

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Administration, Lappeenranta
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Pre-Wedding Photography Productization Case: The Benson Group (China) Limited

Thesis 2015

Abstract

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The purpose of this research was to analyze how to productize pre-wedding photography as a new business venture for the case company: The Benson Group (China) Limited Company, whose target was to attract Chinese consumers to London.

The research uses a number of different data collections methods such as participatory observations, internet information researching, literature reviewing, questionnaires and interviews in order to gather information.

Based on the findings, a comparison between domestic and overseas market trends have been analyzed, comments from individual consumers have been analyzed and a pre-wedding photography service package has been produced.

Keywords: Productization, Pre-wedding photography, London

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the case company

The case company of this study is The Benson Group (China) Limited. The Benson Group (China) Limited is a branch office of the headquarters of The Benson Group which is located in the USA and whose major business scope is chemicals, energy solutions, food and textiles. A partnership co-operation to start a new business venture by bringing Chinese consumers to London for pre-wedding photography was raised. According to the manager from the case company, Edgar Lai, the company's annual report shows struggling performances and a slowing of sales in a few existing market sectors due to current poor global commodity price. As previous business operations have experienced, expanding into a new market could be an efficient way for leveraging the business growth and hence they are looking at diversifying into a potential big growth market. Whilst having the excitement for this new venture, they have no expertise in this new industry, but they have an urge to discover the depth of this new industry for negotiation in partnership. They have to take caution however, as without a disciplined process for its potential growth, a wrong decision could slow down the business.

In order to evaluate the possible opportunities and undertaking risks, the case company has decided to investigate and have a researcher to collect data from different resources and discover how to productize pre-wedding photography in London.

In order to prove the hypothesis from the company's positive perspective, qualitative data would be the majority focus while quantitative data would be assisting for the purpose of working out a practical plan to implement from theory into practice. It is important to know the competition in the industry and what are the current trends in the

wedding photography industry. The domestic Chinese wedding photography industry could be at a mature stage of its life cycle with lots of competition, therefore, a new idea of taking Chinese to go abroad to London for wedding photography was raised by the case company The Benson Group (China) Limited. London was chosen due to existing partnership arrangements in the city. Therefore the thesis research is not to be focused on other destinations, but only on how to productize a wedding photography service in London. This would have a strong potential to break into the market and make the business to gain profit.

1.2 The history of Chinese pre-wedding photography

In order to complete the task for the case company, a deep understanding of the competitors' moves and consumers' thought would be extremely essential. Below, details are explained from different perspectives.

The Chinese habit of spending vast sums on pre-wedding photography began in Taiwan in 1980. For a fixed price, wedding studios would provide the soon-to-be married couple with a photographer or multiple photographers, rented outfits for both the pre-wedding shoot and the wedding, an elaborately bound album, a framed photograph, a slideshow and other amenities. Economies of scale allowed the studios to offer lower, all-inclusive prices in one convenient package. The lowered prices and convenience pushed pre-wedding photography into the mainstream of Chinese society. (Quora 2014.)

There are some factors which have boosted the wedding industry in China, such as the rising disposable incomes and the growing middle class. Nowadays, the wedding industry in China accounts for \$80 billion and it is expected to continue increasing over the next years due to the rising wealth in the Asian giant (Olivier 2015).

In China, the general population spend an average of \$12,000 on each wedding and there are more than 10 million weddings in the country each year. Therefore, it is estimated that the wedding industry will reach \$120 billion in the following years, as reported by the China Wedding Industry Development Report. (Olivier 2015.)

Due to the rapid development of the wedding industry, consumers have been paying more and more attention to it and are increasingly willing to spend more money to host the wedding. Everything related to the wedding has to be perfect and they tend to do it as fancy as possible. As China is such a collective society, children and parents have strong bonding relations. Anything the parents have done must have a reflection on the children and vice versa. Chinese parents are willing to do anything for their child and no expenses are spared because they consider their child's wedding a unique and very important life event. Therefore, they are glad to spend large amounts of money on the wedding. (Chang 2014.)

As the parents are willing to spend large amounts of money on their child's wedding, this further explains how the extravagant wedding event reflects on the social status of the whole family. Chinese see wedding as an occasion to show off their wealth and status and therefore they organize weddings with elaborate photo shoots, expensive dresses and banquets for scores of people. (Olivier 2015.)

The traditional custom for Chinese newlywed couples is to host their wedding ceremony in the event room of a hotel instead of going to the church. Whilst guests are sitting and waiting for the start of the ceremony, pre-wedding photography is always shown on the screen to be shared with the guests. Therefore, if all the pre-wedding photography dressing style is more or less the same (formal suits and wedding dresses), the location of where the pre-wedding photos are shot could play an important role which reflects the social status and helps to gain more 'face' for the Chinese couples.

This new trend for brides and grooms in China for more and more elaborate wedding photo shoots means that most couples take the wedding photos months before the wedding, as it can be a complicated and arduous process that demands days of effort, numerous costume changes, exotic locations and a huge budget, with some shoots costing as much as 15,000 dollars. As opposed to Western couples who seek wedding pictures that capture real moments, Chinese couples want elaborated photos that reflect their romantic fantasies. (Olivier 2015.)

Pictures are a very important part of the wedding and Chinese couples spend a lot of money to get the perfect photos. These days, many Chinese couples decide to take their pre-wedding photos abroad, often in front of famous landmarks. Paris, Santorini and London are the main destinations for pre-wedding photography. (Olivier 2015.)

For many Hong Kong to-be-weds, getting those perfect photographs before the big day is almost as vital as the vows. "Hong Kong couples consider pre-wedding photos very important," says Olivia Cheng, a committee member at the Hong Kong Wedding Merchant's Association. "They don't want the same photos as their friends. If they go abroad, their photos can be different" (Man 2011).

One agency, Romantic Life, based in Hong Kong, has seen their customers travelling to places such as Taiwan, Japan and France for their pre-wedding photography increase from just 5% to 20% of overall sales in one year alone (Man 2011). This shows that not only mainland Chinese have a strong willingness to shoot pre-wedding photography abroad but also Hong Kong Chinese. Although some formal portraits are taken on the wedding day itself, it is clear that pre-wedding photography plays a very important role in China's booming wedding industry.

1.3 Research methodology

1.3.1 Research question

The aim of the research is to find out how to productize pre-wedding photography in London for the case company. In order to collect information thoroughly, it is important for the researcher to investigate some questions for a deeper understanding of the market:

1. How does the market price in the first level representative cities Shenzhen and Shanghai compare to prices in London in the pre-wedding photography industry?
2. Is an individual pre-wedding photography product, or one which includes a full travel and accommodation package, preferred by potential Chinese consumers looking to go to London for pre-wedding photography?

1.3.2 Research methods

The research methods in general could be implemented into two directions: Quantitative research and qualitative research. For the case company, a qualitative approach is used as a means to collect empirical information for the purpose of gaining deeper understanding of the market for the comparison between domestic and abroad market. This will include interviews with couples at the pre-wedding shooting scene, participatory observation at the wedding fair visits in Shanghai and Shenzhen, questionnaires for individuals and literature reviews, both printed and on the internet.

Interviews are an example of qualitative research. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences as the interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses. (McNamara 1999.)

In order to start, it is important to know there are different types of open-ended interviews. Firstly there is the informal, conversational type of interview where no predetermined questions are asked and the interviewer goes with the flow and remains as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's nature and priorities. The second more structured type, is more restrictive. The interviewer uses the exact same questions on specific topics for each interview, and those questions are carefully worded to avoid ambiguity or specific undesired connotations. This makes them faster and can be more easily analyzed and compared. (Valenzuela & Shrivastava 2015.)

The interviews were conducted at Thames Town, Shanghai, China, an English style development and most popular pre-wedding photo shooting location for English backdrops in China. The interviews were conducted during photo shoots and out of the two types of interview methods mentioned above, a more structured approach was chosen because it was easier and more effective for an in-field survey. The interview was started by asking the couples standard questions, as it is important to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee as this provides more focus than the conversational approach. The approach was adapted if the interviewees were willing to chat more and allowing a degree of freedom to gather interesting additional information.

As the photo-shoot teams present were from existing photography companies, they were able to sense the competition threat for the researcher's approach, therefore a more informal, conversational interview approach was used to ease the tension which might have occurred.

While an interview would be an important method for qualitative research, a questionnaire was implemented to assist gathering information for the advantages. If comparing to interviews, the questionnaire responses were gathered in a standardized

way, so they were more objective. It was relatively faster to collect information using a questionnaire. The amount of feedback collection in questionnaire was more than interview at the shooting scene. Combining these two sets of information could produce insightful results for a business looking to learn more about customer opinions, preferences and what the customers consider to be important.

Participatory observation is a qualitative method in which the researcher not only observes the research participants, but also actively engages in the activities of the research participants (Williams 2015). The researcher monitored and recorded their findings at their visit to wedding fairs in two different cities in China.

The plan was to search from different resources to broaden insights and collect the latest information about the industry trends. The focus was in visiting exhibitions in both first level cities of Shanghai and Shenzhen as participatory observations, internet information researching, literature reviewing and interviews in order to gather information and research to then help inform the questions for the questionnaire to get more focused and precise answers.

1.3.3 Research limitation

The case company paid the cost for the researcher's attendance to the Shanghai Wedding Fair to undertake research, however it would have been too expensive to fly over to London for local market research, so for that part of information collection, it was only possible to search on the internet for secondary data due to the lack of information on publications like newspaper or magazines. As the case company has the goal to do cross border business between two countries, the information collected within China seemed to be much more detailed than the British research. The evaluation for the final result may not be well balanced.

In order to target the potential customers who would have the financial ability to afford pre-wedding photography taken abroad, the questionnaire was targeted at people working at an office building. However, only 50 white collar people were selected, as it was difficult to gain the permission for research purpose without interfering with business hours. Questionnaires can have a low reply rate, for example, people with marriage problem may not even want to recall the time when they took pre-wedding photography together; people can lie about the answers and if they are answering with people watching it may influence their responses.

As briefly mentioned above when interviewing the couples on photo shooting site in Shanghai, there were a couple of problems with conducting this type of research on site. Firstly, the researcher's approach caused "rivalry tension" from other pre-wedding photography companies. They did not welcome the researcher's approach and tried to block the start of the conversation. This decreased the amount of couples who actually gave valuable comments to this industry research. Secondly, another difficulty was the wedding couples themselves understandably not necessarily wanting to be approached and answer questions in the middle of their special occasion photo shoot.

Also, interviewees may be influenced by the presence of the researcher. "Interview bias" is a problem with interviews. Either consciously, or subconsciously, respondents might answer in a way that they believe the interviewer wants to hear, rather than saying what they truly believe (Russell 2002).

2 Theoretical background

Although a pre-wedding photo shoot is a 'must do' culture in China, with so many people of different backgrounds and huge disparities in wealth, their preferences and choices are obviously very different. With the fast development day by day, pre-wedding

photography abroad has become more and more popular. Ten years ago and many people wouldn't have foreseen the huge growth in this market and people would not have even imagined it could happen. Thus, the theory of identifying markets and consumer buying behavior is very helpful for the case company to understand the current market situation.

2.1 Global marketing concept

International marketing refers to marketing carried out by companies overseas or across national borderlines. At its simplest level, international marketing involves the firm in making one or more marketing mix decisions across national boundaries. At its most complex level, it involves the firm in establishing manufacturing facilities overseas and coordinating marketing strategies across the globe. (Geetanjali 2010.)

For the case company, it would be at a complex level as the company is based in China, service providing would need extra sources for coordination in London. Especially at the preparation phase, details should be well considered for long term business developing purpose.

A company with a global reach strives for efficiencies of scale by developing a standardized product, of dependable quality, to be sold at a reasonable price to a global market (that is, the same country market set throughout the world). The world as a whole is viewed as the market and the firm develops a global marketing strategy (Geetanjali 2010). For the case company, the global marketing concept will be taken as guideline on how to productize for pre-wedding photography in London at a high standard which is unique and has the strong ability to stand out from the crowd. Therefore, it has to seek difference from what the current market already has and add creative spice to attract new customers.

2.2 Characteristics of business market demand and segmentation

There are two significant marketing implications in the fact that business market demand is a derived demand. First, to estimate the demand for a product, a business marketer must be very familiar with how the product is used. Second, the producer of a business product may find it worthwhile to engage in marketing efforts to encourage the sale of its buyers' products. (Etzel et al. 2001 p.127.)

Accurate target market selection is crucial to productive marketing efforts. Products and even companies sometimes fail because marketers do not identify appropriate customer groups at which to aim their efforts. Organizations that try to be all things to all people rarely satisfy the needs of any customer group very well. Identification and analysis of a target market provide a foundation on which a marketing mix can be developed. (Geetanjali 2010.) At the beginning, the researcher also had the thought to propose to the case company to target the end customer (business to consumers) as well as the business customers (business to business), the intention was to target as many customers through all possible channels. However, this was not as easy as assumed, as the plan complexity was too high or it could have failed easily just because without identifying the targeted group efficiently.

Marketing segmentation is one of the steps that goes into defining and targeting specific markets. It is the process of dividing a market into a distinct group of buyers that require different products or marketing mixes. (Geetanjali 2010).

Here it further explains why the researcher has chosen different cities for comparison in the study. Shanghai is located on the east coast while Shenzhen is located many miles away on the south coast of China and the interest for going abroad for pre-wedding photography might be different. Segmentation is needed for the case company as it helps to provide a route to target potential consumers more objectively and efficiently.

The segmentation of buyers into groups which can be easily reached by a firm is a powerful marketing concept which has improved the profit of many businesses. It suggests that buyers can be grouped around common needs. Then, by customizing the firm's offer, these common needs will be met. Suppliers can gain both competitive advantages and save costs because they are only addressing a portion of the market. (Young 2005.)

In market research, socio-economics refers to classifying people by their social, economic and educational status. In a sense, it is about 'class', such as blue-collar or white-collar, rich or poor, etc (Randy 2010). Therefore the questionnaire was chosen to be sent out at the business building located in the central business district, in order to target white-collar people who should have stronger financial ability to go abroad.

Personality, value, opinions, attitudes, interests and lifestyle all belong to Psychographics. Market researchers conduct psychographic research by asking consumers to agree or disagree with activities, interests and opinions. (Business Dictionary 2015.)

Although, Chinese do take wedding photo on the actual wedding day, pre-wedding photo-taking is more popular as these photos can be displayed on a screen in the reception on the wedding date and knowing the couple have been abroad for pre-wedding photography brings fame to the family.

Where people come from, where people want to go and by what means could play a vital influence on decision making. The case company needs to know that there are regional preferences for dressing styles, travelling arrangement by agency or themselves, and so on as these differences would seriously affect the productisation further more to business plan.

2.3 New product planning and development process

Ideally, products that generate maximum profit with minimum risk should be the market development orientation. However, there are many variables involved. What is needed is a systematic formalized process for new product planning. Initially the firm must establish some new product policy guidelines that include the product fields of primary interest, organizational responsibilities for managing the various stages in new product development and criteria for making go-ahead decision (Paul & Donnelly 2004, p.102).

When developing a market entry strategy, one should consider the following key points: The idea generation is the base for product development, and the entire planning process relies on the quality of the idea generation and screening process. (Russ & Kirkpatrick 1982, p.239). It is important that the new product development is concentrated on meeting marketing needs. Marketing research on different forms like questionnaires to individual, to the newly wed couples at photo shooting scene or visiting exhibitions would help to deliver more ideas about what the current market situation really is.

Once a satisfactory and continuous flow of new product ideas has been established a preliminary screening is indicated at the stage in screening the ideas. The purpose is to separate promising ideas from those that are not, to avoid investing more money and effort in ideas that will not succeed. Final screening is a serious, critical step because the idea that survives is moved on into product development. It is important to check to see that the product is compatible. Final screening includes a comprehensive study of the market for new product, it is called business analysis, it is much like the assessment and forecasting phase of strategic planning. (Russ & Kirkpatrick 1982, p.239).

After gathering the information about current trends from different sources like questionnaires to individuals, couples at photo shooting scene, visiting exhibitions, web

searching and comparisons between different companies, the researcher would analyze the data and conclude what is best for the case company in order to enter this business industry.

The screeners must ask at least three questions from any lists below at this stage:

1. Will the customer in the target market benefit from the product?
2. What is the current or expected competitive pressure for the product idea?
3. What are the industry sales and market trends the product idea is based on?
4. Will the product be profitable when delivered to the customer at the target price?
5. Who is the target market and who is the decision maker in the purchasing process?
6. What benefits will the product provide?
7. How will consumers react to the product?
8. How will the product be produced most cost effectively? (Geetanjali 2010)

Product planning is analyzed in terms of some competitive implications like production, marketing and financial factors. Product features and component specifications are outlined. The implementation on market research should include these key points as well as the questionnaire design. (Russ & Kirkpatrick 1982, p. 240.) Setting the research goal on how to collect the information from different sources and analyze the data: options like visiting exhibitions, interviewing on shooting field, sending out questionnaires, market research in three different cities in Shenzhen, Shanghai, and London. Identify all options and determine whether they are deliverable.

Product development assures the company that the new product is technically feasible and financially promising as a whole (Russ & Kirkpatrick 1982, p. 240).

The purpose of test marketing is to get feedback from the actual marketplace on the four components of the seller's marketing mix: product, price, distribution, and promotion. It is possible to get a wide variety of information from test marketing, ranging from competitors' reactions to data on the best pricing strategy. (Russ & Kirkpatrick 1982, p. 240.)

2.4 Pricing strategies

Price can act as a very influential factor in consumers' purchasing behavior. In service marketing there is great need for managerial skill in pricing. Price competition among service providers varies by industry. Where it has become more common, the use of price competition seems to exist at three levels: The first level that price is rarely mentioned as the focus is on its services, but will not dwell on price. The second level is that the seller uses a segmentation strategy and targets a given market at a specific price. The third level is that intense price competition occurs as firms stress comparative prices in their advertising. (Etzel et al. 2001 pp. 302-303.)

2.5 Special pricing strategies and situations

To be effective in setting initial prices, evaluating existing prices, and adjusting them as necessary, a firm needs to be aware of a variety of special pricing strategies and situations (Etzel et al. 2001 pp. 376-377). As the business climate keeps changing in this competitive world, having a flexible pricing strategy allows a business to quickly adjust the price as needed. It also empowers customers to have more choices based on their buying power. Separating the product into cost categories in order to distinguish different quality levels, for example like 20 euros, 23.50 euros and 26 euros, the different price levels are called price lines. Prices ending in 9, 95, 97, 99 are sometimes being called "charm prices". If a price is 9.99 euros while another one is 10 euros, even

though the real difference is almost close to zero, however consumer mindset assumes they receive great savings by taking the product that costs 9.99 euros (Etzel et al. 2001 pp. 376-377).

2.6 Managing service quality

Service providers must understand two attributes of service quality: Firstly quality is defined by the customer, not by the producer-seller. Secondly, customers assess service quality by comparing their expectations to their perceptions of how the service is performed. Service marketers should not be over dependent on advertising. To effectively manage quality, a services firm should understand its customers, measure the expectation level of its target market and strive to maintain consistent service quality at or above expectations level. (Etzel et al. 2001 p. 308.)

3 Market research by segmentation

3.1 Market research on wedding fair

In order to know the market situation better from a commercial perspective, market research at a wedding fair would be undertaken. The researcher chose two cities as representatives of the first level city category: Shenzhen and Shanghai, where pre-wedding photography abroad has developed incredibly fast in the past few years. The wedding fair in Shenzhen was hosted in mid April 2015 and the one in Shanghai was hosted at the beginning of July 2015.

3.1.1 The visit to Shenzhen City wedding fair

At the wedding fairs, there were many companies registered as exhibitors and altogether eight pavilions were full. In China, especially for domestic pre-wedding

photos this approach of attracting customers is popular and is seen as an industry norm. It is no surprise inside the exhibition centre to see hundreds of companies ranging from small size to large size and the purpose for this fair is for businesses as well as end consumers. For a couple about to get married, it would be time saving whilst they can do source searching in the exhibition centre instead of visiting different places to check the photo packages and price comparison.

The researcher spent the whole morning in the exhibition centre for quotations. All pre-wedding photography companies had their brochure to give out, however there was never a price list mentioned. The sales people were very cautious when the researcher was trying to take notes for different prices comparison. The assumption for why this could be is because the competition between the attending companies is very high and they do not want to openly reveal their pricing structure to their competitors. Or it may simply be because there is no standard product when it comes to wedding photography as the customer tailors their own package to their needs. Every sales representative demands to know the exact time for pre-wedding photography before revealing any prices. For domestic pre-wedding photos, the price varies from 4,000rmb (575 euros) up to 39,999rmb (5,752 euros). Every company the researcher spoke with, had a European background scenery in a studio arrangement as it has always been a popular option for Chinese couples without stepping out of the country to go abroad, but is still recreates a similar desired effect. For example Milan Xin Niang, one of the biggest pre-wedding photo companies asked for 39,999rmb (5,752 euros) for taking photos in their big workshop which has different kinds of international scenes to choose from.

Another famous pre-wedding photo company, Tian Chang Di Jiu, quoted 80,000rmb (11,502 euros) for having a team follow customers to United Kingdom and take pre-wedding photos. The sales representative revealed that they had not fully expanded their service to United Kingdom yet, focusing mostly on domestic and other Asian

countries like Thailand and Indonesia. She further explained the reason is due to convenience. Asian countries like those would be much easier and the natural scenery is beautiful and well recognized by Chinese.

However, if the customer has a special request to the new destination, Tian Chang Di Jiu can also custom-make and offer the service. However, the researcher felt the 80,000rmb (11,503 euros) price she quoted was not reliable as it was made instantly without a detailed itinerary. Another famous pre-wedding photo company, Man Yan Hun Sha, quoted 30,000rmb (4,313 euros) for going to London, United Kingdom; 100,000rmb (14,377 euros) to Maldives.

Another pre-wedding photo company which is worth mentioning is Paris Wedding. They are the only one which has a visual store located in Paris, France among the entire research. For Paris Wedding Company, they offered 19,999rmb (2,875 euros) for choosing three historical scenes with one set of wedding dress in the package. That is the only service package they offer; price increases with more dressing outfits needed, all together customers could receive 320 original photos with 60 photos details modified. Compared to the package services taken in Shenzhen, they have more choices and the prices varies from the cheapest 6,280rmb (902 euros) with 50 details modified photos plus 140 original photos to the highest package with 10,280rmb (1,478 euros), providing 60 details modified photos plus 200 original photos.

The last one is the Qing Wedding Company, which is not a famous company in the pre-wedding photo industry and it is less well known than the previous companies mentioned. The unique selling point about this company's photographs is that they capture the whole scene instead of just the couple and hence they stand out from the rest. The researcher interviewed one of the co-owners who was originally a make-up artist, but started the company with some good friends who are professional

photographers. They have overseas pre-wedding photo package service to Santorin, Greece and Prague, Czech Republic with two days photo shooting on each location and the price is 30,000rmb (4,313 euros). Each time they could take two couples and it has been quite popular.

Figure 1 clarifies the information from different sources above:

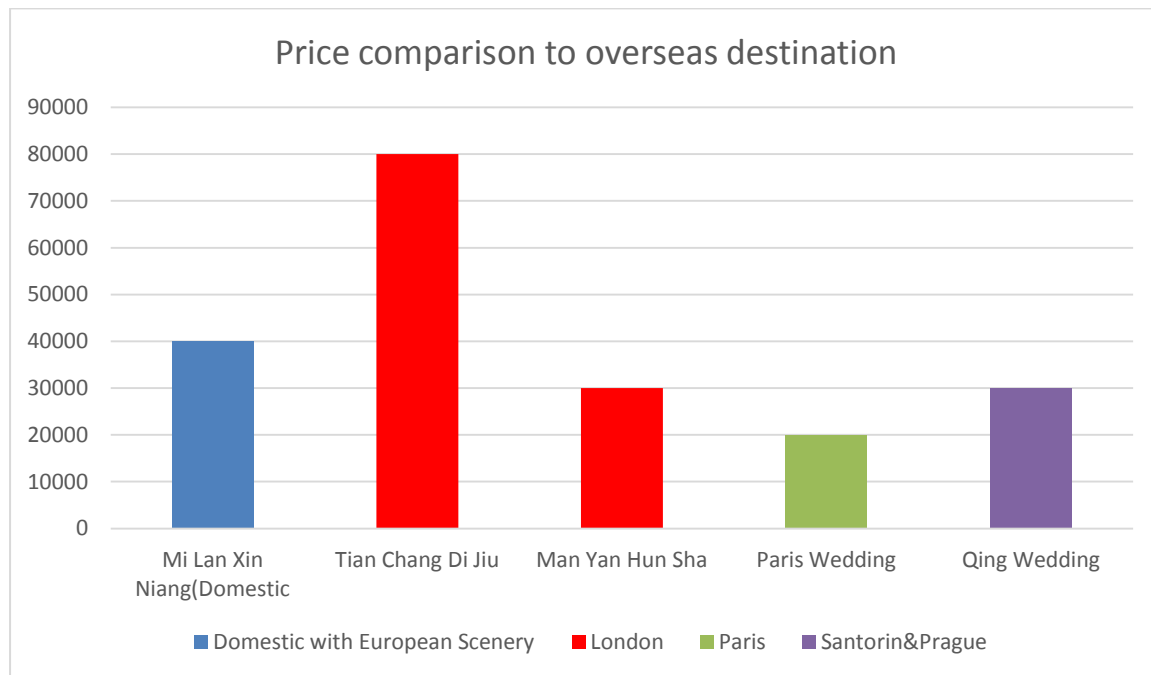


Figure 1. Price comparison of Chinese companies for overseas destinations

It is difficult to make a direct comparison between the companies as they offer packages to different destinations. Only two from the five companies offer trips to London. However, the price comparison still gives a general idea of what Chinese customers' expectations could be when it comes to pre-wedding photography abroad.

In conclusion for the Shenzhen Pre-wedding Photos Fair, it is definitely a valuable experience visiting a place which gathers all the suppliers together for information collecting and by directly asking questions. The price of taking pre-wedding photos overseas is much higher than domestic packages as you can see by comparing the cheapest price for pre-wedding photos in Shenzhen which is around 4,000rmb (575

euros), compared to the cheapest overseas at 19,999rmb (2,875 euros), making the difference more than five times.

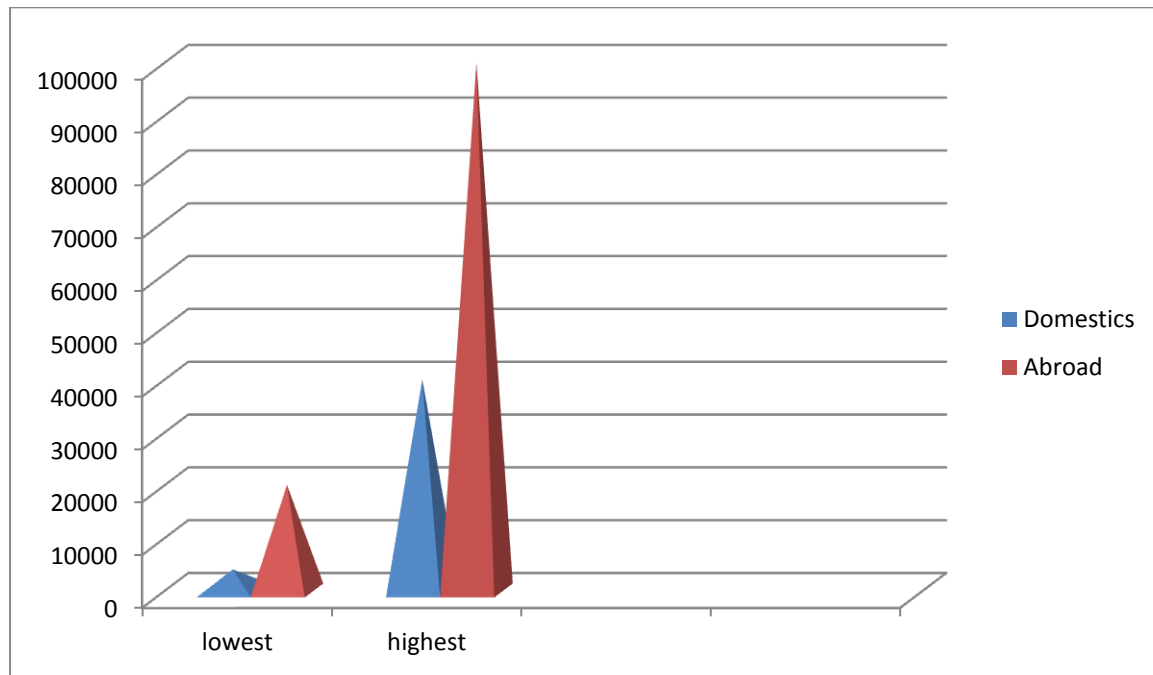


Figure 2. Price comparison between Chinese and British based companies

Figure 2 illustrates the prices range differences for taking pre-wedding photography between domestic and abroad market. The starting point for abroad destinations is higher than domestic markets.

From this research, it shows the case company The Benson Group will have an advantage for entering the United Kingdom for pre-wedding photo business as taking pre-wedding photos abroad is fast growing and booming, however the United Kingdom market still has a quite blank space to fill in while Asian countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Maldives have set the base for pre-wedding photos taking abroad.

3.1.2 The visit to Shanghai City wedding fair

After visiting the wedding fair in Shanghai, the researcher discovered there were some new and unique business concepts which were not found in the wedding fair in Shenzhen and used for the overseas pre-wedding photo taking industry.

The company named Ban Lan calculates the pre-wedding photo taking overseas by the days, offering 3,500 rmb (492 euros) and 7,000rmb (985 euros) for overseas business handling fee. If a couple liked to go to UK for pre-wedding photo shoot for three days, they would need to pay 17,500 rmb (2,463 euros), and they would still need to pay for the flights and accommodation for themselves as well as the photographers, make-up artist and one assistant. The price could add up to being quite expensive after the calculating for international flights back and forth. And they only offer two suits and wedding dresses for change, which may not be enough to fulfill the needs of Chinese couples.

Another company named Lai Image also calculated the base price by days at a fee of 20,000rmb (2,815 euros), with additional money charged for the crew's international flights and accommodation, food and visa fees. This means the price would be very expensive after all the additional costs have added together. As for another popular beach destination for Chinese to go, Bali in Indonesia, they offered a package deal with seven days, five nights with flights and accommodation included, one day photoshooting, the total price is 40,000rmb (5,630 euros). So therefore this information is useful for The Benson Group as it shows creating package deals including accommodation and other add-ons can be lucrative as they offer higher profit margins.

Also present at the fair were other companies with a different approach. They offer franchising for anyone who wants to run business at the pre-wedding photography overseas industry. They charge from lowest 7,500rmb (1,055 euros) to give one the right to use their service for help. For example, if a company A wants to open overseas pre-wedding photography business, by paying them 7,500rmb (1,055 euros) they can advertise their company and tell their customers they have branch office at Greece, London, Paris which do not actually belong to them.

The company A has paid another company B the franchising fee, which gives this company A the convenience to offer service to customers without company A even stepping out of the domestic door. This way, company A only needs to pay for the service fee to this franchise company B, but then can have access to and use their photos and videos which were taken in Greece, Maldives, United Kingdom, France and many other countries to further advertise on company A's website. However in the end company B will be the one to take care of company A's clients in different countries. For example, they charged 47,000rmb (6,615 euros) for pre-wedding photo shooting in London with hotel included for the clients. Clients need to pay for their own flights. Therefore, as for company A, they will need to set the final sales price to their clients for adding 47,000rmb (6,615 euros) plus 7,500rmb (1,055 euros) plus company A's own profit.

This franchising business concept is very interesting, not only serving the end customers but also creating the advantage where they have branch offices in other western countries which allows them to get customers from business to business. This is great for companies that want to expand their business overseas but may not have enough financial capacity or the expertise to go through the complex processes of developing a successful venture overseas.

Another business model worth mentioning from Xin Xiang Ying company is that they offer training for those people who are new to the pre-wedding photography industry. The cost to an individual is 20,000rmb (2,815 euros) for five days training and the existing wedding studio business will teach you how to run business in this field and they give you the right to put their pre-wedding photos on your website for advertising on your own website or to show as case examples to get new customers.

However it is debatable if five days' training is enough time to develop the skills and the knowledge required to become familiarised with the complexities of pre-wedding photography, even if their training covers different aspects for what is required to run a business. Also, there is a moral debate about showing potential customers case samples claimed as their own but in fact have been taken by another company's photographer. This could even be challenged legally if a dispute were to arise with a dissatisfied customer if they discovered the truth after getting an inferior result after the job is done.

Another company in Shanghai, Feng Huang, was found offering a break to the Maldives for pre-wedding photography with a price of 16,999rmb (2,392 euros). This is for one day photo shooting, plus five suits and wedding dresses for changing into; rising to 29,999rmb (4,222 euros) for two shooting days, plus eight suits and wedding dresses.

Due to the large demand, some business people have spotted a gap and have adapted the traditional business model by offering Business-to-Business as well as Business-to-Customer. For example these companies sell 'skill packages' to other beginner photo shooting companies whilst still selling to the traditional customers, therefore diversifying their business portfolios.

In conclusion for the visit in Shanghai wedding fair, the lowest price researcher could find for overseas photography started with 16,999rmb (2,392 euros). One thing in common for the wedding fairs in both cities was that they do not have brochures listing detailed prices and information for confidentiality reasons. However, when compared with the visit in Shenzhen city, three new business models were found out of expectation in Shanghai which are interesting for business sense and so it could be argued that this wedding fair was more valuable for the research.

3.2 Market research in London, United Kingdom

After doing the research on the Chinese market, it is also clearly necessary to study the British market. As the United Kingdom is one the most popular countries that Chinese love to visit, Chinese people have brought the pre-wedding photo shooting concept to UK. Whereas before there was only wedding ceremony photo service, many photographers in the UK have expanded their services to pre-wedding photo shooting, especially to fulfill the needs of Chinese visitors as well as tourists from some other Asian countries. (Prendeville 2014.) One of the people catering to this growing market is photographer Tao Wei. Whilst studying at the University College London, he agreed to take a series of pre-wedding photos as a favour to a friend. More requests followed and eventually he gave up his degree and set up VM Studios. The company has been open for just a year, but in that time he has already done pre-wedding photographs for 150 couples. One of his rivals, Crystal Leung, has been running Gigibride Wedding Photography for the past eight years and says the number of couples choosing London is growing year on year. "In the last 20 years people have more money and so it's become a growing tradition. In the past they would only maybe take one photograph," she explains. (Prendeville 2014.)

Leung says around half of her clients are students in the UK and will shortly return to China. The remainder are couples who have flown over from China, Hong Kong or Taiwan especially to have their pre-wedding photographs taken in the capital. According to Wei, Westminster Bridge, St Paul's, Tower Bridge and Bank are the most popular spots. However, sometimes couples who have been studying here will want photographs taken in their university library or in other parts of London that are special to them, says Wei. (Prendeville 2014.)

According to the comments on Prendeville's article, Gigibride is one of the most respected existing photography companies currently profiting from the London market. Therefore, Gigibride was used as a study case to look into the details and learn from them. Gigibride has four different kinds of similar pre-wedding photoshoot packages, with prices starting from 699 pounds (984 euros) with locations at Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, London telephone box, Parliament Square and Westminster Bridge. This includes bridal make-up and hair styling, one dress and one suit, digital photos MTV slide shows, seven seat car, an assistant for professional photography lighting and all of the photos soft-copy (up to 100 photos) and 30 retouched photos (Gigibride 2015).

This is clever marketing from Gigibride as the locations listed above are situated very close to each other in London and so basically belong to one scene, but the list may make people think there are five different locations. The rest of the service package prices are 999 pounds (1,407 euros) with two shooting scenes; 1,399 pounds (1,970 euros) with three shooting scenes, two wedding dresses and suits choices and 1,699 pounds (2,392 euros) with four shooting scenes, three wedding dresses and suit choices. It is worth noting that as the package price increases, the number of photos the couples receive as part of the package increases incrementally too (Gigibride 2015).

It does not make sense for mainland Chinese to travel the long distance to Europe but then only pay for one scene shot. The price from 999 pounds (1,407 euros) seems to be an appropriate entry level, however, seeing an eye-catching price starting with only 699 pounds (984 euros) makes it sound like a bargain for an overseas package, especially when compared to the prices being charged by the companies located in China. However, this price from Gigibride seems to be more a great marketing tool to attract new customers, as once they have been attracted by this seemingly cost effective deal, the vast majority of people might end up choosing the more expensive deals they are offering.

Another Chinese company in London running pre-wedding photography business is Ka Fu Wedding. Similar to Gigibride, they offer four different package services, the lowest price starting from 1,699 pounds (2,392 euros) with four shooting scenes and three bride's dresses and two groom suits choices; 1,999 pounds (2,815 euros) with three day time and one night time shooting scenes, four bride dresses and three groom suits choices; 2,399 pounds (3,378 euros) with five day time and one night time shooting scenes, five bride dresses and three groom suits choices; 2,999 pounds (4,224 euros) with two days photo-shooting schedule (locations: London and Cambridge), seven bride dresses with five groom suits choices. Both Ka Fu Wedding and Gigibride are the only Chinese companies running pre-wedding photography in London and so they both have the advantage to communicate with customers in their mother tongue. At a glance, it may seem Ka Fu Wedding's service package prices are more expensive than Gigibride's, but again, as each package is slightly different and there are often additional costs added to these initial quotes, it is difficult to make a direct comparison. That said, however, based on their price range 1,699 pounds (2,392 euros) could be a good reference point for The Benson Group's pricing.

As already mentioned, the cultural influence from China of pre-wedding photography has now spread to England. During the research, it was discovered that many photographers in England actually run their own photography businesses through their own websites, with many offering a pre-wedding photography service package. Examples include, BD Wedding Photography with a price of 850 pounds (1,197 euros) for a three hours shoot; and 1,995 pounds (2,809 euros) with seven hours shoot according to the phone enquiry. Three hours long photo-shoot for pre-wedding photography sounds rather short compared with the time usually taken in China. In China, many couples will spend the whole day to do that. Seven hours sounds more realistic to meet the expectation for Chinese consumers. Another one, Mark & Marine

charges 1,650 pounds (2,323 euros) as their starting price for 3 hours shoot according to the phone enquiry.

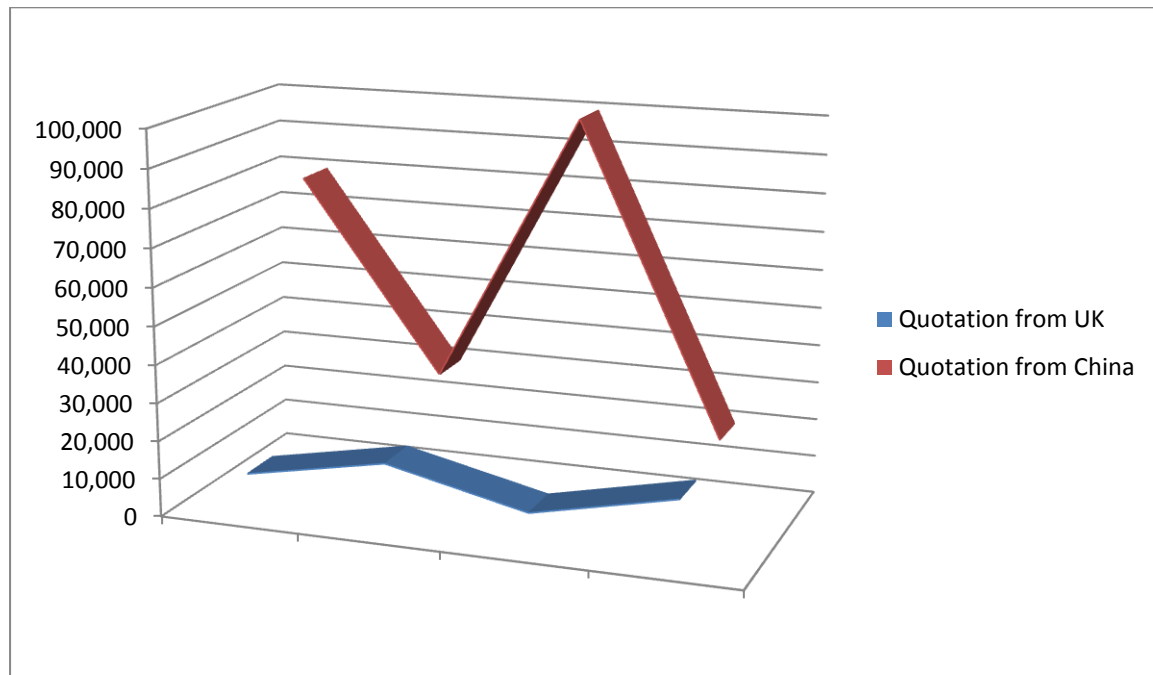


Figure 3. Price quotation comparison between Chinese and British based companies

Figure 3 above illustrates the pre-wedding photography prices quoted in Britain as much lower than in China, which further reveals that Chinese companies running pre-wedding photography abroad are currently likely to be generating huge profits. Despite the large differences in price being charged between Chinese and UK companies, it seems likely that Chinese consumers will continue to book packages through Chinese run companies as they feel far more secure due to the language barrier and the unfamiliarity of the great travel and cultural differences between the countries. For the time being, domestic companies know this and hence it is reflected in the much higher prices than the ones which have offices abroad.

Wei, a Chinese photographer currently working in London, reveals that many of his clients will only consider using a Chinese photographer - but not just because of the language barrier. "Chinese people judge beauty differently from Europeans", he suggests. In his view, European couples prefer more "natural looking" pictures, whereas

his Chinese clients prefer what he describes as a "natural, plus post-production" style. For Wei this means not only changing the colour on some photos, but digitally removing "clutter" from the background, such as litter on the ground or people who have wandered into the frame. (Prendeville 2014.)

In conclusion, in order to target Chinese customers, having a Chinese photographer for language convenience as well as knowing the cultural needs by removing "clutter" from the background and having a make-up artist to polish the bride are very important. There are some cultural habits amongst Chinese which are also important to consider such as a preference for whiter skin, meaning all the wedding photos have to come out with glorious white and smooth looking skin. This is another important business clue for the case company The Benson Group. To be able to make a successful introduction into the pre-wedding photography arena in London, it would make more commercial sense to employ a Chinese photographer rather than a foreign one.

3.3 Market research on individual

The market is a complex combination of factors that requires the enterprise to know the overall business environment, as well as the needs of the individual customer. After all, every business has to fulfill the needs of their customers. Therefore, after visiting the pre-wedding fairs in Shenzhen and Shanghai, the two major first level cities in China with high purchasing power, it was important to conduct interviews with individual customers to hear their opinions and gain an understanding of what they consider are the important needs.

3.3.1 Interview with newlywed couples on shooting-scene

In order to target exactly the right audience, interviews were conducted with couples actually undertaking their pre-wedding photography. An ideal location to conduct these interviews is a place called Thames Town on the outskirts of Shanghai. This satellite

suburb in the Songjiang district, near Shanghai, was built in 2006 in the style of a traditional English village. It is a fully functioning residential area with a mix of property types in a variety of English period styles such as Tudor, Victorian and Georgian. Every building, street, and the landscape looks genuinely authentic like England's capital and so Thames Town's real draw is as a photo opportunity and now this backdrop has seen a huge pre-wedding photography business develop around it. (Lo 2011.)

Thirteen couples were interviewed whilst they took a break from walking to one place to another in the process of photo taking. Some couples chose Thames Town as a shooting scene from the recommendation of their friends. According to Mr. Zhang, "My friend has taken photoshoot here before, he said it was nice. Makes you feel like they were abroad by going through their photos". Another couple who came due to word of mouth was Mr and Mrs Huang. According to Mr Huang, "The place is famous for outdoor pre-wedding photoshoot, all my friends who have taken pre-wedding photoshoot came here and they all said it's nice here, so we came as well". Inside Thames Town, there are two pre-wedding photo taking companies, Milan Wedding Company and Paris Wedding and two other wedding dress companies, which could avoid the inconvenience for bringing too many costumes from other place to the shooting scene here.

Surprisingly, some interviewed couples do not know that Thames Town is designed according to the English elements. Among all couples interviewed, only one couple had been to London before, and they chose this place genuinely for the love of the London city look. Interviewee Jiang said, "We have been to UK, we love it there, and coming here to take photoshoot, we can recall the memories there, most important thing is we can communicate with photographers in Chinese. As we are not professional, having their guidance for how to pose is very necessary".

For all the couples interviewed, the men all mentioned it was the wife's decision when it comes to the pre-wedding photos. It represents the symbol of romance in their fantasy which is better to leave for the wives to decide. From here we could see, for pre-wedding photo-taking, the female is the target which could be more easily affected since they seem to be decision-makers.

Three couples would not choose to go abroad for pre-wedding photo taking as the fees are too high, ten couples had an interest to go abroad for pre-wedding photo taking and nine out of ten couples said they would like to go to United Kingdom if there was a package offered with travelling plus pre-wedding photo taking. This would clear the barrier of not knowing where to go and huge amount of time for information searching and most importantly for the communication problem. Also among the ten couples who indicated to be interested in an overseas photo shoot, most said that they would want to stay for 7 to 14 days in the United Kingdom and spend 30,000rmb (4,313 euros).

It is valuable to have answers from the point of view of the couple who are taking pre-wedding photos at the site, because they belong to the target group for the new business venture of the case company The Benson Group. As the pre-wedding photo taking overseas is becoming more and more tempting for Chinese to go for the natural beautiful scene and European style, after the interview and research, The Benson Group should consider packaging travel and photo shoot costs together. However, the interviews above were conducted with Chinese who do not speak English and hence Chinese who can competently speak English may have different views. Therefore, future research target should be expanded to wider range to include English speaking Chinese.

3.3.2 Questionnaire to individuals

This part of research involves making a questionnaire and 50 pieces were sent out in the office building at JinYun Century Building, which is located in NO.6033, Jin Yun Century Building, Futian District, Shenzhen, one of the office buildings in the CBD (Central Business District) in order to target the right range of respondents who should have the financial ability to go abroad.

Just to show London is a popular destination to visit and pre-wedding photograph is important for Chinese, below the answers from question 1-3 have been interpreted into the bar chart for clear comparison: The detailed questionnaire will be shown at the end as Appendix for reference to analyze.

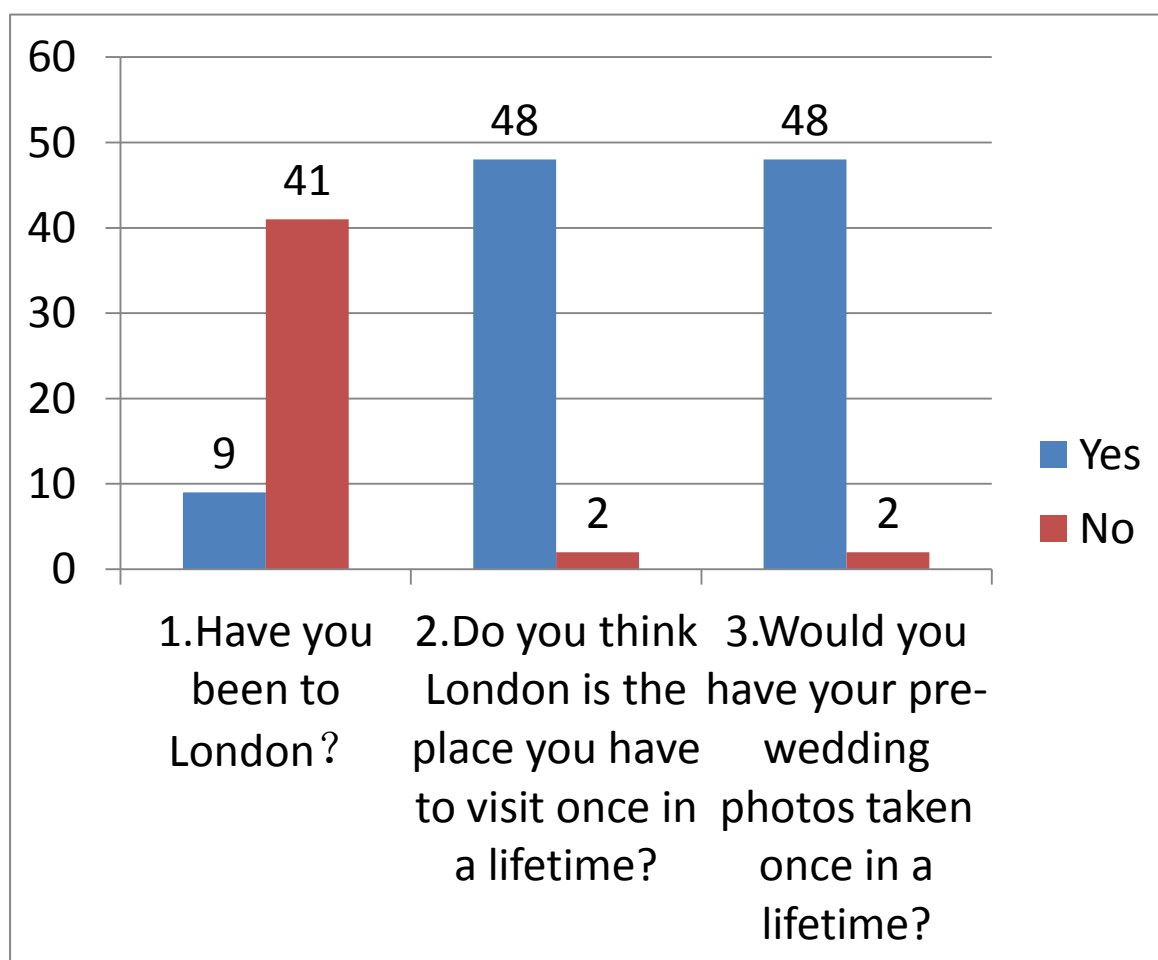


Figure 4. Questionnaire Analysis

From the respondents' feedback, even though the percentage of Chinese who have not been to London yet is high, almost all the interviewees consider London as a place that they have to go to at least once in their lifetime. In addition, a large amount of people revealed that taking pre-wedding photos in their lifetime is important. The two people who answered no were both male.

80% of interviewees said pre-wedding photos means a lot to them. The 20% of people who have no particular passion for the photography all belong to male group, which again shows a clear gender divide in the importance of pre-wedding photography in the consumers' eyes. This may provide the case company with valuable insight when it comes to future advertisements, as women seem to be a larger target market and so feminine elements could be emphasized more.

94% of respondents liked the idea of going to London for pre-wedding photography whilst only 6% of interviewees did not. They explained their non-willingness to travel to London with, for example, that there are too many places in the world to choose from or China is beautiful too, highlighting a small percentage of any group is likely to prefer domestic pursuits ahead of overseas adventures.

A large majority of 84% of respondents picked the 'mixed entertainment package with visa, hotel, pre-wedding photos and daily entertainment arranged', whilst only 16% of interviewees picked the solo pre-wedding photos option. It is likely that this 16% may have been to London before, speak English well and hence they feel more confident once the language barrier is not a problem. Still, a high amount of people prefer to have things arranged for them. The researcher believes this stems from the cultural phenomenon of Chinese preference of travelling as a group, especially if the language and a place is new to them. They wish to know the plan in advance in order to prevent unpredictable surprises.

The interviewees who chose either the 'solo pre-wedding photos' or 'mixed entertainment package', preferred staying for seven days. As China's holiday system is different from Europe, it is very rare that Chinese can have more than five days off as an annual holiday from work. Newlywed registered couples who are seen as late marriage (for male the age is 25 years old and for females 23 years old) could enjoy up to thirteen working days off for wedding ceremony. This is why the answers are only between seven days or two weeks.

In terms of the price relating to pre-wedding photography, for 'solo pre-wedding photos' selections, 75% of respondents preferred to spend one day on photo shoot and they found 10,000rmb (1,405 euros) more acceptable. For those who prefer to take part in the 'mixed entertainment package' around 71% would like to spend at least seven days in the UK and expected cost is 30,000 (4,216 euros). This result could give valuable guideline for the case company.

The research also shows that the majority of respondents think it would be a good idea if other cities within United Kingdom were included in the package too, alongside London being the must see destination. Unlike the Shengen Visa which allows Chinese to travel between many European Union countries, getting a UK Visa is relatively difficult and totally independent meaning they could only visit one country. Since Chinese have to travel so far to make their trip to the UK, it would be beneficial if they could visit more cities besides London in order to enhance the British experience.

4 Recommendation and conclusion

4.1 Recommendation

The research results are analyzed further and what can be determined from the results is used to explain how to productize the pre-wedding photography in London for the case company The Benson Group (China).

The current research shows that pre-wedding photography business in London has a popular demand by Chinese. The individual questionnaire research shows that Chinese prefer to go to London for pre-wedding photography with a traveling package. There are some limitations which need to be sorted in order to attract even more domestic Chinese on board:

4.1.1 Visa barrier

It can be difficult for mainland Chinese to travel abroad. To apply and have a visa successfully granted in many of the desirable European countries, Chinese citizens are requested for huge amount of personal information. For all the Chinese who wish to go to United Kingdom, assuming they travel with a tourist visa, an individual is required to fill in the online information form with up to almost 100 questions, pay the visa fee of 800rmb (112 euros) in advance on-line (Govuk 2015).

The complete process every applicant has to go through can therefore seem daunting and complicated and as the application form is only available in English, this may push most Chinese to apply for the UK visa via the travel agency because of the language barrier. From the research above, there is no such overseas pre-wedding photography company which offers the visa application service. The case company is therefore highly recommended to include this service in the package deal as the commission fee they are able to charge can be highly profitable.

4.1.2 Flight and accommodation

Flight prices are unpredictable and can change fast, especially around holidays seasons when the long haul international flights between the UK and China can become very expensive. Therefore this variable factor is hard to control on budget planning and this also explains why in the pre-wedding photography industry, no company is offering flight booking service.

When it comes to accommodation, from the wedding fair visiting in Shanghai, Lai Image Company mentioned that they would go to the local hotels and negotiate the best deal for the company and all Chinese couples who come for pre-wedding photo shoot would be arranged to stay in this hotel. This strategy is very good as it helps the Chinese customers to find suitable accommodation easily and since it can be their first time visiting London and they might otherwise find it hard to select where to stay.

At the moment, there is only one company, Lai Image that is booking hotels for the customers in London. The case company could follow this example and consider signing a cooperation deal with a number of local hotels in order to get a stable and discounted price for providing accommodation booking service to Chinese consumers.

4.1.3 Price setting for pre-wedding photography in London

When there are many competitors in a market place, pricing strategy can be a very important way to differentiate from the competition. The recommendation for the case company is to set an entry level price to attract more customers to come with an affordable price, then add more functions to increase the package value by offering additional service like videotaping to fulfill different needs and charging a higher price to tap into the higher end market.

4.1.4 Photographer nationality

It makes business sense if the case company hires a local photographer, who is overseas Chinese and based in London as well as for the convenience of communication between Chinese clients and photographer.

4.1.5 Package recommendations

Based on the research comparison of various competitors in the market place, the following content should be considered as the main content for the pre-wedding photography for The Benson Group (China). As the majority of Chinese consumers would like to go to London for a travelling package rather than solo pre-wedding photography, visa application, accommodation and other additional service could be added for further exploration in London.

Wedding Photojournalists of America award recipient Peggy Blair states that when people look back on their wedding albums years down the road, they want to remember how they felt at the time, not just what they look like (Owens 2015). The case company The Benson Group could create a unique selling point by including 'video diaries' as part of one of their packages which records romantic videos rather than just still photographs and hence can show more emotions and feelings more. Below are the recommended pre-wedding photography sets and pricing structure:

Set A: 9,999 RMB

- Two London sceneries
- One outfit for both groom and bride is provided (they can take their own clothes along)
- Photo shooting time: 3-4 hours

- One photographer and make-up artist are provided
- Transportation provided during photo shooting
- 300-400 photos provided
- 20 photos are effect polished with Photoshop

Set B: 13,999 RMB

- Three London sceneries
- Two outfits for both groom and bride are provided (they can take their own clothes along)
- Photo shooting time: 6-7 hours
- One photographer and make-up artist and assistant are provided
- Transportation provided during photo-shooting
- 600-800 photos provided
- 40 photos are effect polished with photoshop

Set C: 19,999 RMB

- Three London sceneries
- Two outfits for both groom and bride are provided (they can take their own clothes along)
- Photo shooting time: 8-9 hours
- One photographer and make-up artist and assistant are provided

- Transportation provided during photo shooting
- 800-900 photos provided
- 50 photos are effect polished with photoshop
- Video (4 minutes long)

4.2 Conclusion

China's booming economy in recent decades has turned the wedding business into a lucrative industry (Asia-Weekly 2015). From an economic aspect, according to the China Wedding Industry Development Report, increases in disposable income and improved economic outlook have led to newlyweds' willingness to invest more than 30% of their savings in their wedding occasion. Availability and cultural acceptance of debt has also led to newlyweds using credit cards and bank loans as funding vehicles for their wedding expenses. Cultural realities and economic changes could increase the spending on pre-wedding photography abroad for Chinese. (Grail Research 2015.)

All the signs suggest that both the domestic and overseas pre-wedding photography markets are still high growth markets. Without doubt, the popularity of pre-wedding photography will continue to increase and whilst demand is high, suppliers can continue to charge high prices and make healthy profits.

All the information collected from different resources including visiting exhibitions in both Shanghai and Shenzhen, internet information researching, literature reviewing, interviews, participatory observation and questionnaires have been used to form the recommendations above.

The research process has produced clear directions for market segmentation and pricing, etc and is used to form the recommendations above which are generated from

the guiding theories and analyzed data of this research on how to productize pre-wedding photography for the case company The Benson Group (China).

Figures

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. Have you been to London? 请问您之前去过伦敦吗?

Yes_____ (leads to Q3) 有 (请跳至问题 3)

No _____ (leads to Q2) 没有 (请跳至问题 2)

2. Do you think London is the place you have to visit once in a lifetime?

您觉得伦敦是一个人生必去至少一次的地方吗?

Yes_____ 是

No_____ (explain why) 不是 (请简短说明原因)

3. Would you have your pre-wedding photos taken once in a lifetime?

您觉得拍婚纱照是人生必须要有的纪念吗?

Yes_____ 是

No_____ 不是

4. How much pre-wedding photos mean to you?

拍婚纱照这事对您来说, 您觉得有多重要?

A: a lot 很重要

B: okay 还好

C: not much 不重要

5. Would you like to have your pre-wedding photos taken in London?

您觉得去伦敦拍婚纱照是一个不错的主意吗？

A:Yes_____ 是

B:No_____ (explain why)

不是（请简短说明原因）

6. How many days do you want to stay if you travel to London?伦敦游的话您觉得多少天适合？

Your answer: _____ 您的答案: _____

7. Regarding to pre-wedding photo in London, what kind of style would you like to have?

关于去伦敦拍婚纱照这个点子，什么样的方式您会更喜欢？

A: Solo pre-wedding photos 纯拍婚纱照

B: Mixed entertainment package ((visa+hotels+pre-wedding photos daily entertainment arranged) 包签证+拍婚纱照+每天行程都给安排好

8. For solo pre-wedding photo in London, what price level do you think it is appropriate?

在伦敦纯拍婚纱照，您会接受怎样的价位？

Your answer:_____ 您的答案: _____

9. For mixed entertainment package (visa+hotels+pre-wedding photos daily entertainment) in London, how much do you think it is appropriate?

在伦敦的套餐安排（根据在“问题 6”您所给出的天数），您觉得多少钱会比较适合？

Your answer:_____ 您的答案: _____