

Problem-Solution pattern in Internet presentations of local- and global-target start-ups

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Abstract

In this paper I examine the Problem-Solution pattern in start-up project presentations in terms of discursive means whereby subsequent steps of this pattern are expressed in different modalities (text, video, image). I also compare their use in project presentations of local and global-target start-ups in order to verify if addressing the project at either national or international context affects the discursive construction of the Problem and Solution pattern.

Keywords: Problem-Solution pattern; crowdfunding; start-up; start-up platform; discourse; Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

The present paper is devoted to a relatively recent business phenomenon, *start-ups*, and the related Internet genre, *start-up presentation*, as featured in dedicated crowdfunding platforms. Taking a discourse analytical perspective, this study addresses two research questions. Firstly, it analyzes to what extent the structure of start-up presentations adopts the Problem-Solution pattern. In particular, I draw attention to the extent in which the Problem-Solution pattern is co-constructed in different modalities (text, video, images etc.) in selected start-up presentations. Secondly, the study discusses possible similarities and differences in the use of the Problem-Solution pattern between local and global-targeted start-up projects.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introductory section, section 2 defines the key terms of *start-up* and *start-up crowdfunding platform*. Next, sections 3 and 4 feature an overview of Discourse Analysis literature on the Problem-Solution pattern and discuss its relevance for start-up presentations, respectively. Section 5 presents the results of a case study, with a local-targeted start-up campaign (AkcjaCydr on the Polish market, section 5.1) juxtaposed with a global-targeted one (BrewDog in section 5.2). Similarities and differences between the two start-up presentations in terms of their use of the Problem-Solution pattern are summarized in section 6, followed with concluding remarks in section 7.

2. Start-ups and start-ups' crowdfunding platforms

Start-ups are “innovative, growth-oriented businesses in search of a repeatable, scalable business model” (Blank & Dorf 2012, cited in Kohler 2016, p. 348). They are most often burgeoning enterprises which offer an innovative solution (product, service, business process etc.) to be considered by potential investors. The ever-increasing number of start-ups worldwide and the venture capital market developing in parallel (for statistical data, see Dushnitsky, Guerini, Piva & Rossi-Lamastra 2016) have changed the global economic landscape. Many start-ups indeed hold an important market position in their fields: a *Wall Street Journal* report (co-authored with Dow Jones VentureSource) lists 168 private start-ups with an estimated value of 1 billion+ USD in October 2017 (compared with 45 such companies in January 2014) (<http://graphics.wsj.com/billion-dollar-club/>; DOA: 5th December 2017).

The start-up boom would not be possible but for the development of affordable new technologies, including fast-transfer and wireless Internet, Wi-Fi smartphones and smartphone applications. The top-ranked start-ups (e.g. Uber, Didi Chuxing, Xiaomi, Airbnb and SpaceX, to take the first five from the *Wall Street Journal's* list) all exploit the capabilities of advanced – and accessible at that – technologies. In general they address everyday needs, be it taxi hailing or searching short-term lodging, offering innovative solutions to handle them in a more time- and cost-effective way than traditional methods would otherwise offer. As a result, start-ups' solutions attract not only a sizeable group of customers, but also potential investors interested in their further development.

Another factor contributing to the evolution of start-ups market is changes in the patterns of interpersonal communication, in particular communication in the context of Web 2.0, i.e. Web co-constructed by the virtual community of its users. One of its facets is *crowdsourcing*, i.e. joint execution of a pre-specified task by networked individuals on a voluntary basis. The success of many crowdsourcing projects, of which Wikipedia is possibly the best known case, has led to the emergence of *crowdfunding*, where Web-users act as investors, enabling an emergent business venture to become operational, in return for some tangible gift (*reward-based crowdfunding*) or shares in the venture (*equity crowdfunding*). Again, crowdfunding would not have evolved but for advances in new technologies, including Internet banking and financial services, micro-payments functionality, and, importantly, *start-ups' crowdfunding platforms*.

Start-ups' crowdfunding platforms are “web-based platforms that serve as intermediaries between project initiators and potential funders” (Löher 2017, p. 51) by

offering the former a virtual space to showcase their companies and the solutions to be marketed, and the latter the tools to browse through these offers, compare them, select the suitable one(s), invest in them and keep in touch with the start-up. In general start-up crowdfunding platforms operate in the equity-based mode, although some start-up companies also offer extra rewards to their investors.

Like reward-based crowdfunding platforms (Kowalski 2017), start-ups' equity crowdfunding platforms operate either locally or internationally, and in turn they target markets of different scope. Correspondingly, a start-up company can present a project which addresses a Problem related to a local Situation, familiar to a relatively small group of potential customers, or it can develop a project of potentially global significance, addressing a Problem recognized worldwide, i.e. one that is pertinent to a commonly experienced Situation. The nature of the Problem and the relevance of the Solution are both crucial for the start-up company to choose the suitable platform: for those recognized locally a locally operating platform would seem more adequate, whereas for those of more general relevance a platform operating internationally would offer a better chance for sufficient backing, especially when a project requires considerable funds.

Considering the above argument, I hypothesize that the Problem-Solution pattern – discussed in the next section – may be a major form of content structuring in start-ups' project presentations at equity crowdfunding platforms targeting local and international markets alike. A comparative analysis of presentations of local- and international-target start-ups' projects will show if the Problem-Solution pattern is applied differently and expressed with different discursive means in these two contexts.

3. Problem-Solution pattern in multimodal discourse

The Problem-Solution pattern as analysed in this paper has been identified in Discourse Studies as one of the major frames of text organization in different written and spoken genres (Hoey 2001, p. 123). The pattern was first examined in detail by Michael Hoey (1983), followed by certain revisions in his more recent works (e.g. Hoey 1986, 2001; Hoey & Winter 1986), and often referred to by other authors (e.g. McCarthy 1991; Dudley-Evans 1994; Paltridge 1996; Flowerdew 2003, 2008). As Hoey (2001, p. 11) claims, patterns of text organization, including Problem-Solution, Goal-Achievement, Opportunity-Taking, Knowledge-Filling or Question-Answer, are historically and culturally established discourse

frames which streamline personal interaction by structuring the text along generally recognized and predictable lines.

The Problem-Solution pattern consists of four basic steps: Situation, Problem, Solution and Result/Evaluation (Hoey 2001). Specifically, Situation delineates a broader context in which a particular Problem is then identified. The Problem is addressed with a Solution, which is intended to eliminate the Problem and in turn restore orderliness to the Situation. The effect of the Solution may simply be acknowledged (Result) or followed with some Evaluation.

Subsequent steps in the Problem-Solution pattern are signaled by specific lexical and grammatical *triggers* (Hoey 2001). The former include certain keywords (e.g. *problem*, *issue* or *challenge* for Problem, *solution* or *answer* for Solution; see also Winter 1977 and Jordan 1984). Pragmatically, lexical triggers are further distinguished into *inscribed signals* (explicit references, e.g. *problem* or *solution* to signal Problem and Solution, respectively), *inscribed evaluations* (implicit references, allusions etc., e.g. *unfortunately* to signal Problem), and *evoking signals* (presuppositions requiring commonsense knowledge to be properly understood as relevant references, e.g. *He had no money* to signal Problem). By contrast, grammatical triggers include certain markers of sentence subordination (e.g. Cause and Effect clause relation, which often coincides with the Problem-Solution pattern, see Hoey 1983), discourse markers (e.g. adversative *but* or *however*, which can signal transitions between Situation-Problem and Problem-Solution) or syntactic constructions (e.g. direct questions to the reader in the Problem-Solution pattern, whereby Situation is constructed as the author's and audience's shared experience, thus providing the former with grounds for presenting the Problem as concerning both the author and the audience).

Identifying the triggers with specific discourse patterns, including Problem-Solution, forms the backbone of Hoey's analytical framework (Hoey 1983, 1994, 2001), whereby particular texts can be defined as more or less prototypical representatives of a given pattern. The framework, however, has some apparent limitations, the most evident being the triggers' varying level of explicitness. As Hoey himself notes, "[t]he greater the knowledge that the reader shares with the writer, the less need there is for the writer to make explicit linguistic reference to the pattern being followed" (Hoey 2001, p. 128). As for the grammatical dimension, a problem is that the boundaries of the steps in a pattern do not always correlate with the boundaries of grammatical units in discourse, be it clauses, sentences or paragraphs, which in turn makes their identification challenging. Also, the steps can appear in a non-linear order and/or can be recurrent in a text (McCarthy 1991, p. 28, Flowerdew 2008, p. 1-12).

An issue which seems to be often discussed in relation to Hoey's (1983) original framework is its applicability to analyse how the patterns are expressed in non-linguistic semiotic systems. With the rapid development of digital technologies, different media, including videos, images and sound, can complement, amplify, attenuate, replace etc. the verbal content. In this respect my study brings into focus the need for systematic research on discourse patterns in multimodal discourse (see also Kowalski 2017).

4. Problem-Solution pattern in start-ups' presentations

One of the genres conventionally applying the Problem-Solution pattern is advertisement (Hoey 2001, p. 128-129). The Problem-Solution pattern in advertisements dovetails with the marketing process: identification of the Problem corresponds with recognizing a market niche; successful convincing the potential customer that the Problem affects her/him stimulates market demand; successful convincing the potential customer that the product offered is the effective Solution to the Problem eventually stimulates the product's sales. Start-ups' presentations at equity crowdfunding platforms are also advertising texts, whose purpose is to attract investors' interest, help the company raise the sufficient funds and implement the project in return to equities offered to its backers. Thus one can expect the Problem-Solution pattern to be a basic type of discourse organization in start-ups' presentations.

5. Case study

In this case study I analyse the Problem-Solution pattern in two start-ups' project presentations, one targeted locally and one with a clear international focus. In particular I discuss discursive means whereby subsequent steps of the Problem-Solution pattern are expressed and their possible variation in local- vs. global-target presentations.

Two start-ups were selected for analysis: AkcjaCydr (<https://akcjacydr.pl/>; DOA: 8th December 2017; funded with Beesfund platform) and BrewDog (<https://www.crowdcube.com/companies/brewdog>; DOA: 8th December 2017; funded with CrowdCube platform). The criterion for this selection was the rating of the start-ups on their respective platforms, with

both AkcjaCydr and BrewDog having raised highest sums among the start-ups listed: 402,000 PLN (95,000 EUR) and 13 million GBP, respectively¹.

As for the choice of the crowdfunding platforms, a similar criterion of local and international market leadership was applied. Specifically, Beesfund is the longest running equity crowdfunding platform for start-ups in Poland. Established in 2012, it has 14 successful projects, 5.5 million PLN (1.3 million EUR) worth of invested capital and 2529 active investors (<https://www.beesfund.com/>; DOA: 8th December 2017). It promotes projects of Polish start-up companies, and features start-up presentations in Polish and English.

By contrast, Crowdcube is the leading equity crowdfunding platform for start-ups in Europe. Established in 2011 in Exeter, UK, it has attracted 481,000 investors, with 350+ million GBP of capital invested and 590 projects successfully supported (<https://www.crowdcube.com/>; DOA: 8th December 2017). While generally focusing on the UK market, Crowdcube is also open to offers from non-UK based start-up companies and foreign investors, provided that relevant legal regulations are satisfied.

5.1. AkcjaCydr

AkcjaCydr is a start-up project of a Polish hard cider manufacturer, Cydrownia, which aims at raising funds for a thousand display stands (“stand-guides”, as the company calls them) to be placed in Polish retail stores. As a result, the company expects an increase in sales of its products, and in turn a corresponding increase in the value of equities.

The AkcjaCydr presentation clearly follows the structure of the Problem-Solution pattern, both in its textual content and multimedia materials². As for the former, the subsequent steps of the Problem-Solution pattern are found in the presentation’s specific sections: Situation in *Our Plans*, which also signals the Problem, and is further elaborated upon in *Development of the distribution network*. The latter section also presents the Solution and discusses the Result of its application. Consequently, assuming that the AkcjaCydr website is navigated in the top-to-bottom way, the elements of the Problem-Solution pattern are introduced in their prototypical order. In addition, the AkcjaCydr website features a

¹ BrewDog’s campaign turnover was only exceeded by Crowdcube’s own campaign for the crowdfunding platform’s development, with 13.5 million GBP raised.

² The English version of the start-up presentation is cited.

highlighted section, *Additional benefits of investments*, which – despite its main focus on extra rewards for investors – also recapitulates the Solution and Result.

Analysis of the AkcjaCydr’s text reveals that the company concentrates on the Polish market. The Situation and the ensuing Problem refer to the long history of apple culture in Poland, which is contrasted with a relatively small hard cider market (“We believe that in a country with such a huge production of apples, it is worth investing in the maximum utilization of these excellent fruit”). It can be noted that this passage employs the structure of a classic argument: the premise refers to the apple culture in Poland, a premise which is boosted up with a strong attribute (“*huge* production”; emphasis mine), and which leads to the conclusion that investing in the related processing industry is profitable – even very profitable, as the strong adjectives once again emphasize (“*worth* investing in the *maximum* utilization”).

The authors thus ground their argument in the reader’s commonsense knowledge: if large quantities of fruit available are not processed, they will be wasted. Simultaneously, a parallel argument refers to the marketing potential of the resources available: the fruit are at hand in quantities (premise 1) and the fruit are of excellent quality (premise 2), thus investing in the related processing industry – apparently not operating with its full potential (*maximum utilization* seems not to be reached yet) – is likely to bring profit (conclusion). Additional premises in this economic argument are provided in the next sentence – “Poles are open to new types of low-percentage alcohol beverages” and “[Poles] like the domestic brands and products” – which further support the claim that hard cider industry is worth investing. This argument prepares the grounds for introducing the specific Solution in the next section.

As has been mentioned, AkcjaCydr aims at promoting Cydrownia’s line of hard ciders by showcasing them in brand-endorsed stands distributed to Polish retail stores. In this respect the Solution is again shown to operate within the local context (“The company decides to intensify the nationwide distribution by setting one thousand special Hard Cider Guides-Stands *in stores all over Poland*”), and to answer the local Problem of limited hard cider sales in Poland.

However, the next section (*International Rollout*) recontextualizes the Solution, as it is hypothesized that once the Solution proves locally, it can likewise become applicable in foreign markets. The Problem-Solution chain employed in the previous part might not be easily transferable to the new context, as foreign hard cider markets can already be saturated, and hence the premises related to low hard cider sales in Poland will no longer be applicable. Correspondingly, the argument remains rather vague, and employs many discourse markers of

speculation as it unfolds, e.g. adverbs of (low) certainty and of indefinite time (“*perhaps soon* our brands could become successful”; “*maybe* even Grójecki will be available”), epistemic modal verbs (“perhaps soon our brands *could* become successful”; “maybe even Grójecki *will* be available”), questions (“not only in Poland, *but across Europe? Why not?*”), attitude verbs (“we *hope* that”), indefinite quantifiers (“in *a few* years”) and suspension points (“but also in London, Milan, Oslo and Barcelona ...”)

Importantly, the Problem-Solution pattern in the AkcjaCydr text is supplemented with data, which contribute to the structure of the argument, acting as warrant in the Situation-to-Problem transition (as they show current low sales of hard cider in Poland). On the other hand, the data lend credence to the company’s Solution as they show the forecast sales figures to be on the increase. The data are presented visually, in a series of bar charts in the section *Prospects*, which opens with a statement specifying the details of the planned Result once the Solution is successfully implemented: “[u]ntil today, we have crafted a total of nearly 300,000 liters of hard cider. And by the end of 2017, with special stands of Cydrownia, we plan to double the current result.”

There are three charts in total in the *Prospects* section. The first, “Manufacture of cider Cydrownia S.A.”, shows an increasing trend in the company’s annual production of hard cider in litres, 2013-2017 (the last two figures being forecast at the time). The data thus support the claim concerning the steady increase in the company’s turnover, and thus should convince the potential investors’ of the company’s good business condition – and also of the prognosticated effectiveness of the Solution. The second, “Polish market cider” [sic], shows a similarly increasing tendency in nationwide sales of the beverage, 2013-2020 (the last five figures being forecast at the time). This chart in turn supplements the content of the *Our Plans* section, referring to the current Problem in the Polish hard cider market (low sales), which is likely to change in the future – to the benefit of hard cider producers and shareholders. References to the credible and worldwide recognized source of market forecasts – KPMG audit and advisory company – enhances the argumentative force of this claim. Finally, the third chart, “Annual consumption of cider”, confronts the relevant figures in four European countries: Great Britain, Lithuania, Spain and Poland, in the decreasing order of hard cider consumption in litres per capita. While Great Britain is generally known for its considerable low-alcohol beverages market and the long-established culture of their consumption, the second rank of Lithuania in this chart may be quite surprising to an average Polish reader. Yet from the company’s perspective this choice seems to be well-motivated – considering Lithuania’s geographical proximity to Poland, its similar political and economic status of a

central-European post-Communist state, and possibly similarly structured market of alcohol beverages and related consumption culture, potential investors can be led to believe that hard cider may soon become popular in Poland to the extent it is now in Lithuania. Again, citing the data obtained from an external source (report by AICV, European Cider & Fruit Wine Association) lends credence to the conclusions to be drawn therefrom.

The multimodal content in AkcjaCydr presentation does not only involve the statistical charts, which, as I have noted, generally support the steps of the Problem-Solution pattern and the argument structure as presented in the textual content. A vital element of the presentation is a two-minute video (available at <https://akcjacydr.pl/> and <https://vimeo.com/181925721>; DOA: 11th December 2017), which reproduces – in its visual dimension and in the off commentary – both the Problem-Solution pattern and the related argument structure.

The video begins with setting the context (Situation), showing people who spend their free time in different ways (e.g. dancing, partying, strolling, eating out). Black-and-white sketch silhouettes account for a general character of the Situation, which at this point cannot be associated with any specific cultural context. Similarly, the parallel commentary quotes a universal truth – “People always liked to have fun” – which also seems valid to any culture.



Fig. 1 AkcjaCydr – Situation (general context) (00:00:03) (source: <https://akcjacydr.pl/>)

As the video unfolds, the perspective zooms in on the Polish context, and in turn the Situation and the ensuing Problem become culture-specific. The country is represented visually with its geographical contour, metaphorically rendered as an apple (00:00:31) to emphasize the fruit’s relevance to the country’s economy and culture (cf. the parallel commentary “Poland... is a treasury of apples”). In another representation the contour of

Poland appears to be an empty container attached to a hard cider manufacture with a hose, and in the course of time the beverage gradually fills up the container to the brim (see Fig. 2). The image thus renders the Problem-Solution metaphorically: an empty container (Problem) needs to be filled up (Solution) – but filled up with a good-quality “fuel” as the concurrent icons indicate (gluten-free, with no concentrate added, without artificial flavours, 100% natural).



Fig. 2 AkcjaCydr – Situation-Problem-Solution (local context) (00:00:25) (source: <https://akcjacydr.pl/>)

After presenting the company’s brand portfolio the video specifies the essence of the Problem: “We still want to be in more places though. We want everybody to be able to grab this unique drink.” (00:01:04-00:01:08) The Solution immediately follows: “What do we need? Well, exactly this display stand, to be precise” (00:01:09-00:01:11), and in turn the Result: “Thanks to this stand, everybody will be able to know the world of hard ciders and to pick their favourite hard cider. Or simply the most suitable to the occasion!” (00:01:12-00:01:18)

At the end of the video the Solution is claimed to entail two different Results: one for investors and one for customers: “For us this means an even more rapid expansion, greater sales and satisfaction. And for the entire Poland, the joy of the new, tasty ciders at hand.” (00:01:23-00:01:30) Parallel images depict the former Result in the form of a blackboard with four bottles representing the subsequent years of the company’s volume of hard cider production (2013-2016), each next being filled up to a higher level (thus corresponding to the images in the first bar chart discussed above). By contrast, the Result for customers is visualized as crowd of cheering people, each holding a bottle.

5.2. BrewDog

BrewDog is a major British manufacturer of craft beer, which launched a Crowdcube crowdfunding campaign in 2015 to raise funds for further home and overseas development on the basis of four-year bonds. The company's campaign is presented in three entries (*Crowdcube Funding History*), two dated in October 2015 and one in December 2016.

The first call to investors (dated 4th October 2015; <https://www.crowdcube.com/investment/brewdog-20331>; DOA: 11th December 2017) sets the Situation, referring to UK's food and drink market and BrewDog specifically as a leading company in this market. The headline part then summarizes the business status of the company, emphasizing its steady development in the craft brewery market ("we have grown by an average of 138% a year since 2007") and its considerable shareholders' base ("a community of 30,000 Equity Punk investors"). The following sentence hints at the Problem, which is the need for further investment, and which in turn entails the Solution, i.e. four-year bonds ("we are offering investors the opportunity to lend us money through the BrewDog Bond"). The following sections focus on the mechanism of investment, referring to a bond's nominal value, the annual return rate etc. (*The Bond*), extra bonuses for investors (*Rewards*), and specify the potential risks (*Key risks* and *Risk warning*).

The second call to investors (dated 6th October 2015; <https://www.crowdcube.com/investment/brewdog-20465>; DOA: 11th December 2017) opens with a headline which repeats the basic information about the company's business condition, its market position in the UK (Situation: "one of the UK's fastest growing food & drink brands") and equity-based financial turnover ("we've raised over £14m"). Again, the headline defines the Problem as the need for further investment so that the company can maintain its market position ("With your help, we can do even more. Your equity stake entitles you to share in the success of the company leading the craft beer revolution").

The Situation-Problem-Solution chain recurs in the *Equity* section, with metaphors from the domains of WAR and (COMPUTER) GAME being used to represent the challenge which the company wishes to face. The former concept is evoked to describe the Problem related to competition in craft beer market ("the craft beer *revolution* is just getting started"), whereas the latter likens the company's evolution to a player's progress in a game ("We want your support to help us take our business to *the next level* as we continue on our craft beer *mission*."). The Situation and the Problem are initially contextualized as local ("the fastest growing food and drinks business *in the UK*"), but then references are made to the company's

international focus (“our brewery and our *international network* of bars”). All things considered, the Solution (raising funds with four-year bonds) is intended to enhance the company’s position in both local and international contexts.

Finally, the third call to investors (dated 2nd December 2016; <https://www.crowdcube.com/companies/brewdog/pitches/l8VRdb>; DOA: 11th December 2017) draws upon both local and international contexts to define the company’s market position. As for the former, it is confirmed to be “the *UK’s* leading craft brewer, and one of the fastest growing food and drink companies *in the UK* for the last 6 years”, whereas in terms of the latter context references are made to the company’s brewery in Columbus, Ohio, and its international sales (“BrewDog has 50 craft beer bars *around the world*”).

The Problem-Solution pattern appears in two sections of the campaign presentation’s text. Firstly, the *Business* section features a narrative of the company’s genesis, with the Situation defined as “beer scene in the UK” and the ensuing Problem being that the scene was “staid and uninspiring”. The use of negatively-marked attributes clearly defines the local context as Problem; a similar negative evaluation appears in the following *Team* section (“bland, industrial lagers bland, industrial, fizzy lagers that dominated the UK beer scene”). The Problem was addressed initially with “brewing small batch beers at home”, which worked only as a small-scale Solution satisfying personal needs, to be followed with founding the company and “brewing full time” (cf. the corresponding fragment in the *Team* section: “they set out to make the bold, uncompromising beers that they wanted to drink”). Up to this point the narrative contextualizes the Situation, Problem and Solution as local.

In the second instance of the Problem-Solution pattern, also found in the *Business* section, the current craft beer market and the company’s position serve as the point of departure (Situation), but now the Situation is recontextualized as international. The data provided (also from external sources, i.e. the *Sunday Times* Fast Track 100 list, for additional credentials) highlight the company’s business status in both local and international markets (“Punk IPA is the #1 craft beer *in UK supermarkets* and BrewDog’s beers are available *in 60+ countries*. BrewDog has also opened a series of craft beer bars *around the world*, with 31 *in the UK* and a further 19 *overseas as far afield as Brazil, Japan, Sweden, Italy and beyond*.”) The Problem is, however, only introduced in the *Financials* section; specifically, it concerns the current competition in local (“ever-increasing demand from European markets”) and overseas (“burgeoning US craft beer market”) markets. The Solutions proposed involve, respectively, “expand into more international markets, as well as invest in the Aberdeenshire brewery” and “investing in its new American facility in Columbus Ohio”. A parallel Problem-

Solution chain concerns the still limited number of brand-endorsed bars (Problem), which – after supported with a portion of the funds raised (Solution) – will popularize BrewDog brands (Result): “offer more people the opportunity to explore amazing craft beer in more cities around the globe”.

As in the case of AkcjaCydr, two different Results are defined: one for investors and one for customers. The former refers to financial forecasts assuming a likely increase in the company’s turnover, but, interestingly, it also emphasizes the value of community identification among the company’s shareholders (a WAR metaphor is used to underline the company’s focus on community-building and mission-mindedness: “a 50,000-strong army of craft beer *crusaders*”). As for the latter group, the Result refers to the enhanced customer’s experience: “offer more people the opportunity to explore amazing craft beer”.

In a way similar to AkcjaCydr presentation, BrewDog features figures which visually supplement the data mentioned in the text. The first figure is a chart that presents percentage change in the annual sales of specific craft beer brands, in the form of pictures of their bottles scaled down to represent the given figure, with the first two positions held by BrewDog’s products. The second figure provides the company’s *Highlights*, including the sales growth rate, shipment volume and a bar chart depicting increasing revenue in 2013-2015. The latter is also featured in the graph showing a ten-year-span revenue, overall and for BrewDog’s beer bars. The fourth figure is a chart showing changes in 2014-2016 shipment volume, again with a rising trend. In general, the aim of these figures is to confirm the company’s considerable share in the local and international craft beer market. In this way they act as warrant in the Problem-Solution transition, showing that forecast sales figures are on the increase. The continually increasing figures in the respective charts also indicate that the market is still far from being saturated (Situation – Problem transition).

The December 2016 presentation also features a free-access video material (available at <https://www.crowdcube.com/companies/brewdog/pitches/18VRdb> and <https://vimeo.com/193905263>; DOA: 11th December 2017), which reproduces – in its both visual dimension and commentary – the Problem-Solution pattern and the related argument structure.

Unlike AkcjaCydr’s entirely animated video, BrewDog’s presents for the most part the company’s founders walking in the brewery’s premises and alternately talking about the company’s history, UK’s and international craft beer markets (Situation), the need for the company to develop in these two markets (Problem) and the benefits of raising funds through a crowdfunding bond-based campaign (Solution). Specifically, as far as the Situation is concerned, the speakers contrast “our humble origins” with their current “business that is on a

track to a turnover of 70 million pound this year, that employs over 800 passionate people” (00:00:34-00:00:43). In the age of “craft beer revolution” new challenges appear, locally and globally (Problem), that “[w]e are now doing so quickly both in the UK and overseas that we’ve got to continue to invest aggressively to keep up to the demand” (00:01:13-00:01:20). The company’s bond is then presented as the Solution, immediately followed with the Result (“This bond will enable us to be just that”, 00:01:20-00:01:22) and the Solution’s positive Evaluation (“as we continue to grow and continue our mission to make other people as passionate for fantastic beer as we are”, 00:01:22-00:01:28; “[o]ur new bond is your opportunity to be part of the craft beer revolution”, 00:01:30-00:01:33).

The commentary is supplemented with corresponding images, which mostly refer to the company’s focus on both local and international markets. As for the former, the video shows BrewDog’s founders sitting casually in one of the brand-endorsed beer bars in the UK. The same location appears in the ending of the video, now with the company’s founders accompanied with a crowd of cheering customers (see Fig. 3). This and other recurrent images of crowds participating in BrewDog’s events (00:00:21-00:00:23, 00:01:27-00:01:29) contribute to the WAR metaphor of an army of dedicated “crusaders”; in the same vein the company’s founders refer to their managers: “our *battle-hardened* management team” (00:01:01-00:01:03).



Fig. 3 BrewDog – company founders and crowd of customers (local context) (00:01:29) (source: <https://www.crowdcube.com/companies/brewdog/pitches/18VRdb>)

By contrast, the international context is referred to in the pictures of the company’s brand-endorsed beer bars in different countries, an image of its American branch brewery in

Ohio, and an animated sequence of an airliner flying across the Earth (see Fig. 4), all of which contribute to the general point that BrewDog aims at making its brands available worldwide (Solution – Result transition).



Fig. 4 BrewDog – international context (00:00:49) (source: <https://www.crowdcube.com/companies/brewdog/pitches/l8VRdb>)

Finally, it can be noted that the two main themes central to the Problem-Solution structure presented in the video entail the notion of tempo: quick and steady development of BrewDog on the one hand, and fast-developing local and international craft beer markets that BrewDog has to keep pace with on the other. This lead motif is also reproduced in other visual and audio modalities: the dynamic filming technique (steadicam walk-and-talk and quick changing images in split screen) and fast-paced energetic background music.

6. Discussion

Referring to the first research question, the analysis has shown that both AkcjaCydr and BrewDog presentations largely adopt the Problem-Solution pattern. In either case a Situation is delineated, the ensuing Problem identified, and the relevant Solution proposed, followed with Result or Evaluation of its expected effectiveness. Specifically, the two start-ups construct the Situation by presenting the respective companies' fields of operation (hard cider manufacturing and craft beer brewing, respectively) and locating them in the corresponding cultural contexts (history of apple pomiculture in Poland, and UK craft beer tradition and international craft beer "revolution", respectively). The Situation serves as the point of departure to identify a vital Problem – low hard cider sales in Poland and the need for

BrewDog to maintain the leading position in the craft beer market, respectively. The Problem is in turn followed with a Solution developed by the start-up company, specific and tailored to the given market, as in the case of 1000 display stands proposed by AkcjaCydr, or general and targeted at both home and international expansion, as in the case of BrewDog's fundraising through the issue of four-year company bonds.

Having said that, it should be noted that elements of the Problem-Solution pattern do not coincide with specific sections of the start-up presentations; instead, they can extend across sections, or, alternatively, a section can cover more than one stage of the Problem-Solution pattern. Moreover, it has been found that elements of the Problem-Solution pattern can recur throughout a start-up presentation, and be repeated in different modalities featured therein.

Another point of similarity in the two start-up presentations analysed is their adoption of a variety of discursive strategies in the Problem-Solution pattern. As far as textual strategies are concerned, the presentations include opinion adjectives, positively marked to promote the Solution and negatively marked to describe the Problem. On the other hand, tentative discourse is employed to discuss the future perspectives for the Solution, for instance its transfer to international contexts once the Solution has proven to be effective locally. Other discursive means used to construct the Problem-Solution pattern in the two presentations include adjuncts of certainty and indefinite time, epistemic modal verbs, questions, attitude verbs, or indefinite quantifiers.

Furthermore, the two presentations are also similar in that they employ different media available at Internet crowdfunding platforms which jointly construct the Problem-Solution pattern. For instance, the written text content can be recapitulated in the video narrative, be it in the off-commentary, as in the AkcjaCydr video, or in the characters' utterances, as in the BrewDog video, or else its key points can be condensed in the form of short captions and slogans. Similarly, frequently used figures (e.g. graphs and charts) suggest that despite the ever-increasing sales of the company's products there is still a market niche which the project marketed is likely to fill in.

In both the start-up presentations analysed it has also been found that the Problem-Solution pattern coincides with the structure of a classic argument. Specifically, the Situation, which refers to the audience's commonsense knowledge and everyday experience, provides a premise, from which a claim about a particular negative phenomenon (Problem) inherent to this Situation is then developed. Once the Problem is acknowledged, it becomes a premise itself to the claim that the start-up's idea is an effective Solution to the Problem.

Simultaneously, grounds are provided to convince the audience about the start-up's credibility as a Solution-provider (e.g. statistical data representing the company's steady growth, business experience and established market position). In this respect the argument is co-constructed in different media, not only textual but also graphic (graphs, charts and figures).

Relevant to the construction of the Problem-Solution pattern and the parallel argument structure are also metaphors, which also have been found in the two presentations in question, and which again are expressed in different media. For instance, the AkcjaCydr's video features metaphors in the visual medium, with Poland represented, firstly, as an apple so as to emphasize the country's long apple-farming tradition, and, secondly, as an empty container so as to indicate the current low sales of hard cider in Poland. By contrast, BrewDog's materials feature several examples of two cognitive metaphors, i.e. CRAFT BEER MARKET IS WAR/REVOLUTION and CRAFT BEER MANUFACTURING IS A (COMPUTER) GAME. The former source domain is also used to present the company's focus on community-building and mission-mindedness (BREWDOG MANAGEMENT/SHAREHOLDERS/FANS IS AN ARMY). In the BrewDog's presentation metaphors are used verbally (in the presentation's text and in the video's commentary) and visually (images in the video).

Visual and verbal media are also employed to express Evaluation and Result. In both the presentations analysed the Solution is shown to entail two simultaneous Results: one for investors and one for customers. In the former case the relevant discursive means applied include adjectives and adjuncts of positive evaluation (textual dimension) and graphs depicting a steady increase in the company's turnover – and in turn its shareholders' profits (visual dimension). In the latter case adjectives and adjuncts of positive evaluation are also employed (textual dimension), accompanied with images of satisfied customers enjoying the company's brands (visual dimension), be it “new, tasty ciders” or “amazing craft beer”.

When it comes to the second research question, there have been revealed evident differences between the two presentations analysed related to their primarily local- vs global targeting, which are also apparent in the construction of the respective Problems and Solutions. Specifically, AkcjaCydr refers to the local Situation (apple culture in Poland), in which context it identifies a local Problem (low sales of cider in Poland). There appear several references to Poland in the presentation's text (e.g. “*Poland... is a treasury of apples*”; “*Polish consumers in these three years have learned to drink cider*”; “*We want our hard cider - made of the best of apples - to be available everywhere in Poland*” etc.) and related allusions in the accompanying video (e.g. Polish national colours of white and red, the country's outline to

represent the yet unsaturated national market of cider). Likewise, the Solution proposed (a thousand display stands) is supposed to boost local rather than global sales of the brand's products (cf. "The Hard Cider Guides-Stands in 1,000 retail outlets across *the country* will enable us to significantly expand the group of the enthusiasts of the *Polish* hard ciders"). By contrast, the Situation in the BrewDog's presentation shows the company's position of the local leader in the craft beer market as already established. The ensuing Problem is the company's global aspirations, as signaled in diverse references to *world* and *globe* ("to offer more people the opportunity to explore amazing craft beer in more cities *around the globe*"), and *international* context ("Your investment gets you a stake in our brewery and our *international* network of bars"). Similar references are also reproduced in the visual medium (a transcontinental airliner flying across the Earth).

7. Conclusion

This study has shown that start-ups' presentations at equity crowdfunding platforms apply the Problem-Solution pattern, not only in the text, but also in other media, including video, graphics and sound. The pattern has been found in the two presentations analysed, of which one was targeted primarily at the local market and showcased at a crowdfunding platform of a relatively local impact, while the other was focused on both local and international markets and showcased at a crowdfunding platform with a global impact. In both cases similarities have also been found in terms of coincidence between the Problem-Solution pattern and the structure of argumentation (i.e. Situation and argument's premise, transition from Problem to Solution and the claim, or graphs and figures acting as warrants in the unfolding argument). By contrast, apparent differences have been found in the discursive construction of Problem and Solution depending on the local- or global-targeting of the start-up project.

Further research is welcome to provide more insights into the phenomena analysed, in particular based on a larger sample of materials. It is also vital to develop a relevant theoretical model for analyzing text patterns in multimodal discourses, a model which would go beyond a single semiotic system and duly represent the relations between diverse semiotic systems jointly contributing to the meaning-making process in discourses of new technologies.

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