

# INVITING OVERSEAS ENTREPRENEURS TO GREECE FOR B2B TOURISM MARKETING PURPOSES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A SME

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## **Abstract**

*Economic crisis in Greece has been a fact during the previous years, leading the Greek entrepreneurs to turn to foreign markets and to overseas distributors as a solution to face the crisis problems and help their businesses survive and develop. As Greece is a country which welcomes millions of foreign travelers per year, some Greek SMEs try to include the tourism service sector opportunities in their export strategy in order to exploit every potentiality they may have, like their country's tourism attractions. Their intention is to achieve positive export results and a world market sustainable brand name for their product offers.*

*The aim of this paper is to study whether overseas oriented marketing efforts can combine tangible with intangible product offers (services) to enforce the Business Tourism Market for a Country Destination and to create win to win situations for their businesses. This research is an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis case study survey on the travel activity of Chinese entrepreneurs who were motivated by a Greek SME to visit the country with a view of expanding their business cooperation and also combining business with tourism.*

*This paper is unique since it contributes to the existing literature by identifying the Chinese business tourist preferences and providing a theoretical framework which presents the differentiation characteristics of their business travel activities. The procedure presented here may be further examined as regards the impact of business tourism preferences on SMEs' export performance.*

*From a managerial perspective, this study may help tourism experts of the MICE industry to understand the Chinese business travelers better and provide higher quality services to them. It is also a procedure that may be repeated by enterprises which seek to differentiate their marketing mix in order to expand their exports activity.*

**JEL Classification:** L83, L84, M31

**Keywords:** Greek exports, Chinese travelers, tourist attractions, hair salons, MICE tourism

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## **1. Introduction**

The recent great uncertainty of the world economy, followed by the European debt crisis, greatly affected national economies, with Greece being the worst-hit country within the European Union, experiencing record unemployment levels (Giannakis & Bruggeman, 2017). The economic crisis of 2008 in Greece has, among others, increased the tax burdens, reduced the available income of households and deteriorated the indicators of economic and social welfare, leading to inequalities and higher risks of poverty (Magoulis et al., 2015). Given that continual cash shortages may lead the small firms to financial straits (Quintiliani, 2017), for the Greek enterprises to survive, marketing appears as the greatest competitive advantage and those which failed to change their marketing mix during crisis, faced a decrease in their profits (Chouliaras et al., 2015). Pearce and Michael (1997) also present that small businesses may bear the negative financial effects of a recession if they invest on marketing. Moreover, the world is getting more and more globalized and exporting has become the most favorable method of entering an international market, mainly as regards small-medium enterprises (SMEs) (Abor et al., 2014, Tan et al., 2018). Exporting of SMEs contributes to employment creation and is of great importance for them (Tan et al., 2018), yet the recent studies (Abor et al., 2014, Balios et al., 2016, Böwer et al., 2014, Cuadrado-Roura et al., 2016, Crescenzi et al., 2016, Darvas, 2016, Gourinchas et al., 2017, Papadimitriou et al., 2016, Richter et al., 2016) that refer to the Greek economic crisis concentrate mainly on macroeconomic indicators and factors, and none, to the best of our knowledge, has examined the oriented marketing efforts from the part of the SMEs themselves and especially if the latter attempt to include in their marketing plan the tourism service sector opportunities for overseas business tourists.

According to Nassr et al. (2016), Greece has a great potential to make exports because of its history, cultural sites, natural beauty and its comparative advantages in tourism and other services which have not been entirely exploited. The recent literature has studied the Greek economic crisis problem in conjunction with the trade between Greece and other countries (de la Maisonneuve, 2016, Ghazalian, 2016, Halikias & Salavou, 2014, Korkmaz & Celebioglu, 2016, Makris et al., 2016), but a research gap in the area of exporting of SMEs during crisis with the combination of the tourism service sector was identified.

This research was carried out to help in filling this gap and to provide insights into the adoption of tourism services into the export marketing plan of a SME. More specifically, it tries to explore the differentiated travel characteristics of Chinese business tourists and to examine whether their personal travel experiences could lead to the expansion of their business cooperation with the SME. To this end, an exploratory study with the use

of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodology was applied in order to get a profound understanding of the travel behavior and preferences of the Chinese entrepreneurs while they travel for business. Another purpose is to study whether overseas oriented marketing efforts can combine tangible with intangible product offers (services) to enforce the Business Tourism Market for a Country Destination and to create win to win situations for their businesses, in spite of the adverse economic conditions. The findings provide a conceptual model of the Chinese business tourists' preferences which consists of five key differentiated points in their travel activities. This study opens an academic window through which the literature may examine further the special travel characteristics of the Asian business tourists along with the benefits that could occur for their partners abroad. The practical implications for the MICE industry and the SMEs are also discussed.

## **2. Theoretical Underpinnings**

### *2.1 Small and Medium Enterprises in Greece*

According to Shah et al. (2015), the definition of a SME, small and medium enterprise, tends to be different around the world, depending on national and local needs, with the employment being the most common element. The number of employees that determines the size of a SME differs from country to country; the small size is under 50 employees and the medium size is under 250 employees in European Union (Shah et al., 2015).

SMEs could significantly contribute to an export-oriented economy (Nassr et al., 2016) because they are the backbone of every economy (Kaplanoglou et al., 2016). In Greece they play a vital role and stand for a crucial share of the country's economy, by creating new jobs and being a main source of inventions (Hyz, 2011). However, according to the aforementioned researcher, it is difficult for the Greek SMEs to develop and strengthen their market position, due to difficulties in accessing financing. SMEs are of high importance for Europe representing nearly 99% of all firms (Lemonakis et al, 2017) and this importance is also proved by the fact that they are being supported by many European initiatives; yet, Greek SMEs suffer a deep recession due to the prolonged crisis (Gsevee, 2018). SMEs seem to be "the first victims of economic recessions" (Petzold et al., 2018) because they confront various challenges, including reduced sales, liquidity problems and decline in demand for their products and services (Kossyva et al., 2015) along with considerable tax burdens (Kaplanoglou et al., 2016). In low levels of resource slack, being pressed to find ways to survive, SMEs intensify exports (Kiss et al., 2018). Exporting is a basic strategy for expan-

ding to new markets, gaining new customers and discovering new marketing opportunities (Boso et al., 2016) and has been well proved that exporting ameliorates SMEs growth and survival (Haddoud et al, 2017).

Regarding SMEs and their role in tourism the academic discussion is limited with slow development, whereas the SME sector itself also neglects to describe the desired benefits from tourism (Thomas et al. 2011).

## *2.2 Tourism in Greece during crisis*

Tourism is an important part of the service economy worldwide with continued growth (Papatheodorou & Arvanitis, 2014, Smed & Bislev, 2016). The role of tourism in national and economic development is central and the impacts of tourism on the economy are powerful and visible (Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014).

Tourism sector in the Mediterranean counties, including Greece, has been affected by the economic depression, however, the average growth rate in tourism industry is greater than the average economic growth seeing that tourism recovered quickly from the economic crisis (Dogru & Bulut, 2018). The tourism industry, through alternative tourism forms, could support the recovery of the Greek economy (Giannakis & Bruggeman, 2017).

According to the evidence provided by Dogru & Bulut (2018), economic growth strongly depends on tourism development for the Mediterranean countries, including Greece. However, it is after the recent financial crisis that the significance of tourism for the Greek economy has been recognized (Papatheodorou & Arvanitis, 2014). At times of financial difficulties, countries such as Greece and other Mediterranean, could apply more targeted marketing techniques in their existing sea, sun and sand experiences and develop alternative tourism packages (Antonakakis et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the business environment undergoes changes, and while the international business develop, the need to meet personally increases (Buhalis et al, 2006). Recently, the business travel market witnesses a steady growth which is expected to grow further thanks to the large number of SMEs and their business activities (Anon, 2019). Travelling for business includes the trips which are related with the traveler's employment or business interests and involves several kind of economic, environmental and social impacts (Davidson & Cope, 2003; Marais et al., 2017). That is, apart from the undoubted economic benefits from the part of the suppliers (Davidson & Cope, 2003), business tourism also contributes to decreased seasonality, creation of jobs and enhanced destination image of the host community (Marais et al., 2017; Swarbrooke et al., 2012). The motivations of business travelers are complicated, including the introduction of new products or the purchase of servicing, and may differ from other types of travel (Kulendran & Wilson, 2000). Therefore, SMEs in tourism should provide

high-quality services and products along with well-educated and well-trained personnel (Dewhurst et al., 2007) while SME in tourism performance is strongly related with innovation diversity (Verreyne et al., 2019).

### *2.3 China's role in world tourism*

Tourism demand is changing and new tourism markets, such as China, have emerged, presenting a rapid economic growth (Buhalis et al, 2006). The European financial crisis coexisted with the growth of outbound Chinese tourism, which brought about continued growth in the tourism sector in European economies (Smed & Bislev, 2016) with a great rise of the number of Chinese tourists who travel to Europe (Raspor et al., 2012). As China's role in the world changes (Raspor et al., 2012) the international tourism industry will be affected by the Chinese tourists and special attention will be paid to this new and emerging market (Smed & Bislev, 2016). China's tourism industry highly contributes to the growing revenue of many overseas countries (Jiang et al., 2018). In terms of the number of arrivals, Europe is the most visited tourism region not only for international but also for Chinese tourists (Smed & Bislev, 2016). The knowledge about Chinese tourist behaviour is limited and worth to become more qualitative by identifying its potential challenges (Smed & Bislev, 2016). As Chinese outbound tourists have been increasing (Dai et al., 2017) and China is the largest outbound market since 2012 (Zou & Petrick, 2016), the offers and treatment to Chinese tourists should be customized to their needs cultures (Raspor et al., 2012) based on the understanding of their unique cultural values (Jiang et al., 2018). It is a challenge for marketers to match emerging markets, like the Chinese, with suitable products and marketing (Buhalis et al, 2006).

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a method that involves the detailed examination of personal lived experience (Drobot, 2012, Eatough & Smith, 2017, Smith, 2011, Smith & Osborn, 2004); this is the reason why it is a phenomenological approach, and thus, unavoidably involves an interpretative process of the part of both researcher and the participant (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The meaning of the particular experiences of the respondents is the purpose of the IPA studies (Drobot, 2012), carried out usually on small samples sizes (Smith, 2011). The researcher plays a dynamic and active role by trying to get close and learn something about

the respondent's physiological world, attempting to explore personal experience (Smith & Osborn, 2004) so as to get a viewpoint from the inside (Drobot, 2012).

### *3.2 The Professional Hair Care Products Greek SME*

A Greek small-medium enterprise, based on Thessaloniki, whose industry is professional hair care products and the number of its employees is under 50, was chosen for this study. It is small sample sizes, including a rather homogeneous sample, those that are used for IPA studies (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Recently, Eatough & Smith (2017) also underlined that the number of participants in IPA studies is between one and thirty, usually being the lower one, because the researchers try to enter inside the participants' world, their wishes, desires and motives. The reason of the choice of the specific SME was because it has been established just before the start of economic crisis in Greece and, despite the crisis, it managed to achieve positive results thanks to its opening to international markets. Export knowledge and exporting experience among smaller firms were also set as prerequisites for the selection of the SME, because both characteristics are basic for successful international expansion (Evangelista & Mac, 2016). The determinants of the examined exporting SME, as mentioned on Pickernell et al. (2016) study, which were taken under consideration, were mainly the owner-manager-specific characteristics and the firm's available resources. Moreover, the Greek SME has been open-minded, searching for alternative ways of performing its business and with strong commitment to corporate social responsibility projects, which has been highly recognized by its customers. The adoption of CSR has become an essential strategic means of influencing customer behavior, and mainly customer trust (Mombeuil & Fotiadis, 2017).

### *3.3 Data collection*

The study was carried out in May 2017, when the SME invited its Chinese clients to Greece with the view of expanding their business cooperation through technical training seminars on its products and through tourist experiences. The training courses, being one of the categories of business travel and tourism and organized by a single organization, provide information to the participants with a purpose of helping them develop their skills (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012).

The seminars were held at the renovated studio of the company, where the SME's technical team demonstrated the new trends in hair color. Since the seminars covered several aspects of the hairdressing procedure, like bleaching, hair coloring and balayage, with the use of the SMEs special

hair care products, they could not be conducted by distance. Technology is better explained through personal contact and face-to-face communication notwithstanding the use of telephone or internet (Hovhannisyan & Keller, 2015, Unger, et al., 2016).), so the SME decided to invest on a proper hospitality of its Asian guests, based on technical training of each special products along with tourist sightseeing. The first step of any business which wants a share in the Chinese market is to understand their culture and the way they make up their preferences and expectations (Mok & Defranco, 2000). The SME tried to fulfil the expectations of its guests and to offer them both technical knowledge and relaxing experiences. There are multiple links between business and leisure tourism, with business travelers enjoying leisure amenities once the working day is over (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012).

The Chinese hair salon owners, who have been in the field for 10 years or more and decided to take part in the training event of the SME, came to Greece along with the SME's official distributor in China. All the participants were eight in number, coming from Guangdong district. The communications were made in the English language and a translator was also recruited in order to facilitate the communication between Greeks and those Chinese who were not able to speak the English fluently. The eight participants were aged between 28 and 49 years old. The researchers have been along with the interviewees and the translator all the three days that the Chinese hairdressers spent in Greece so as to get a deep understanding of the latter's preferences and have enough time for the interviews. In-depth interviewing is the most frequent technique of data collection (Smith, 2011), and a very suitable method in qualitative research, with a view of collecting data through the searching on deep information, mainly on personal matters, like lived experiences and values (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

Some of the respondents did not answer all the questions because they did not know that they would be participating on a survey and because some topics were not important to them. Some were more willing to talk and eager to share their feelings and experiences and others not. The interviews did not reveal discrepancies among the respondents. The exploration of the participants' experiences were facilitated through semi-structured interviews. Since the present work is exploratory and we do not test hypotheses, a questionnaire would not fit so open-ended questions, through semi-structured interviews, were adopted. The latter are used in IPA studies in order to guide the course of the interview and initiate a dialogue that will reveal interesting and important subjects (Eatough & Smith, 2017, Smith & Osborn, 2004). Contacting in-depth interviews is a qualitative method of collecting data in order to get deep information and knowledge and in-depth interviewing is usually used in conjunction with

other approaches, such as live experience of the interviewer in what is being studied (Johnson, 2001). The interviews were conducted at the leisure time; that is during the intervals between the seminars and lasted around 30 minutes each. The investigators were also allowed to take photos of the seminars and of the sightseeing moments which were shared at the social media of the SME and the tourists.

### *3.4 Data analysis*

The questions asked were selected based on the Chinese preferences and requests for the hospitality before their arrival and on the observations of the researchers during the Chinese stay in Greece. The interviews covered the aspects of the host country impressions, the purchases during their stay in Greece, the method of collecting experiences, the opinion about the host services and how they booked their trip. The interview transcripts and observations have been collected, managed and analyzed, ending up in notes and phrases that epitomize everything that was said during the interviews. This open coding procedure provides a summary for each element that is discussed (Burnard et al., 2008). The focus of attention were given to the most important areas. This preliminary study was designed to identify the travel characteristics and the most-preferred travel activities of Chinese entrepreneurs when visiting overseas destinations for business and vacation and to examine the services of the host enterprise.

## **4. Findings**

The researchers endeavored to enter into the life world of the Chinese respondents, rather than investigating it. The process of IPA has revealed a model of the Chinese preferences and reflects crucial experience levers which could offer a more profound understanding to the travelers' personal experiences. Based on the summary of their replies, the main findings were the following:

- **Host country impressions**

The interviews revealed that all the Chinese hair salon owners knew Greece, especially as regards its ancient history and archeological sites, cultural knowledge, ancient gods (Apollo was mentioned three times) and civilization, mainly thanks to several series that are shown on Chinese TV. They admire the wonders of ancient Greek civilization and they were eager to learn more and more about the host country and visit other places, first and foremost Athens and Santorin. Athens, specially, is one of the most popular European destinations for them. They also revealed to researchers that Europe



is a must for them, ("I have to go to Europe"), and they have every intention of coming back again both to Greece and to other European countries. The SME's representatives offered them statues of ancient Greek gods, as souvenirs.

- **Purchases and Consumerism**

The interviewees reported that Chinese are particularly interested in material goods and they enjoy buying foreign products just because "they are different from Chinese". Luxury and high quality products fascinate them as well. They were interested in famous restaurants and luxurious experiences in general, eager to spend large amounts of money. Some goods, such as olive oil, are expensive in China, so they bought as many as possible during their visit in the host country.

- **Collecting experiences**

Chinese tourists always want to be online and internet access is of high importance to them. Unanimously, the respondents replied that they were very fond of taking photos and then sharing them in their social media. This fact was particularly recognized by the researchers themselves during the days they spent with the Chinese. It was also reported that the interviewees use their own Chinese social media and searching machines since they do not have access to global ones like facebook.com or even to Google.com. Moreover, some delays were observed since the hosts could not use Google.com to find the maps of the meeting points. It was noted that it is vital for them to share experiences with their friends and family in WeChat social media. The next days after the seminar the guests were guided in the tourist attractions of Thessaloniki, and visited the local monuments, non-stopping to share photos, videos and moments with their friends in China through their social media. They tasted traditional Greek food and were more than willing to try the local dishes. They reported that the selfies from the places they visit, and then upload in their social media, urge their compatriots to travel in these places as well.

- **Host enterprise services**

The host company invited the hair salon owners in order to expand its business cooperation with them through technical seminars for its products. In this view, the seminar was organized based on the Chinese needs for learning about the hair products. However, it rapidly became evident that the Chinese's main anxiety was the interaction with the Greek technicians in order to take photos and share then with their friends in China. Especially the younger hairdressers felt constrained by the standardized program of the seminar and they preferred to spend their time with discussion, photo-taking and interaction with the Greeks. So, the Chinese very soon expressed their complaints to the host enterprise and their desire for something dif-

ferent, apart from just a seminar. The host enterprise was very flexible, quickly changed its seminar program and invited the Chinese hair salon owners on the stage to fulfill their desire for interaction, with very positive results. The Greek and the Chinese hairdressers worked together and exchanged technical ideas and knowledge regarding the hair trends. All the moments were captured (with the selfies being the most popular photos) and being shared on the social media of the Chinese through their smartphones. This personalized experience made their trip unforgettable.

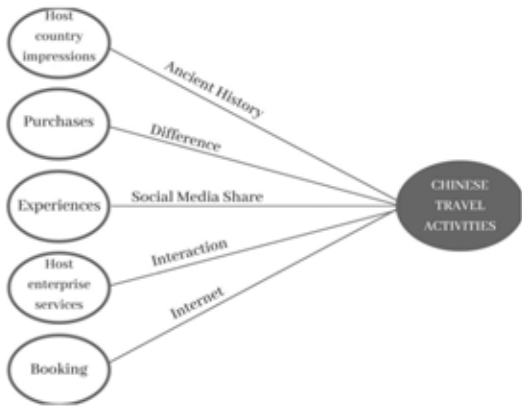
• **Booking and way of travel**

Although the host company was willing to provide support for the details of the trip, the respondents booked their hotel through booking.com and their tickets through internet. They reported that they did not use travel agents since they prefer to organize their holidays themselves instead of addressing to organized groups. The internet access was set as a prerequisite for them in order to book the hotel. Two of the guests were accompanied by their spouse. It was also stated that Chinese usually do not have many days of annual leave, therefore, they wait for their pension before travelling all around the world.

**5. Discussion**

In figure 1, we conceptualize the findings of the in-depth interviews and the observations. The “ancient history”, “difference”, “social media share”, “interaction” and “internet” are the key terms that provide the differentiation in the travel activities of the Chinese business travelers, according to their replies.

*Fig. 1.: Chinese business tourists’ preferences model*



The results show that the technical seminars that the SME would provide would not be enough if they were not included in a *general travel service plan* for the guests. The Chinese hair salon owners were eventually satisfied due to the *combination* of technical education on hair products and the new experiences they got during their stay in Greece. Certainly, the new wave of Chinese outbound tourists look for special and customized opportunities and experiences (Jin & Sparks, 2017). They reported that this trip will be memorable for them and they will expand the cooperation with the SME through more products.

The essential for them was the “interaction” and the “share”, with the view of distributing through internet these new experiences to their compatriots. Indeed, the outspread of the smart electronic technologies and the interaction among the members of online communities, characterize the new millennium, enabling consumers to share experiences (Fotiadis & Stylos, 2017). During the interviews and through the in-depth replies, the participants confirmed that the social media share from the seminar and the touristic places was the center of their trip. This fact complies with the literature on Asian tourists; tourists produce material about their tourism destinations for their social media, blogs, emails and other media (Pearce et al., 2017).

Chinese travel for business reasons, for shopping possibilities and for discovering new cultures (Raspor et al., 2012). The outcomes of the present paper ratify this. As it is evident from the present paper, and also suggested by previous researches (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009, Li et al., 2017), tourists are not passive sight-seers but they get involved in photographing through content creation and reproduction. The role of the photograph remains dominant, with the smartphones being the most extensive tool for capturing images (Li et al., 2017).

Our study underpins that Chinese tend to spend more on shopping, as other papers also suggest (Jin & Sparks, 2017, Smed & Bislev, 2016) and they are enthusiastic to buy sophisticated products (Raspor et al., 2012).

Internet has become the central information source, especially for travelling, for the Chinese who consider social media reliable and tend to depend on the availability of internet (Pearce et al., 2017). The respondents were not eager to cooperate with travel agents but rather preferred to arrange everything through internet by themselves, mainly because they preferred a personalized trip, based on their need for training and vacation, as they reported. As suggested by Chiappa (2013) on a survey on Italian tourists, travel agents should add value to tourists' travelling experiences by becoming managers, advisers and consultants if they want to survive in the electronic market.

It is worth to mention that the Greek SME was very flexible, eager to alter its program and receptive to the changes that its guests required in

order to meet their new preferences. Its representatives were willing to guide the guests to the city's sights and to meet their travel preferences. Besides, SMEs should be "proactive, flexible and open-minded" and to "find new ways of conducting business" to survive during crisis (Kossyva et al., 2015). The travel activity preferences of Chinese outbound tourists for overseas destinations have been studied by Chow and Murphy (2008) where the results showed that the Chinese preferred "Dining/Eating," "Sightseeing," "Culture and Heritage," "Participatory Activity," "Entertainment" and "Shopping". The present paper also confirms the results of Chow and Murphy (2008) study as regards the preferences of the Chinese but with the addition of the social media which is of high importance to the respondents. Assiouras et al (2015) studied the push and pull motivations of East Asian tourists who came to Greece and proposed market segmentation with the segment "Want-it-all" scoring higher than all the rest, especially for Chinese tourists. The aforementioned study for "Want-it-all" demonstrates "a travel experience that will combine high-quality travel arrangements and facilities" suggesting that communication campaigns emphasize on the new experience and knowledge, keeping though moderate prices. The segment "Want-it-al" that Assiouras et al (2015) studied seems to work for Chinese hair salon owners as well. The latter consider as important the culture and history and also the leisure, shopping and other facilities, therefore, any potential communication campaigns for this target group should pay attention to the new experiences. Other researchers have also studied the Chinese tourists' preferences. For instance, Chinese tourists express their preference for destination characteristics such as the unique local history and the culture (Jiang et al., 2018). Chinese tourists in other small countries, like Montenegro and Slovenia, are satisfied by natural beauties and cultural heritage as it is evident from the study of Bulatović et al (2016). The business Chinese travelers were also studied by Jang et al (2003) but in comparison with visiting friends and relatives travelers in USA country. Li et al (2011) described the Chinese outbound tourists' expectations of accommodation, food, tour guides, entertainment and transportation.

## **6. Implications**

### *6.1 Practical*

This study has adopted a conceptual perspective, yet, it identifies the Chinese business tourist preferences and provides a procedure that may be repeated by enterprises which seek to differentiate their marketing mix in order to expand their exports activity. While adopting the use of modern

customer relationship management metrics as a profitable and efficient means of decision making (Fotiadis & Vassiliadis, 2017), B2B enterprises could organize their activities based on the needs and preferences of their overseas partners. More specifically, SMEs could differentiate their marketing mix and diversify their product offers through developing in other areas, such as tourism, in order to expand their exports activity. Chinese outbound tourism is still making its first steps of development and organized market policies should be applied to increase it further (Dai et al., 2017). Figure 1 presents some interesting points where the exporting SMEs could give emphasis on through a customized service plan for their overseas partners, investing on differentiation, interaction and social media.

This study may also help tourism experts of the MICE industry to understand the Chinese business travelers better and provide higher quality services to them. Our findings highlight the need to investigate more and understand better the preferences of business travelers in order to enable the processes that could establish what really matters for these travelers and provide them with the requisite experiences. With the significant growth of Chinese outbound tourism, the support of marketing to tourism is becoming very important for the economic development of a country (Dai et al., 2017).

## *6.2 Theoretical*

More travel characteristics need to be explored in future research so as to help understand better the Chinese business travel preferences. Since people's behavior, values and requirements are different among distant countries and cultures (Li et al., 2011), the needs of Chinese outbound tourists should be covered in order to increase their well-being during travelling (Dai et al., 2017). Additional research in the China's outbound tourism, including tourist expenditure, technology transfer and travelling issues like visas, would add to our knowledge of Asian business travelling literature. SMEs from other sectors could be encompassed with the purpose of increasing the generalizability of the results. It would be interesting to see studies in other countries, which confront difficulties because of the economic crisis, so as to examine if the proposed framework works for SMEs in these countries. It would also help for future research to explore other Asian business tourists' preferences and compare them with the Chinese.

## **7. Limitations**

The paper is a preliminary exploratory study and several limitations should be taken into account when applying its findings more general-

ly. These limitations, mainly associated with the sector, the SME and the country used, open directions for future research and restrict generalizability. Firstly, it is recognized that the sample was biased as the respondents were not any Chinese tourists but business ones, with the hair salon sector being their occupation reporting. This means that the information gathered may require further testing in other sectors and occupations. Another limitation is that just one SME was examined, so future academic researchers need to explore whether the conclusions would work for other types of SMEs which perform similar export procedures in overseas countries. Besides, it should be examined whether these findings would work for other countries as well.

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