this method is that it can better meet the customers' requirements. The agency provides customized and one-to-one service, providing more professional and proper proposals to customers, which can solve the disadvantages in the industry, such as inflexibility of service, exaggerated services, and unfulfilled requirements and expectations from traditional "production line" service mode.

2. Communication

According to Sharma and Lambert (1994), There is a difference between companies defining what customers want and what customers actual want. Doyle (2011) states that value creation needs to examine the difference between the actual need of customer and the company defined value of customer over time. The problem of difference can be solved by and the feedback from customers (Woodruff, 1977). Co-creation of value is

an ideal goal, and incorporating customers into value creation is critical because it helps organizations highlight customer feedback and improve the front-end process of identifying customer needs and wants (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). The engagement of customers will have a better understanding of customers and co-create the value to the customer. Smith & Colgate (2007) stated that understanding the demand is the foundation for customers' value. Communication is a tool that can understand customer needs and improve the quality of service through feedback. Through the interview with the company, they present in-depth communication enables them to understand the needs of customers better. They communicate with their customer to investigate the disadvantages of old services and changed old services from "production line" service mode to customized service. Thus, the students reduce the annoyance of communicating with more than one and do not know who is the right counselor to communicate.

In conclusion, to connect with the pains of the customer, oversea universities' requirements of language skills, and different language systems result in the pains of the customer. However, the international study tour helps improve the student's language skills through the international environment and integrates with the local culture. Thus, the international study tour is the pain killer for students. The tour aims to cultivate student's language skills, cultural integration, and grow personal autonomy.

The different academic norms and educational methods are the other pain of students. The agency provides research projects to grasp from research ability and familiar with different academic norms.

Distinguishing the exaggerated information of oversea study agency is a pain for customers since if they choose an agency with exaggerated information, they will have some requirements they cannot be fulfilled probably. The agency uses customized service to fulfill customer requirements, so word of mouth is created.

6. Conclusion

The chapter is to present the conclusion of the research. The first part is the review of the purpose of the research. The chapter is also to answer the research questions and make some recommendations about the case company, and future research is also stated in the last part.

With the increasing degree of globalization, cooperation and communication between countries are also increasing. Studying abroad has become an emerging industry, which also promotes the development of overseas study agencies. Overseas study agency is the middle part between students and overseas universities, which is to help students collect information about foreign schools and apply for schools and visas, while they also help overseas universities recruit international students. As a large number of companies enter the overseas study market, the quality of service starts to vary. Customer satisfaction with the service is getting lower and lower.

The matching between the case company's services and the demand of customers is an effective way to achieve the value proposition. The value proposition canvas is a tool that can help a company provide products or services that correctly matches the needs of its customers. The value proposition canvas can help the company improve services based on customers' pains, gains, and customer jobs. Thus, the purpose of the research is to make use of the value proposition canvas in order to make the value proposition more explicit and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business.

Based on the research purpose, the research questions are detailed as:

- **What is the value proposition of Huashi overseas study agency?**
- **How can the services of the company be improved?**

6.1. Value proposition canvas

6.1.1. The customer profile

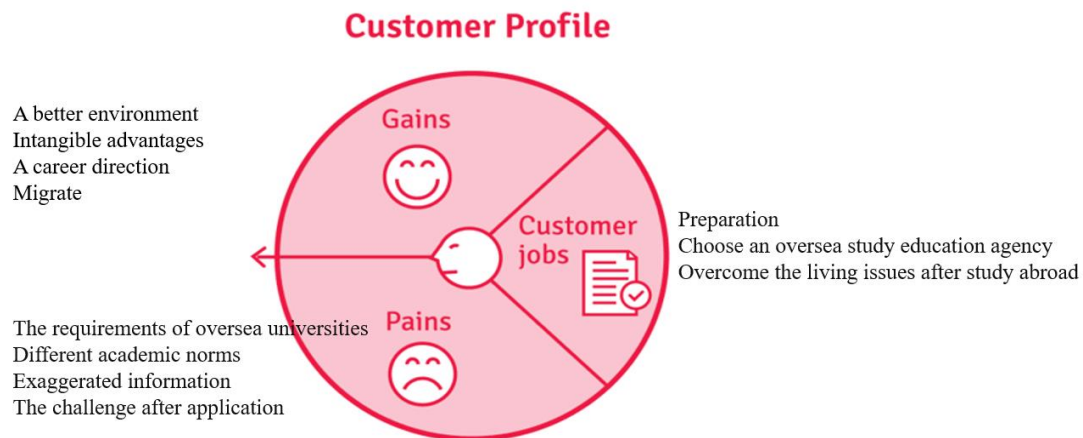


Figure 4 Customer profile in value proposition canvas

The thesis firstly studied what customer jobs to be done through the interview with customer pains and gains. They are extracted from the interview because at least half of the four customers mentioned a relevant point of view.

Customer jobs are summarized as: preparation, to choose a suitable oversea study agency, and to overcome the living issues after study abroad. For students, in the preparation stage, they usually need to pass IELTS, prepare application materials, and participate in activities to improve their competitiveness. They also need to choose a suitable oversea study agency to help them successfully study abroad. In addition, after studying abroad, they also need to overcome the challenges in life and study brought by cultural and language differences, as well as future employment problems.

What they expect and want for students is a good learning environment, advantages that give them a competitive edge in the application process, a direction of employment, and migration. Other issues that bother students are the requirements of overseas universities for international students, different academic standards, exaggerated propaganda messages from overseas study agencies, and challenges in life after studying abroad.

6.1.2. The value map

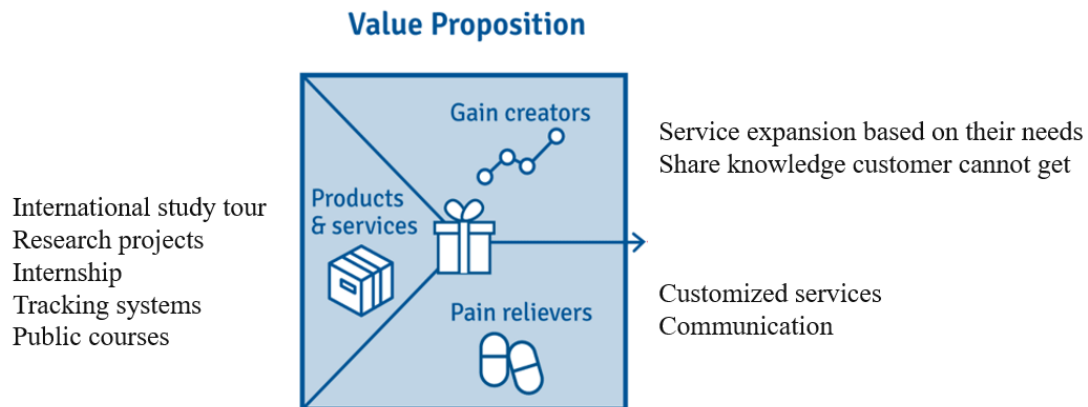


Figure 5 The value map in value proposition canvas

When Huashi company leaders realized that the number of customers in the company had decreased, they organized staff to investigate the reasons and improve the services. They changed the traditional service model to customized service and expanded the services' scope by adding international study tours, research projects, internships, tracking systems, and public courses.

To create gains for customers, Huashi oversea study agency expanded its service scope to meet the needs and requirements of more customers. The case company also provides free courses based on a tracking system and share knowledge to help their customers deal with the potential problems in the future.

For solving customers' pains, the company changed the service mode from "production line" to customized service, which is easier to meet the requirements of customers and make detailed plans for customers according to their profiles to help their customers study abroad successfully. The company has also strengthened the importance of communicating with customers so that the case company can understand the detailed requirements and needs of customers through communication.

6.2. Recommendations for Huashi oversea study agency

6.2.1. Focus on customer needs to create value

It is mentioned in many works of literature that customer needs are the foundation of a company. Value Proposition Canvas is a useful tool to check and correct whether a company's services and customer needs match. Huashi oversea study agency changed service mode to solve the problems in the market so that they can provide suitable services by investigating to customers and survive in the intense competition in the market. They have solved the problems in the market at present. They still need to understand the pains and gains of customers and then help them solve the jobs that customers need to do. By evaluating the services they improved, most of the services match the pains, gains, and customer jobs. However, as mentioned above, the needs of industry and customers are continually changing, so they need to improve their services based on customer needs.

6.2.2. Extension of Service

The scope of services in the company should be able to cover the needs of customers. The company offers services to help students achieve an internship, international study tours, research projects, tracking systems, and public courses to customers and assist them in studying abroad by making proposals and visa applications. The innovative services can be seen as those services that attract more customers except for the main application services covered all over the industry.

Combined with the value proposition canvas, most services can create value for customers. The services can solve most pains and gains in preparation and during the applying process. However, there are also have some needs that the agency did not fulfill, such as life's challenges, students' families also will face the challenge of visa issues, and the career issues also need to be solved. Those factors can be seen as a new value which can attract more customers.

6.2.3. Enhance communication with customers

Communication is critical to understand customer needs and verify whether the customer captures the value. When communicating with customers, communication can also enable customers to integrate into value creation, such as obtaining customer feedback and improvement suggestions. In this way, customers can not only understand their needs and feelings more accurately but also help create a good reputation. As mentioned in the interview, customers often get recommendations from friends and relatives or check some companies' evaluation online. So good word of mouth can help them get more and more customers. Therefore, the company needs to understand customers' needs through communication so that customers can be integrated into the process of value creation. Meanwhile, positive communication can also create a good reputation and create more benefits.

6.3. Future research

The purpose of the research is to make the value proposition more explicit through the value proposition canvas and find suitable ways in which the company can further develop its business. This research mainly studied the pains, gains, and customer jobs to be done and evaluated whether the company's services match the customer profile. Then, the research made some suggestions on how to improve their services based on the value proposition canvas. Thus, the research focuses on the part between overseas study agency and customer. However, overseas study agency as a middleman connects both customers and overseas schools. The research focuses on agencies using innovative approaches to bring value to customers. At the same time, the study of how to communicate and cooperate with the overseas school to maintain a good quality of service and attract more customers still need to be studied in the future.

Secondly, the industry is usually influenced by factors such as the country's policies and economic conditions. The change in every factor will lead to a change in the overseas study industry market. Thus, because of the dynamic industry environment, future research should grasp the extent of influence brought by different factors.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide for company:

1. What services do you have? What kind of students do those services usually attract?
2. Did you see some changes when you worked in the industry? What do you think caused these changes?
3. How do you compete in the industry to attract customers?
4. Did you see the number of customers increased or decreased over the years that you have worked? What do you think caused this? How did you deal with it?

Customer value:

5. In your experience, what kind of service do customers usually look for?
6. What characteristics do customers value most? For example: price, service, quality?
7. Why do you think customers choose to study abroad agencies?

Customer proposition:

8. What changes have you seen in company services over the years and why?
9. How do you make service to the value of your customers?
10. How do you get your customers to capture value?
11. Give examples of what value your services create for your customers?

What benefits did it bring them?

What difficulties have been solved?

12. Give examples of the changes your service makes to achieve customer value.

Appendix 2

Interview guide for customer:

Customer jobs to be done:

1. What kind of thing is mandatory to do when you study abroad?
2. Are there any requirements that you must meet during your study abroad?
3. Describe the process of preparing for study abroad and after studying abroad?

Pains:

4. Describe the difficulties you will encounter when studying abroad.
5. When did it make you feel negative when you were studying abroad?
6. Are there any risks in your study abroad?
7. What are the consequences of these risks for you?
8. What challenges do you have to overcome?

Gains:

9. Why did you choose to study abroad?
10. What are you looking forward to studying abroad? What benefits can studying abroad bring you?
11. Why do you choose a study abroad agency? What are your criteria for choosing a study abroad agency?
12. What kind of services do you expect an agent to bring you?