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Promoting technical innovation.

Case study: the Salvamont - Vodafone application

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The author presenting the Salvamont app

Abstract: *After the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, mountain sports lovers resumed their habits of practicing both hiking and snow sports. However, only few realize how important it is to also consider safety in addition to the momentary pleasure offered by the activity itself. Salvamont (the Romanian Mountain Rescue Service), together with Vodafone (one of the leading mobile service providers in Romania), have developed a special location tracking application to increase safety and enhance rescue efforts in case of risky situations in the mountains. The present study aims to highlight the benefits of this application to smartphone users. The study concludes that, despite the aggressive promotion of the application and of the Salvamont-Vodafone partnership, the news had a rather low public impact. The promotional campaign should be restarted and, according to the findings in this study, both online (e.g. on official social media pages) and offline (e.g. posters, leaflets, in-store) methods should be used.*

Keywords: *promotion, technical innovation, Vodafone, Salvamont application, safety, 5G*

1. Introduction

The global growing interest in innovation, especially in technology, goes hand in hand with increased competitiveness and the need to design new consumption models. In the present paper, I aim to examine the importance of technological innovation in telecommunications, with special emphasis on the application of new technologies in projects capable of positively impacting human life. In this context, the implementation of technological innovation in various fields and collaboration with organizations in diverse sectors, such as Salvamont, bring solutions to problems that could not be solved in the past. Such innovations are possible due to corporate concern on intensifying research and development to expand the applicability of present technologies and to find advanced technological solutions.

In the age of technology, the concept of innovation is no longer limited to the invention of new products or processes; it now also includes the improvement of existing ones. The cumulative effects are as important as the initial ones.

As early as 1934, J. A. Shumpeter published “The Theory of Economic Development”, which is still a reference book on economics, in general, and on the innovation process, in particular. The distinction between invention and innovation comes much later. For instance, Malerba (1997) defines invention as a new idea, a new scientific discovery or technological novelty, while innovation is the commercial application of an invention. Innovation, in this view, is the materialization of a novel idea.

My being part of the “Vodafone family” played an important role in choosing the topic of this study. The three years spent in this company have helped me understand and acclaim the implementation of the 5G network and its further improvement. Initially promoted publicly in Romania as an enhancement in the entertainment industry, the 5G network has found real-life solutions for life-saving activities, previously impossible to imagine. One such solution is the partnership between Salvamont (the Romanian Mountain Rescue Service) and Vodafone, one of the leading mobile service providers in the country. This partnership has led not only to an increase in the quality of the GSM network, but also to a revolutionary activity within Salvamont: the possibility of saving people’s lives by means of the location coordinates on their phones.

Given the importance of the Vodafone - Salvamont partnership at national level, I decided to conduct a research survey on the topic, with a focus on the Vodafone – Salvamont application. On this occasion, I had the chance to share the information about the app to the target audience. The received feedback shows that both technical innovation and promotion are equally important.

2. Research methods

The field research was carried out in-store, on the Vodafone premises at the Auchan Nord Hypermarket in Timisoara, Romania, where I work. The research consisted primarily in face-to-face conversations over a

two-month period, exclusively on weekends. I used the 5G devices available in the store. The presentation was intended for all Vodafone service users, both individuals and organizations. The purpose of the presentation was to promote the new technologies within Salvamont, but also to promote the Salvamont - Vodafone application. I used the questionnaire as the main research method to find how many of the one hundred clients asked had knowledge of the new technologies implemented and of the Salvamont application.

3. Results and discussion

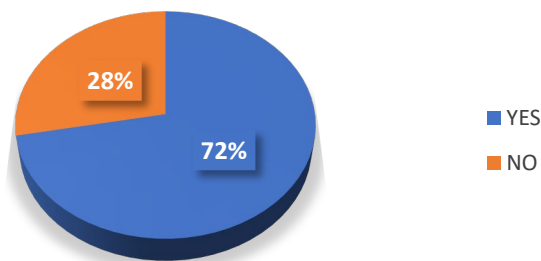


Fig. 1. The results of the question: "Are you familiar with the Salvamont - Vodafone application and its functionality?"

An important step in promoting the application among customers was to discover the extent to which the Salvamont application was known among mobile phone users. The Salvamont - Vodafone app is an application in continuous development, which has been promoted intensely. Currently, it has over 200,000 downloads in Play Store and AppStore (Statistical data 2023 for App Store and Google Play). However, 28% of the respondents had not heard of this application and did not know anything about it. In such cases, I had to present the application from A to Z, from the download stage, to creating an account and explaining the apps' benefits. Many customers were impressed by the app's ease of use. On the other hand, 72% of the respondents were

very familiar with the application, activating it when hiking either always or usually. In such cases, I only had to provide some additional information, to make them aware of features they did not know. It is noteworthy that, when introducing the application to those who had not heard of it, the respondents who thought video drones were more useful than signal drones slightly changed their mind, because they noticed that having the app and having a signal can improve and ease the intervention of Salvamont rescue teams in case of emergency.

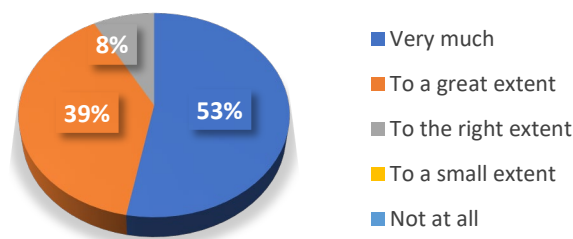


Fig. 2. The results of the question: "To what extent would you recommend the installation and use of the Salvamont – Vodafone application to your friends?"

As expected, the people who use the app and are aware of its benefits are also those willing to pass the information on. 92% of the respondents would recommend the installation and use of the Salvamont - Vodafone application to their relatives "very much" and "to a great extent". The conversations I had with the respondents suggest that mountain enthusiasts are more open to using an app designed to help people increase their safety during hiking.

8% of the respondents would recommend the application to their relatives "to the right extent", because they think that, while it is good to have it there in case of risky situations, it is not necessarily useful, since their relatives are not passionate about winter sports and hiking.

The results of the in-store survey mirror Everett Rogers's (2003) considerations on the diffusion of innovation: those who are fond of novelty (technological, in this case) lead the way, while those who are not are tied to tradition and hesitate to even try something out of their

range of experience. Also, the survey has shown that the proposed application is still in the diffusion stage and needs extra effort to reach the adoption stage. Otherwise, novelty may slide into what Rogers (2003) describes as “failed diffusion”. He describes failed diffusion as diffusion that does not reach or approach 100% adoption due to its own weaknesses, competition from other innovations, or simply a lack of public awareness. Hence, communicators need to carefully examine the communication channels involved in such a campaign for social change and use them according to their inner potential to reach the target audience. Much of the effort falls on the public relations specialists, who should develop appropriate communication strategies to support the promotion of innovation (Cernicova-Bucă, 2016).

Promoting the Salvamont application



Fig. 3. Vodafone-Salvamont application interface

Ever since its launch in January 2013, the application has undergone continuous development. The app was last updated in June 2022, when the "My Routes" section was added to allow users to track their location history. Also, battery consumption decreased with the development of the app.

The findings of the survey on the Salvamont - Vodafone application have allowed me to come up with a proposal for the company to continue the promotion more intensively, both online and offline. Since the app was designed to improve the safety of hikers, users should be informed about the existence of the application. It is noteworthy that, although the promotion of the partnership was intensive in the beginning, the information did not have a large-scale impact. By promoting the app only during the winter season, the communication effort failed to reach desired targets.

Conclusions

Since 2004, Vodafone Romania has joined the rescue activity of the National Association of Mountain Rescuers, and in 2019, the funding of the Salvamont National Dispatch was taken over by the Vodafone Romania Foundation, Vodafone thus becoming a "technology partner". With the implementation of the "Salvamont counts on Vodafone" project, various public information campaigns have been carried out, with emphasis on the new technologies implemented (e.g. the signal drone, the video drone, the data analysis centre) as well as on the Salvamont - Vodafone application, which is in continuous development.

Drawing on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that, although the promotion was aggressive for a short while, via many channels, it unfortunately failed to go as far as expected. Out of the 100 respondents, 28 were not even aware of the app's existence, let alone its functionality. The goal of the campaign was straightforward: to let customers know that Vodafone is more than just a phone company; it is also focused on developing interesting solutions that improve customers' lives.

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