

Original Paper

The Entrepreneurial Exploration and Practice of College Students' Photography Studio —Taking San Jiu Photography Studio as an Example

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Abstract

Under the national “mass entrepreneurship and innovation” encouragement policy and relevant college education, plus the trend that people, especially college students like to record campus moments as souvenirs via cameras, we take our own “San Jiu Photography Studio” as an example to share specific practices of college students’ photography entrepreneurship. The article conducts an analysis from four dimensions: team formation, operating strategy, innovative practice and entrepreneurial gains. Initially, the studio identified students’ photography needs, integrated available resources, and solved problems as they arose. The studio’s core belief “Life Fragments documentary” records daily trivial moments on campus for students. In addition, we have expanded multi-channels promotion and collaboration, provided personalized services, like customized shoots tailored to individual students’ styles. The startup process brought many challenges, such as insufficient customer base, limited working hardware and some difficult customers, but the studio gradually developed solutions. It holds that team members’ strengths, accurate needs identification, and warm services are the keys to succeeding in the campus photography market. During this Entrepreneurial practice, we have achieved all-round growth, both in capability and cognition. The studio hopes these practices can serve as a reference for other campus entrepreneurs and showcase the potential of college students’ entrepreneurship.

Keywords

college students’ entrepreneurship, photography studio, entrepreneurial exploration and innovative

practice

1. Introduction

Under the dual background of the state's encouragement of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation" and the continuous deepening of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities, college students' entrepreneurship has upgraded from an individual choice to a trend of the times. This group, with their acute insight into the young market, flexible creative thinking, and the policy support and practical platforms provided by universities, is becoming an active force in the field of micro and small business startups. Meanwhile, the digital revolution has made image dissemination the mainstream form of expression. Photography is no longer confined to professional creation; instead, it has become the core method for ordinary people to record their lives and preserve their emotions. Especially for college students, the growth and transformation, classmate friendships, and youthful memories during campus life need to be captured through professional and emotionally touching visual forms. However, the high cost of high-end photography services and the low quality of ordinary shooting create a stark contradiction, leading to a gap in photography services that precisely meet the needs of the campus.

In this context, "San Jiu Photography Studio" was jointly established by photography enthusiasts and entrepreneurs from universities. It focuses on the image recording needs of college students, and takes campus scenes as its core creative base, providing photography services that combine documentary and creative elements.

The San Jiu Photography Studio we established aims to systematically review its entrepreneurial foundation, operational strategies and innovative practices, and deeply analyze the complete logic of "demand exploration—resource integration—problem-solving" in the process of college students' entrepreneurship. At the same time, by summarizing its growth experiences and existing shortcomings, it provides a feasible practical model that can be referred to for similar campus entrepreneurship projects. It also aims to offer micro-case support for understanding the value realization path and development potential of college students' entrepreneurship in the new era.

2. The Foundation of San Jiu Photography Studio's Entrepreneurship

2.1 Our Team: A Group of Young Dream-makers Dedicated to Light and Shadow

Our photography entrepreneurship team, composed of 6 college students bound by a shared passion for the art of light and shadow. We firmly believe that behind every excellent photo lie not only advanced technical skills but also a well-organized and closely-coordinated team.

Core team composition:

- Photography Director: The “artistic eye” of the team, guiding the creative vision and execution of every shoot. With a strong foundation in photography and a distinctive aesthetic perspective, this role also excels in post-processing, color grading, and image refinement—ensuring that every step, from shutter click to final output, delivers the highest visual quality.
- Mini Program Developer: Empowering art with technology. Independently developed and maintained the online selection mini-program for our studio, allowing clients to browse the original footage on their mobile phones at any time and place, and make initial selections easily and freely after the shooting was completed. This significantly enhanced the convenience and efficiency of our services.
- Operations Manager: the “chief manager” of the team, in charge of the finances, ensuring the healthy operation of the studio; responsible for the publicity, planning and promoting activities through various channels such as social media and online platforms, telling our brand story and allowing more people to see our works.
- Photography Assistant: Assist the photography director in arranging lighting, preparing equipment, and coordinating on-site, ensuring a smooth and uninterrupted shooting process.
- Operations Assistant: Assist the operations manager in handling daily data, content layout, and communication with clients, making the promotional work more meticulous and detailed.
- Technical Assistant: Assist developers in conducting tests for the mini-programs and collecting user feedback, ensuring the stability of the technical platform and the improvement of user experience.
- Customer Service Specialist: The first voice clients heard when reaching out. Handling every inquiry, scheduling appointments, tracking requests, and giving swift answers. Warm, patient, and professional—this role forms the welcoming bridge between customers and the team.
- Aesthetic enhancement / Stylist: Serving as the team’s “beautician”, this role designs customized makeup and hairstyles that align with each client’s unique features and desired shoot style. Professional expertise elevates confidence, allowing the most captivating presence to shine in front of the camera.

2.2 Service Contents and Positioning

Campus Moments Chronicle · Real Record of Youth Life: Saying goodbye to the monotonous “tourist photos”, we delve into every corner of your life - the intense writing in the library, the bicycle figures on the tree-lined avenue, the joyful cheering on the playground, the playful and noisy scenes in the dormitory. We use documentary-style camera language to capture your most natural state of life, creating a “youth micro-film” exclusively for you.

Exclusive Customization · Personal Creative Portraits: Everyone is a unique individual. Whether you are fond of the cute and elegant style of Japanese fashion, love the retro Hong Kong style, or want to try the cyberpunk trend, we can tailor it just for you. From theme planning, clothing selection to scene choice, the photography director and makeup artist will communicate with you throughout the process,

working together to turn the wild imagination into stunning visual masterpieces.

Graduation Season · Eternal Youth Remembrance: Graduation is the most passionate ending of the most exciting part of the youth's musical composition. We offer you the most ceremonious graduation commemoration photography service. Whether it's a group photo of you and your close friends throwing caps and cheering at every campus landmark, or a solo photo in a classroom or auditorium wearing a graduation gown, we will use professional techniques to freeze the joy and reluctance of this life's highlight moment for you.

Our target audience is college students. Since we ourselves are college students, we are better able to understand the aesthetic preferences, consumption habits and emotional needs of our peers. Communication without barriers, creativity in harmony. As a student entrepreneurial team, we have abandoned the high prices of traditional photo studios and offer professional quality at an honest price, making high-quality photography services accessible to everyone. From online consultation, custom makeup design, professional shooting to convenient film selection through the mini-program, we offer a complete and smooth service loop, saving you precious time and effort. Tell stories through the lens, pay tribute to youth with light and shadow. We are not just photographers, but also your companions and recorders of your youth.

3. The Operating Strategy of San Jiu Photography Studio

3.1 Promotion and Marketing Pathway

3.1.1 Multi-channels Promotion

We are well aware that even the best fragrance can be overlooked if it is not showcased. In order to enable more students on campus to discover us and get to know us, we have developed a comprehensive set of promotional strategies that deeply penetrate the campus environment and precisely reach the target audience. We not only thrive in the online world, but also encounter you in real life.

Online: Focus on campus social platforms

WeChat official account and video account: Content value is the core

Regularly release high-quality client photos and creative samples, presenting our photography skills and unique style in a "pictures + text + video" format. Each set of photos tells a story, aiming to attract customers with similar aesthetic preferences. Push out practical content such as "Photography Posture Guide", "Graduation Photo Styling Tips", and "Recommendations for the Best Campus Shooting Locations", providing value to students and establishing professional trust. We have launched activities such as "Leave Messages for Rewards", "Like for Free Gift" and "Theme Collection", aiming to enhance the stickiness of our fans. We also seamlessly integrate our self-developed film selection mini-program to improve the user experience.

Xiaohongshu: Creating a Visual Brand Platform

By posting notes with localized popular topics such as #XX University Photos, #Campus Photography, #Graduation Photos, etc., we can precisely attract students from the same university and surrounding universities who have the intention to take photos. Launch the “Unprofessional Transformation Program” series of content, presenting the actual makeup process and before-and-after comparisons, which will powerfully showcase our technical capabilities and stimulate users’ desire to shoot. Offline: Creating immersive experiences

Collaboration with student organizations: Provide free group portraits and event follow-up services for student unions, art groups, and large-scale organizations, in exchange for joint publicity and credit ratings on the official channels of these organizations.

3.1.2 Collaboration with Photography Associations and other Clubs

Host public lectures such as “Mobile Photography Skills” and “Introduction to Portrait Photography”, sharing knowledge while naturally integrating the studio’s brand and attracting potential clients.

3.1.3 Network of Acquaintances for Recommendations

Implement policies such as “Offer discounts to both parties when introducing new customers” or “Give away a premium makeover voucher”, to motivate satisfied customers to actively spread positive word-of-mouth within their social circles, dormitories etc. This is the most cost-effective and trustworthy way to acquire customers.

3.2 Service Quality Control

Quality Assurance: In the details, we witness professionalism. We are well aware that a set of touching photos stems from the dedication to quality in every aspect. From the initial communication to the final delivery of the full project, we have established a rigorous yet warm service process to ensure that each customer’s experience exceeds their expectations.

3.2.1 The Initial Communication Stage

Through one-on-one in-depth communication with customers by dedicated customer service staff, they patiently listen to the customers’ thoughts, preferences and shooting purposes. Before the shooting, we will provide a preliminary shooting plan, reference samples and makeup suggestions, and work with the client to jointly confirm the creative direction.

3.2.2 Shooting Stage

The photography is shot by the photographer himself, who guides the client’s emotions and postures with professional experience, and strictly controls the core technical aspects such as lighting and composition. The photography assistant was on standby throughout the process, responsible for tasks such as organizing the clothes and adjusting the reflectors, to ensure that the shooting process was smooth and unobstructed. The makeup artist is always on hand to apply makeup and touch up the makeup, ensuring that the client maintains a perfect appearance in front of the camera. During the

shooting process, we will periodically review the just-shot photos on the camera screen with the client, make timely adjustments to ensure the client's satisfaction.

3.2.3 Post-processing Stage

All the negatives are initially screened for standardization by the photographer, and the refined photos follow a rigorous process of "basic correction → skin tone uniformization → texture enhancement → stylized color adjustment". We adopt a two-stage confirmation model. First, we will provide some sample images of the refined photos. Please confirm whether the overall color tone and the degree of refinement are in line with your expectations. Secondly, customers will use our self-developed film selection mini-program to browse all the initial processed negatives online and mark them. The entire process is clear and efficient, and customers' choice rights are fully respected. Finally, based on the direction confirmed by the client and the selection results, we will carry out the detailed processing of all the final films and deliver them within the agreed time. At the same time, we will provide a limited number of fine-tuning services to ensure that each final film meets the client's satisfaction.

4. Problems and Innovative Practice of San Jiu Photography Studio

4.1 Problems in the Entrepreneurial Process

After all, starting a business for college students is not as hard and stable as starting a real business in society. Problems such as imperfect management systems, lack of experience in entrepreneurship and financial management, insufficient time, and unprofessional equipment and technology, and any one of them may affect the progress of the studio. However, college students' entrepreneurship is full of boundless passion and creativity, as well as the courage to forge ahead. Whether a business venture succeeds or not is not the most important thing. What matters is what one learns and experience one accumulates during the process of starting the business. These are the most precious fortune in one's future life.

4.1.1 Insufficient Customer Base

As all of the team members are college students, social circles are limited, and the recognition of the new brand is 0, the clicked rate of online promotion channels is low. The studio only has 5 sets of sample pictures and 0 real customer reviews, which cannot constitute "social proof". In addition, the promotional channels were limited (relying only on WeChat Moments), the information spreading range was small, and the effective customer base was narrow. As a result, the final reservation conversion rate was less than 1%, presenting a vicious cycle of "low product visibility - low trust - low reservation conversion rate". This led to only one group of orders being made in the first month of opening, far from covering the fixed costs.

4.1.2 Limited Working Hardware

In the early days of San Jiu Photography Studio, the equipment was limited and there was no fixed working location. All the photography equipment was the personal equipment of the team members. Besides, the venue, clothing, cosmetics, etc. were all rented by the team members at their own expense.

4.1.3 Difficult Customers

The initial operation mode of the studio was mainly based on “mutual encouragement”, and most of the sample photos were also taken by models from it. However, the feeling that the model desires and the effect presented by the studio photographer sometimes deviate, resulting in prolonged shooting time and reduced efficiency. During the “mutual encouragement” and communication process, there were issues related to funds. Sometimes, models were unwilling to bear the relevant expenses and may want to attain some gifts for free.

4.2 Innovative Practice

4.2.1 Creative “Fragmented Life” Style

Most traditional photography is presented in the form of film and cannot be replayed. It needs to be processed by professionals to form the final image. With the development of The Times, various types of cameras have gradually become popular, like ccd, Polaroid, film cameras, digital cameras, etc. However, most films are stored in electronic form, and the content mainly consists of portraits, objects, and landscapes, which can be changed by PS. However, “Fragmented Life” style refers to catching the minute events and material traces that have been left behind within an extremely short period of time, even in the blink of an eye, by pressing the shutter button to record this natural and beautiful moment, making the photo evidence that “a small thing happened at that time”, rather than “taking a good-looking photo”. “Fragmented Life” is not a grand narrative, but those fleeting moments that can stir up emotional ripples in the future, such as the clouds reflected outside the window in half a cup of coffee, your own shadow on the subway glass overlapping with the advertising light board and the warmth of a cat circling its tail to your ankle etc. To record the fragmented life well, the key is not the equipment, but to learn to “discover”. “There is no shortage of beauty in the world, what is lacking is the eye to discover it.” The studio sticks to the principle of “capturing the poetry of life with the mirror of innovation”, and upholds an innovative style, and discovers the beauty in the fragmented life.

Recording the fragments of college students’ lives with a digital camera is not just about “taking more photos”, but treating the “camera” as a diary to carry around. That means always on standby, quick to get started, and capable of telling stories. Compared with traditional photography, the innovation lies in breaking the pattern, which means no studio, no model, no staged shooting, only the real breathing in the classroom, dormitory and campus corners. First of all, the “edges” should be the main characters. The subjects of the shoot should not be the school beauties or handsome guys, but “the sticky notes occupying seats”, “the dust from the blackboard eraser”, and “the night light from the dormitory water

dispenser”. Then comes teamwork. A life observer is responsible for writing an “emotion script”, discovering multiple moments that can be caught and recorded. A photographer, who only do “decisive continuous shooting”, carry a camera with you all the time, and record those breathing moments. An operator, who post works on WeChat Moments and QQ campus Wall, collect feedback in the comment section to determine the theme of the next issue. It can also arouse the fans’ interests in participating by letting them guess which corner of the school these moments are in. After accumulating a certain number of fans, more students get to know this photography studio and attract more potential customers.

4.2.2 Personalized Services

Anyone who takes a photo album in our studio and spends at least 520 yuan will be given a free gift of 2 minutes of behind-the-scenes footage (micro film) + 3 Polaroid photos worth 9.9 yuan+ 1 “blind box base film” (randomly developed waste photos that are not selected) + all negatives+1 custom 10-inch table stand. Also, customers can voluntarily customize special keychain with small cards for 9.9 yuan, one 6-8 inch crystal/linen photo album, an upgraded version for 299 yuan, and one card-style photo album for 9.9 yuan etc.

4.2.3 Other Measures

To keep pace with fashion trend, the studio adopts the “mutual encouragement” mode broadening the shooting style, increase the types of sample photos. And the studio constantly updates the daily life in the Moments, making the customer service account “lively”, also expands the customer circle, and gradually get through the initial awkward stage. Thanks to this mode, as time went by, the studio can purchase equipment such as reflectors and fill lights.

Facing Difficult customers, the studio adhering to the principle that “the customer is king”, reduce profits as little as possible to retain customers and coordinate online to reduce costs.

5. Entrepreneurial Gains

5.1 All-round Growth of Team Capabilities

The entrepreneurial process has enabled the team to transform from “skilled individuals” to “cooperative collectives”. The team initially formed based on interests and gradually built a complementary structure that met the project requirements by clear division of labor and cooperation among photography, post-production, and operation. Thus, the team overcame common problems such as single major and ambiguous division of labor in college student entrepreneurial teams. Zhang Wei and Gao Jian, in their article “Research on Key Factors for the Growth of Chinese Startups: A Comparative Analysis of Successful and Failed Cases”, pointed out that the growth quality of startups is highly dependent on the complementarity and collaboration efficiency of the team through several researches on multiple entrepreneurial cases. Clear role division, and a member composition with

complementary skills can effectively reduce the cost and execution resistance in the early stage of entrepreneurship, which is the core support for the team to cope with market challenges. The growth process of the San Jiu Photography Studio team precisely proves this conclusion. In the face of practical difficulties such as insufficient equipment and a shortage of clients, the members not only deepened professional skills but cultivated comprehensive qualities such as market analysis and client communication, achieving a transformation from “campus learners” to “market practitioners”.

5.2 Meeting the Needs of the Campus

The studio, centering on “recording the true moments of youth”, precisely fills the gap in campus photography service. Through the “Fragments of Life” shooting style and personalized service innovation, it has broken the rigid model of traditional photography, which focus on neglected scenes such as classroom interactions and dormitory daily life, allowing the images to return to the essence of emotions. The studio provides college students with cost-effective solutions, earning recognition from the target group.

5.3 Deep Expansion of Entrepreneurial Cognition

During practice, the team has deeply realized that the core competitiveness of campus entrepreneurship lies in “demand matching” and “emotional resonance”. Compared with commercial photography institutions, a scene understanding of students’ lives, flexible service adjustments, and precise cost control can better form a differentiated advantage. At the same time, it is also realized that the standardized process management (such as communication lists in the early stage and modification standards in the later stage) is the key for small teams to ensure service quality.

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