Managing Digital Study-Abroad Conversion Through Content Credibility and Consultation Responsiveness: A Contextual Organizational Diagnosis of NST

Lu Xin*, Poh-Chuin Teo

Azman Hashim International Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500231

Received: 06 May 2026; Accepted: 11 May 2026; Published: 28 May 2026

ABSTRACT

Small digital study-abroad consultancies can now receive enquiries from short-video platforms without opening branch offices, but the commercial result is often uneven. This article discusses that problem through Neo Sing-Trend Pte. Ltd. (NST), a Singapore-based digital education consultancy for Chinese students considering universities in Singapore and Malaysia. NST's enquiry volume rose from 397 in 2021 to 1,317 in 2025. Over the same period, its best conversion year remained 2022, when the enquiry-to-contract rate was 12.03 percent; by 2025 the rate had fallen to 4.10 percent. The diagnosis uses internal performance records, one structured focus group, content and workflow review notes, SWOT interpretation, fishbone analysis, and a likelihood-consequence risk matrix. The strongest bottlenecks were not the lack of traffic, but weak credibility signals in short-video content and delayed follow-up once families entered private consultation channels. Platform adaptation, client filtering, knowledge resources, and adviser workload also mattered, but they were less immediate intervention priorities. The article provides a practical diagnostic framework for small adviser-led education service firms that need to connect digital trust-building with disciplined enquiry management.

Keywords: digital study-abroad consultancy; enquiry-to-contract conversion; content credibility; consultation responsiveness; organizational diagnosis; fishbone analysis

INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have changed how Chinese families search for overseas education services. A small consultancy no longer needs a physical branch network to reach prospective students. Short videos, platform posts, private messaging tools, and social recommendations can create direct contact between advisers and families across regions. For small firms, this lowers entry barriers and expands visibility. It also creates a managerial problem: attention is easier to obtain than commitment.

The study-abroad decision is usually high-involvement because it affects tuition spending, family expectations, institutional choice, documents, visas, and future career plans. A viewer may watch a video or add an adviser on WeChat, but this does not mean that the family is ready to sign a paid service contract. The movement from platform exposure to signed contract depends on perceived credibility, adviser reliability, response quality, and follow-up continuity. Prior studies on digital marketing and short-video content explain how online communication can stimulate attention, engagement, and purchase intention (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Gan et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2024; Valenti et al., 2023). However, less attention has been given to small adviser-led education consultancies where conversion is completed through private consultation rather than through the same platform that generated the enquiry.

NST is used here as a contextual case of this conversion problem. The question is straightforward: why did a firm with more enquiries fail to achieve proportional contract growth? Two practical objectives guide the article. The first is to diagnose the factors that constrained NST's enquiry-to-contract conversion. The second is to identify intervention priorities that a lean digital education consultancy could realistically act on. The article

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue V May 2026

does not aim to generalize statistically from one firm. Its value is in showing how content credibility and consultation responsiveness meet inside a small organization where the same team must attract attention, reassure families, and keep follow-up moving.

Case Background

NST was established in Singapore in 2021 to support Chinese students applying to universities in Singapore and Malaysia. Unlike traditional branch-based agencies, NST operates mainly through digital channels. Prospective clients first encounter the firm through short videos on Douyin, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and YouTube. Interested viewers then move into WeChat, WhatsApp, or WeCom, where advisers provide one-to-one consultation, explain study routes, compare institutions, and guide application decisions.

This operating model gives NST wide reach and low fixed cost, but it also concentrates the most important trust-building work in a small team. The founder contributes media buying and creative production experience. Two advisers manage consultation, route planning, application support, and follow-up communication. A content creator and freelance editors support the short-video pipeline. In everyday operation, the two advisers may have to answer route questions, check document requirements, compare schools, update parents, and record follow-up status at the same time. When enquiries rise during campaign periods, parts of the workflow still depend on Excel sheets, chat histories, and adviser memory.

By 2025, NST had supported more than 200 students and built a combined social media following of more than 20,000. The firm therefore had evidence of market visibility, but its conversion performance showed a widening gap between enquiries and signed contracts. Table 1 summarizes NST's enquiry volume, number of signed contracts, and enquiry-to-contract conversion rate from 2021 to 2025. Enquiry volume increased from 397 in 2021 to 1,317 in 2025. However, signed contracts did not grow proportionally. Contracts reached 63 in 2023, declined to 48 in 2024, and recovered only to 54 in 2025. The conversion rate fell from 12.03 percent in 2022 to 4.10 percent in 2025.

Table 1. NST Enquiry, Contract, and Conversion Performance, 2021-2025

Year	Enquiry Volume	Number of Signed Contracts	Conversion Rate
2021	397	32	8.06%
2022	482	58	12.03%
2023	704	63	8.95%
2024	957	48	5.02%
2025	1,317	54	4.10%

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This study used a contextual organizational diagnosis based on NST's internal performance records from 2021 to 2025, one structured diagnostic focus group, and content and workflow review notes. The focus group included the founder, two study advisers, one content creator, and two freelance video editors. These participants were selected because they were directly involved in the conversion pathway from short-video exposure to private consultation and contract follow-up. The analysis followed four steps. First, NST's enquiry, contract, and conversion trends were reviewed. Second, diagnostic comments from the focus group were grouped into recurring themes. Third, the themes were mapped into a fishbone diagram to distinguish visible symptoms from likely root causes. Fourth, the retained factors were prioritized through a likelihood-consequence risk matrix. The purpose was not statistical generalization, but practice-based diagnosis of conversion bottlenecks in a small digital education consultancy (Harrison & Shirom, 1999; Yin, 2018).

Problem Diagnosis And Research Gaps

The SWOT review indicated that NST's strengths were concentrated in short-video production, knowledge of Chinese social platforms, and focused expertise in Singapore and Malaysia study routes. These strengths helped explain the increase in enquiries. The main weaknesses were closer to the point of conversion. Credibility cues were uneven across content, follow-up depended heavily on manual records, and responsibility for some enquiries became unclear during busy periods. In a small firm, these weaknesses can quickly affect client confidence because the same team must create attention, answer detailed questions, and maintain decision momentum.

The focus group evidence pointed to four connected diagnostic domains: branding, workflow, resources, and capacity. Branding problems concerned the strength of credibility signals in videos and adviser-facing communication. Workflow problems involved response speed, follow-up tracking, and lead ownership. Resource problems involved limited analytics and incomplete shared reference materials. Capacity problems reflected the strain placed on a small advisory team when enquiries increased. Table 2 summarizes the main diagnostic themes. It uses paraphrased evidence and a few short anonymous internal statements to show how the problem appeared in daily work.

Table 2. Diagnostic Themes and Internal Evidence

Theme	Meaning	Internal Evidence
Short-video credibility and content design	Content authenticity, evidence quality, and adviser authority influence audience trust and enquiry intent.	Founder: "Some parents still ask whether we are officially licensed after watching the videos." Participants also noted repeated questions about adviser credibility, student cases, and service reliability.
Multi-platform content strategy	Content distributed across platforms may not be sufficiently adapted to different user groups.	Content creator: "The same videos were often reused across platforms, but users asked different kinds of questions." This created extra explanation work after enquiry.
Follow-up and tracking system limitations	Manual tracking creates missed follow-ups and weak visibility over conversion progress.	Adviser A: "When enquiries increase, follow-up becomes too dependent on memory and chat history." Advisers described Excel records and scattered chat histories as difficult to maintain during busy periods.
Management and response mechanism	Response speed and responsibility assignment shape client trust and decision continuity.	Participants linked slow replies to unclear ownership when several advisers were handling enquiries at the same time. Some families asked the same question again because previous responses were not easy to trace.
Team capacity and workload	A lean team becomes vulnerable when enquiries increase or staff are unavailable.	Adviser B: "During peak periods, I may be explaining routes to one parent while another family is waiting for a fee breakdown." The founder sometimes had to step into advisory work.
Empathy and trust-building	Advisers have factual	Advisers reported that factual

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue V May 2026

communication	knowledge but need more systematic communication practices.	answers were usually available, but message tone could become shorter when the number of conversations increased.
Knowledge management	Fragmented knowledge can cause inconsistent explanations or outdated information.	Participants noted that shared reference materials were incomplete, so explanations about routes, documents, fees, and school options could vary across advisers.

These findings reveal both a practical and a research gap. Practically, social media visibility did not solve NST's conversion problem because the firm still had to create trust and maintain follow-up after enquiries entered private channels. Theoretically, much digital marketing research explains attention, engagement, and intention in product markets or large platform settings (Cheng et al., 2024; Hochstein et al., 2025; Meng et al., 2024). NST's case is different because the final decision depends on adviser interaction, family reassurance, and service-process reliability. The diagnosis therefore positions digital study-abroad conversion as a combined branding and workflow problem.

FISHBONE DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS

A fishbone analysis was used to organize the diagnostic evidence into root-cause categories. The central problem was low enquiry-to-contract conversion. Four main categories were retained: branding, workflow, resources, and capacity. Branding included weak credibility cues, insufficient student evidence, unclear adviser authority, and limited process transparency. Workflow included delayed replies, manual tracking, weak lead filtering, and unclear follow-up ownership. Resources included the lack of a real-time analytics dashboard and incomplete shared knowledge materials. Capacity included adviser workload pressure and limited communication training.

The fishbone structure helped separate surface symptoms from underlying causes. Repeated client questions, hesitation after initial consultation, and slow movement toward payment were visible symptoms. The more important causes were the lack of repeated credibility signals before enquiry and the lack of disciplined response routines after enquiry. These findings are consistent with service and CRM research showing that customer evaluation is shaped not only by marketing messages but also by response quality, coordinated interaction, and reliable service delivery (Caruelle et al., 2023; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Payne & Frow, 2005).

Figure 1. Fishbone Analysis of Low Enquiry-to-Contract Conversion at NST

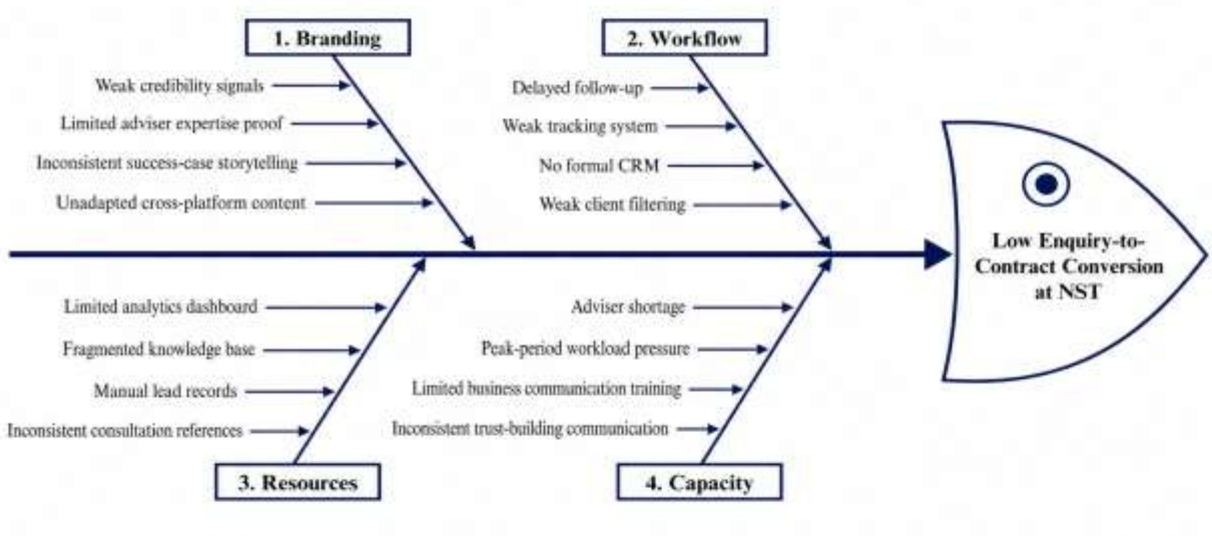

Figure 1. Fishbone Analysis of Low Enquiry-to-Contract Conversion at NST

(Source: Self-developed)

RISK ASSESSMENT

After the fishbone analysis, the diagnostic factors were reviewed through a simple risk matrix. Likelihood and consequence were each scored from 1 to 5, and priority was calculated by multiplying the two scores. The purpose was to identify feasible intervention priorities for a lean firm rather than to produce a statistical risk model (Aven, 2016; ISO, 2018).

Table 3. Risk Assessment of Diagnostic Factors

Category	Diagnostic Factor	Likelihood	Consequence	Priority
Branding	Weak credibility signals in short-video content	4	5	20
Branding	Unadapted cross-platform content	2	3	6
Workflow	Delayed and weak follow-up and tracking system	5	5	25
Workflow	Weak client filtering mechanism	3	4	12
Resources	Lack of real-time analytics dashboard	2	4	8
Resources	Lack of central knowledge base	1	4	4
Capacity	Adviser shortage during peak periods	2	5	10
Capacity	Lack of systematic business communication training	3	3	9

Note. Likelihood and consequence were scored on a 1 to 5 scale. Priority was calculated as likelihood multiplied by consequence. Higher scores indicate greater urgency for managerial attention.

The risk matrix shows that delayed follow-up and weak tracking received the highest priority score, followed by weak credibility signals in short-video content. These two issues became the most suitable starting points for intervention because they were both high-impact and actionable within NST's current structure. Other issues, such as analytics support, platform adaptation, and knowledge-base development, remained relevant but required more resources or longer implementation time.

IMPLICATIONS

For small digital education consultancies, the first lesson from NST is quite practical: short-video numbers should not be read as conversion evidence by themselves. Views, likes, and enquiries are useful, but they do not show whether a family feels safe enough to pay for advisory service. In NST's case, regular content needs to show more than general study-abroad information. Adviser expertise, student cases, process explanations, local presence, and knowledge of Singapore and Malaysia routes should appear repeatedly, because these are the details families look for before they move into private consultation.

The second lesson is that conversion has to be managed after the enquiry arrives. Once a parent or student enters WeChat, WhatsApp, or WeCom, the service experience is shaped by how quickly the adviser replies, whether the next step is clear, and whether earlier questions can be traced. NST does not necessarily need a complex CRM system at this stage. A simple lead log, a response-time checkpoint, a follow-up template, and clear adviser ownership would already remove some of the leakage between enquiry and paid decision.

The third lesson concerns managerial focus. NST had several real weaknesses, but not all of them could be solved at once by a small team. The diagnosis made the order clearer. Credibility needed attention before enquiry, while responsiveness needed attention after enquiry. For that reason, a first intervention cycle should focus on credibility signals in content, and a second cycle should focus on response speed, lead ownership, and follow-up control. This keeps the improvement agenda close to the points where decision momentum is currently being lost.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATION

NST's case shows that a larger enquiry pool can hide a weaker conversion process. From 2021 to 2025, the firm became easier to find online, but the later stages of the client journey did not keep pace. Before enquiry, some short videos attracted attention without giving families enough evidence of adviser authority, student outcomes, or service reliability. After enquiry, follow-up still depended heavily on manual records, adviser memory, and limited team capacity. This combination helps explain why online visibility and signed contracts moved in different directions.

The conclusion is therefore simple but important for a micro-consultancy: conversion is shaped by both credibility and responsiveness. Content credibility affects whether families are willing to begin consultation. Responsiveness affects whether that interest survives comparison with other advisers, uncertainty about the process, and delay in family decision making. Future improvement should be organized through two focused cycles. The first should add stronger credibility cues to content, including testimonials, qualification cues, student case evidence, local presence, and clearer process explanation. The second should improve response speed, lead ownership, follow-up routines, and adviser support materials. Future studies can apply this diagnostic logic to other small education consultancies and examine whether these two improvement cycles lead to a sustained increase in enquiry-to-contract conversion.

Ethical Considerations

This study relied on NST's aggregated performance records and an internal diagnostic focus group. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, took part voluntarily, and were told that their decision to participate or not participate would not affect their employment, collaboration, or working relationship with NST. No personally identifiable client information was analyzed or reported. Internal statements were anonymized and used only to illustrate organizational diagnosis themes.

Data Availability Statement

The data for this study were drawn from NST's internal performance records and diagnostic focus group notes. Because the records contain commercially sensitive information and may relate to client communication history, the raw data are not publicly available. The article reports only aggregated figures and summarized diagnostic evidence.

Conflict of Interest

Lu Xin has a managerial and ownership relationship with Neo Sing-Trend Pte. Ltd. This relationship is disclosed because the study examines NST as the focal case organization. To reduce potential bias, the analysis used aggregated performance data, summarized diagnostic evidence, and explicit prioritization criteria. The authors declare no other conflicts of interest.

Funding Statement

This research received no external funding.

REFERENCES

1. Aven, T. (2016). Risk assessment and risk management: Review of recent advances on their foundation. European Journal of Operational Research, 253(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2015.12.023

2. Caruelle, D., Lervik-Olsen, L., & Gustafsson, A. (2023). The clock is ticking - Or is it? Customer satisfaction response to waiting shorter vs. longer than expected during a service encounter. Journal of Retailing, 99(2), 247-264. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2023.03.003
3. Cheng, G., Li, W., He, M., & Liao, L. (2024). Exploring consumer responses to official endorsement: Roles of credibility and attractiveness attributes in live streaming. Frontiers in Psychology, 15, Article 1371343. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1371343
4. Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. International Journal of Information Management, 59, Article 102168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168
5. Gan, J., Shi, S., Filieri, R., & Leung, W. K. S. (2023). Short video marketing and travel intentions: The interplay between visual perspective, visual content, and narration appeal. Tourism Management, 99, Article 104795. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104795
6. Harrison, M. I., & Shirom, A. (1999). Organizational Diagnosis and Assessment: Bridging Theory and Practice. Sage Publications.
7. Hochstein, R. E., Harmeling, C. M., & Perko, T. (2025). Toward a theory of consumer digital trust: Meta-analytic evidence of its role in the effectiveness of user-generated content. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 53(4), 1034-1054. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00982-y
8. International Organization for Standardization. (2018). ISO 31000:2018 Risk management - Guidelines. ISO.
9. Meng, L., Kou, S., Duan, S., & Bie, Y. (2024). The impact of content characteristics of short-form video ads on consumer purchase behavior: Evidence from TikTok. Journal of Business Research, 183, Article 114874. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114874
10. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. Journal of Retailing, 64(1), 12-40.
11. Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2005). A strategic framework for customer relationship management. Journal of Marketing, 69(4), 167-176. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.2005.69.4.167
12. Valenti, A., Yildirim, G., Vanhuele, M., Srinivasan, S., & Pauwels, K. (2023). Advertising's sequence of effects on consumer mindset and sales: A comparison across brands and product categories. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 40(2), 435-454. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2022.12.002
13. Yin, R. K. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (6th ed.). Sage Publications.