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## The exemplification of the concept of born-global enterprises by technology start-ups

The scientific purpose of the study is to attempt to compile the views of scholars on born-global enterprises. Attention was paid to a widely accepted conceptual apparatus associated with this phenomenon. The empirical part of the paper is based on a case study regarding technology start-ups. The author gives examples of endogenous factors influencing the early internationalization of new ventures as well as the impact of the business ecosystem on the growth of born-global enterprises. The qualitative case study analysis of the knowledge-based micro companies from the IT industry has shown that technology start-ups have been able to successfully compete on the global market. The provided examples confirm that endogenous factors and external environment undoubtedly play an important role in both the building of entrepreneurial orientation and the process of early internationalization. Case studies in the area of global technology start-ups should develop the existing theory and provide explanations of the hitherto unrecognized phenomena.

Keywords: born-global enterprises, technology start-ups, ICT solutions, global market

JEL classification: D83, O31, O32, O33

### Koncepcja przedsiębiorstw *born-global* na przykładzie start-upów technologicznych

Celem naukowym artykułu jest próba syntezy poglądów przedstawicieli nauki na temat przedsiębiorstw *born-global*. Zwrócono uwagę na powszechnie stosowany aparat pojęciowy związany z tym zjawiskiem. W części empirycznej pracy zastosowano metodę studium przypadku w oparciu o start-upy technologiczne. Autorka wskazała przykłady czynników endogenicznych warunkujących proces wczesnej internacjonalizacji nowych przedsięwzięć gospodarczych oraz wpływ ekosystemu biznesowego na rozwój firm *born-global*. Analiza jakościowa mikroprzedsiębiorstw z branży IT opartych na wiedzy potwierdziła, że start-upy technologiczne są w stanie skutecznie konkurować na rynku światowym. Przeprowadzone studium przypadku potwierdza założenie, że czynniki endogeniczne i środowisko zewnętrzne odgrywają istotną rolę zarówno w budowaniu postaw przedsiębiorczych, jak i w procesie wczesnej internacjonalizacji. Studia przypadków w zakresie globalnych start-upów technologicznych powinny rozwinąć istniejącą teorię i dostarczyć wyjaśnień zjawisk dotychczas nierozpoznanych.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorstwa *born-global*, start-upy technologiczne, rozwiązania ICT, rynek globalny

Klasyfikacja JEL: D83, O31, O32, O33

## Introduction

The early internationalization of businesses has become a phenomenon of considerable scope and interest, thus emphasizing the significance of the born-global concept, as well as the need for researchers and practitioners to identify the factors that influence the success of global technology start-ups. The entrepreneurship of young technology start-ups is perceived as a process of searching for global market opportunities and knowledge-based resources necessary to exploit these opportunities in order to gain long-term results. It can be characterized as an independent risk-taking ability to achieve gains on the international market. The global economy provides the opportunity for internationalization from the very birth of new technology-based companies. Global entrepreneurs must take the Global Intellectual Property as a competitive advantage and access global markets through the ways that others have developed and learned [Etzkowitz, Solé, Piqué, 2007].

The process of creating innovative business solutions is conditioned largely by endogenous factors, including primarily the qualifications and expertise of the staff members of organizations and their ability to implement new technological solutions into their business practice. A significant impact on the development of innovative entrepreneurship is also made by the business ecosystem, covering a wide spectrum of cooperation with business environment institutions [Badzińska, 2014], and by external factors that influence the formation of technology firms [Bailetti, 2012]. All these activities relate to the identification of potential entrepreneurial opportunities arising from technological development and the exploitation of these opportunities through the successful commercialization of innovative products [Petti, 2012].

The scientific purpose of the study is to attempt to compile the views of scholars on born-global enterprises. The attention was paid to a widely accepted conceptual apparatus associated with this phenomenon as well as its multidimensionality. The empirical part of the paper is based on a case study of technology start-ups. The author gives examples of endogenous factors influencing the early internationalization of new ventures and the impact of the business ecosystem on the growth of born-global enterprises. Due to the aim of the research and in order to illustrate the studied phenomenon in business practice, a qualitative case study analysis of the knowledge-based micro companies from the IT industry has been conducted. Technology start-ups MindsEater, Leia Display System, and Glip have been selected using a purposeful sampling technique [Maxwell, 2005]. The purposeful selection of these companies resulted from the clarity of the explained phenomenon and was aimed at identifying the cases relevant to the research objectives. Qualitative data was obtained from in-depth interviews conducted with

the owners of the surveyed enterprises. To expand the database of the technology start-ups an analysis of materials from the available secondary sources was also conducted, which included websites, publications, and opinions of Internet users.

The empirical method makes use of a case study involving the analysis of the processes implemented in the selected enterprises [Dyer, Nobeoka, 2000]. The rationale for the use of the case study is its usefulness in relation to the timeliness of the discussion on the born-global phenomenon and its effects. There exists a need to conduct a practice-oriented empirical research in order to gain better understanding of that reality and help managers to consciously choose their own path [Czakov, 2011]. The applied case study has helped to identify the analysed phenomenon under factual conditions [Yin, 1984]. The study may provide a starting point for an empirical quantitative research as well as a contribution to the discussion on the early internationalization of businesses in the rapidly changing environment.

## 1. Born-global enterprises: Conceptualization

Current empirical literature notes several trends that contribute to the increasingly early internationalization of new technology-based companies. A new method of internationalization and a new type of company were identified in the study conducted by Rennie [1993], which proved that due to globalization and technological advances many firms begin to export within a couple of years of their establishment [Cavusgil, Knight, 2009]. Such findings contradicted the traditional internationalization theory categorized as gradual and evolutionary – the so-called ‘stages theory’ [Johanson, Vahlne, 1990]. The ways for a company to enter the global market can include making use of reliable platforms or experience of other companies or managers. According to the Theory of International New Ventures, developed by Oviatt and McDougall [1994] and McDougall et al. [1994], a new global venture is defined as ‘a business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries’. Innovative and internationally-oriented companies, the so-called ‘born globals’, face the challenge of developing a global value proposition and attending the global market in the rapidly changing business environment.

There exists no single, generally accepted definition of born-global enterprises in the subject literature; they are referred to as ‘born globals’, international new ventures [Oviatt, McDougall, 1994], global start-ups [McDougall et al., 1994], infant multinationals [Madsen, Servais, 1997], or innate exporters [Mettler, Williams, 2011]. The literature sources assume that such entities are micro, small or medium-sized firms, for which reason in some publications they are also termed

‘micro multinationals’ [Varian, 2011; Mettler, Williams, 2011]. The available research suggests that a born-global enterprise is a venture launched to exploit a global niche soon after its inception. It is established with the capability to compete internationally and coordinate resources across countries [Coviello, McDougall, Oviatt, 2011].

The key competences of global-oriented technology start-ups are undoubtedly located in the resources of knowledge and the skilful use of these resources to create an added value and value for customers. The knowledge resources of an enterprise constitute its intellectual assets, being the sum of knowledge of individual employees and teams of employees. They undergo constant changes which are the result of the learning process of an organization [Skrzypek, 2009]. Indeed, creative people are capable of combining multiple knowledge areas and disciplines in different and unique ways [Brazdauskaite, Rasimaviciene, 2015]. The external knowledge search plays a crucial role in achieving variety through the identification and acquisition of new information and ideas that, in combination with their internal knowledge base, lead firms to generate solutions for emerging problems and exploit new opportunities [Cruz-González et al., 2015]. In addition, the advanced technology of information processing and communication contributes to the greater awareness of international business opportunities. The creativity, capabilities, dynamism, and innovativeness of the country’s entrepreneurs are important factors of its absorptive capacity, which is such a distinctive characteristic of successful development experiences [Szirmai, Naudé, Goedhuys, 2011]. Moreover, most important in the process of internationalization is ‘the decision to enter new international markets or to enhance the presence into international markets, which can be considered as innovation’ [Wach, 2015].

Entrepreneurial activity is the enterprising human action in pursuit of the generation of value through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets [Ahmad, Seymour, 2015]. A born-global enterprise is a growth-oriented business with a strong innovative capacity that achieves high export shares in several foreign countries. Such companies are likely to be considered global innovators, following an innovative way of doing business at a global level from the very early stages of their business activity [Oviatt, McDougall, 2005; Cavusgil, Knight, 2009]. They fill important gaps in global value chains and are strongly driven by the global mind-set of their managers as well as the need to attract more business than they ever could in their domestic markets. As a consequence, they could be considered as helping to stabilize the economic development and recovery [Mettler, Williams, 2011]. The intensity of the way in which these firms undertake international business can differ in respect of the maximum time before starting international activity [Knight, Cavusgil, 1996], the minimum share of foreign sales as a % of total sales [Loane et al., 2007], and the number and location of the markets served [Gabrielsson, Kirpalani, 2012].

Born-global enterprises tend to be micro or small in size. They operate in all sectors of the economy, but their product or service portfolio is characterized by a high level of innovation, the use of modern technology, and exclusive design. One of the most commonly accepted features of born-global firms is that they are founded and managed by highly proactive, risk-taking entrepreneurs who are eager to discover and exploit opportunities abroad in order to pursue competitive advantage [Pock, Hinterhuber, 2011]. Due to the lack of a uniform definition of 'born globals' and standardized data dealing with this enterprise form, it is possible to provide only an approximation of their extent and their contribution to the economy.

## 2. Technology start-ups with born-global potential: Case studies

### 2.1. MindsEater

MindsEater has been on the market since 2011. Its founders (one woman and two men) are graduates of Poznań universities. The main purpose of their business is to create and promote innovative ICT projects that will explore new opportunities and offer unique business solutions. The young entrepreneurs from MindsEater faced the challenge of transforming their concept into a coherent and valuable application, service or platform. With the help of professional consulting and support from the European Regional Development Fund for their project in the early phase of its implementation, the team created an innovative business solution – the international platform ITProjectPlace [[www.itprojectplace.com](http://www.itprojectplace.com)] – under the OPIE 8.1. The service has been operating on the Polish market since 2013, and in 2014 its Spanish version was launched [[www.itprojectplace.es](http://www.itprojectplace.es)]. ITProjectPlace is a powerful tool that provides comprehensive assistance in the area of IT, graphics, and marketing projects for small and medium-sized businesses looking for new areas of growth. 'Innovations in companies form our driving force, purpose, and mode of operation. The core of our IT project platform itself is an actual innovation' – as confirmed by one of the founders of the company. The platform allows its clients to track current progress on their projects and, after their completion, to provide an opinion on the contractor's services, thus enriching his portfolio. Having access to a verified database of trustworthy contractors who can provide recommendations and verify their experience and specific achievements is an invaluable asset. Via dedicated applications, providing their customers with a range of complex tools and individual consulting, MindsEater helps to identify and create global market opportunities for other operators and to develop links between potential businesses and people offering IT services.

## 2.2. Leia Display System

Leia Display System is a young Polish technology start-up from Warsaw, manufacturing innovative multimedia devices (fog screens) and interactive applications since 2013. Its founders (four men), drawing on their interdisciplinary knowledge and experience in the IT and entertainment industry, created a unique technology solution on a global scale – a patented, innovative method of producing a laminar stream of steam. It allows the projection of any media content in the air on a thin (about 6mm) layer of water vapour which acts as a carrier [Leiadisplay.com, 2016]. Another one of its innovative features is the use of unique applications in order to enable screen interactivity. The solutions offered by Leia are distinguished in the global market for their ingenuity and the quality of applied technology. The entrepreneurs from Leia are characterized by an innovative approach and a readiness to use the latest technology in their work. The concept of early internationalization is permanently inscribed in the strategy of the company. Approximately six months after the official premiere of Leia Display System in October 2014, the company has managed to acquire distributors on foreign markets in such countries as: Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and South Korea. Developing an innovative approach to seeking better solutions along with the implementation of the latest technologies constitute the challenges faced daily by the young entrepreneurs from Leia Display System.

## 2.3. Glip Ltd.

Glip Ltd. is a young company manufacturing multimedia touch platforms [Glip Multitouch Solutions, 2015]. The founders (two men) of this technology start-up are graduates of the Poznań University of Technology. They have created a modern business model on the basis of their experience in the IT industry, marketing, finance, and economics. The company has been on the market since 2013. The ICT tools created by Glip facilitate clear and engaging communication accommodating the realities of the fast-growing B2B market. The company offers equipment based on the technology of touch, motion detection and holographic projection. The offer includes touch tables, totems and screens, as well as interactive floors and holographic pyramids. The equipment is available in a wide range of sizes and types tailored to suit individual projects. The company also offers copyright software created per requests of different groups of consumers, freely customized and designed in accordance with the company logo. The products are dedicated for business customers, cultural and educational institutions, and local government units. The mission of the team is to break the standards and undertake new interesting challenges. 'Glip wants to stay ahead of the needs of the users and even to create such needs' – declares the manager of the company. The

building of an international network for the exchange of information and diffusion of knowledge, customer-oriented employees paying high attention to the quality of services, and its cooperation with selected research institutions and organizations supporting technology transfer are the key values of the analysed organization.

### 3. Research results and discussion

The purpose of the qualitative research was to diagnose the potential of the surveyed enterprises, which will influence their competitiveness on the global market and their early internationalization. The obtained results are presented synthetically in Table 1.

Table 1. The born-global potential of the studied companies

Key attributes	Technology start-ups		
	MindsEater	Leia Display System	Glip Ltd.
Endogenous factors			
potential of staff members based on professional knowledge and unique skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– qualifications and expertise of employees</li> <li>– research experience in the IT industry, marketing, and economics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– interdisciplinary knowledge</li> <li>– experience in the IT and entertainment industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– experience in the IT industry, marketing, and economics</li> <li>– awareness of the importance of professional knowledge</li> </ul>
creation and development of innovative business solutions with the support of ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– innovative IT solutions tailored to individual customer needs</li> <li>– comprehensive assistance in the area of IT, graphics and marketing projects</li> <li>– customized applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– innovative multimedia devices</li> <li>– unique method of producing a laminar stream of steam in fog screens</li> <li>– interactive customized applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– interactive multimedia touch platforms, e.g. tables, totems, screens, and floors</li> <li>– ICT solutions freely customized and designed in accordance with customer needs</li> </ul>
ability to implement new technological solutions into business practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– high attention to the quality of IT services</li> <li>– creativity combined with innovativeness</li> <li>– focus on technological innovations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– creativity and openness to the implementation of the latest technology</li> <li>– ingenuity and quality of applied technology</li> <li>– focus on technological innovations</li> <li>– offering of high-quality services to satisfy the specific needs of global customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus on technological innovations</li> <li>– differentiation of strategies by developing specialized and customized devices and applications</li> <li>– implementation of the latest technology</li> <li>– high-quality services for domestic and foreign customers</li> </ul>

Key attributes	Technology start-ups		
	MindsEater	Leia Display System	Glip Ltd.
organizational culture	a climate of dialogue and partnership relations free flow of information and technological knowledge	building of a global-oriented organizational culture	partnership relations a common vision of the development strategy
entrepreneurship culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– willingness to take risks</li> <li>– involvement of the team</li> <li>– a shared vision of the present and the future of the company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– willingness to take risks</li> <li>– innovative approach to seeking better ICT solutions</li> <li>– involvement of the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– pro-innovation attitude</li> <li>– willingness to take risks</li> <li>– great determination of the managers and staff to reach their objectives</li> </ul>
External factors			
cooperation with business partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– networks and contacts with domestic and foreign partners</li> <li>– engaging in intensive international activities</li> <li>– customer-oriented employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– relationships between the local operation of the enterprise and its foreign sales representatives</li> <li>– external, independent intermediaries for distribution in foreign markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– an attitude of cooperation with business partners</li> <li>– good relationships with clients, suppliers, facilitators, and partners</li> <li>– a search for new solutions and external sources of information</li> </ul>
cooperation with business environment institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– cooperation with selected research institutions and organizations supporting technology transfer</li> <li>– study of environment in terms of demand for new ICT solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– building of a network for the exchange of information</li> <li>– consultations in the field of financing for innovative devices</li> <li>– the ability to cope with the changing environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– cooperation with Poznan Science and Technology Park of Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation; InQbator Seed project 2013</li> <li>– cooperation in the area of consulting, organizing, and financing innovative ICT solutions</li> </ul>
awards in prestigious competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Poznan Leader of Entrepreneurship 2014 competition in the category Start-up (awarded)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Internet Beta 2013, LBA Start-up Meeting Point 2014</li> <li>– Investor Presentation Contest – Lewiatan Business Angels 2014</li> <li>– Think Big UPC Business contest 2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Poznan Leader of Entrepreneurship 2014 competition in the category Start-up (winner)</li> <li>– Award of the Marshal of Greater Poland 'Innovative for Greater Poland' 2014</li> </ul>

Source: Own research.

The competence of a company to compete internationally depends on a set of endogenous as well as exogenous factors. A very important role is played by the potential of the staff members, which depends on their professional interdisciplinary knowledge. The offering of high-quality products and services to satisfy the specific needs of global customers is one of the attributes of born-global enterprises. It can be argued that the competitive advantage of technology firms is derived from their employees' unique knowledge, skills, and, especially, the ability to implement them in practice, as well as from specific organizational competencies and international experience. The basis of an organizational culture is constituted by the awareness of the importance of that knowledge, a commitment to the shared values, and the creation of an attitude of cooperation with external partners. The surveyed enterprises successfully bridge the gap in the creation of innovative business solutions with the support of ICT and, above all, seek to obtain global market acceptance for their offer. Moreover, the qualifications and expertise of the managers and staff members are a fundamental resource that controls and shapes the processes of reconfiguration and multiplication of other resources.

The companies were awarded in prestigious competitions for entrepreneurs who, through their creativity and openness to the advanced technology, bring innovative solutions to the market. The main purpose of the teams of young entrepreneurs from MindsEater, Leia and Glip is to create and promote innovative projects that will explore new opportunities and offer unique solutions with the support of ICT in the global business environment, using the latest technology and modern tools of interactive communication, and focusing on the customization of services dedicated to individual customer needs. The involvement of the team, a shared vision of the present and the future of the company, their focus on technological innovations, and attention to customer satisfaction constitute the basis for their competitiveness on the global market.

## Conclusions

The creation of new technology-based companies with global reach becomes a key tool for generating wealth in the international business environment. However, the young ventures need the help of support groups such as business environment institutions, which promote the internationalization of entrepreneurial ventures. Therefore, it is necessary to skilfully combine innovative ICT solutions with effective governance and ability to find relevant funding sources. The modernity of the products and services provided by Polish technology start-ups depends largely on the creation of an entrepreneurship culture, which is fundamental for the development of the innovativeness of young and engaging people who are willing to take risks.

To successfully compete on the global market, the entrepreneurs have to break the standards, avoid boilerplate solutions, and undertake interesting challenges. The teams of entrepreneurial, ambitious and creative people who constitute MindsEater, Leia and Glip believe that the understanding of customer needs, partnership in business relationships, and an offer which includes customized solutions tailored to the specifics of a particular industry form the basis for the value and effectiveness of each undertaking. An innovative approach to seeking better solutions along with the implementation of the latest technology and great determination of the teams to reach their objectives constitute the challenges that must be faced by technology enterprises. The analysed examples confirm that endogenous factors and external environment undoubtedly play an important role in the building of an entrepreneurial orientation as well as in the process of early internationalization. The application of the empirical method to the case study has made it possible to characterize the essential qualities of global technology start-ups and illustrate the development of the studied phenomenon in business practice.

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