



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# New technological trends in the market strategies of services economy: A case-study on economic policies and strategic positioning

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### Abstract:

The study touches upon the issue of Covid-19 pandemic economic situation by focusing on the strategic decisions, economic policies and individual measures approached before, during and after the pandemic. The literature shows that the pandemic-related policies and measures have triggered specific market reactions. The pandemic created a favourable context for the rapid spread of the new technological trends in the market strategies of services economy. The research employs the trend extrapolation for the period 2018-2029 of the values collected by the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for postal and courier sector entrepreneurs on the challenges, structural changes, governmental policies, social pressures, economic solutions delivered during the 2018-2022 period. The research study was designed to analyse the data declared by entrepreneurs, employees and customers which also relates to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic measures, travel, work, gathering restrictions over some sectors of the economy. The research is designed to label the employment of new technological trends as strategic investments, management decisions, reactions prior, during and after the pandemic challenges. Consequently, the research questions to what extent were the evolution of the new technological trends for private courier and delivery services influenced by the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and the policies associated to it. Thus the main research question accrued concerns the effects of the pandemic over the economic policies and strategic positioning for certain sectors of the economy.

**Keywords:** *EU economy, economic policy, government, market strategy, National Regulatory Authority (NRA), technology strategic positioning.*

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## **New technological trends in the market strategies of services economy: A case-study on economic policies and strategic positioning**

### **Introduction**

In the current post-pandemic context, this paper enquires on the necessity for operators in the services economy to adopt recovery or development strategies. The paper outlines to test the theory that grants the pandemic period an abnormal status from an economic point of view. The study mirrors the issue of Covid-19 pandemic economic situation by centering on the strategic decisions, economic policies and measures approached before, during and after the pandemic.

The literature depicts that the pandemic-related governmental policies and measures, challenges, social pressures, economic solutions have triggered structural changes and peculiar market reactions. The pandemic concocted a sping board for the rapid spread of the new technological trends in the market strategies of services economy. The research employs the trend extrapolation for the period 2018-2029 of the values collected by the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for postal and courier sector entrepreneurs on the economic solutions delivered during the 2018-2022 period. This research uses the collections of studies, reports and statistical data of the ANCOM (the Romanian National Authority for the Administration and Regulation of Communications).

The research study was designed to analyse the data declared by entrepreneurs, employees and customers which also relates to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic measures, travel, employment, work conditions, gathering restrictions over some sectors of the economy. The research is designed to label the employment of new technological trends as strategic investments, management decisions, reactions prior, during and after the pandemic challenges. Consequently, the research questions to what extent were the evolution of the new technological trends for private courier and delivery services influenced by the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and the policies associated to it. On a mature market, companies that have an experienced, well-trained human resource and a favorable position on the market can adopt a specialization strategy.

The paper assesses the growth strategy that is based on the development of the courier services market by investing in equipment and new technologies in order to achieve a differentiation of services compared to the competition and the development of value-added services (Georgescu, 2013: 105-110). These growth strategies can be achieved in two directions, namely: firstly, an internal growth based on own human resources, but the disadvantage is the need for significant financial resources or, secondly, a franchise system (using subcontractors) that is increasingly used in this field with the advantage of rapid development without major investment. Companies that owned or developed such trajectories and tactics and knew to efficiently communicate externally and internally had a greater chance to succeed (Burlea-Schiopoiu, Mihai, 2019; Dima, Vladutescu, 2012: 27 – 33). Appearing as a niche segment, courier services have differentiated themselves from the classic postal services by the speed of the transfer of shipments from the sender to the recipient but also by the safety and flexibility of the services (Georgescu, Georgescu, 2017).

That is why in the delivery process it is considered as extremely important to create an internal transport network that ensures the transfer of shipments to the recipient warehouses on time and effectively. On the other hand, the growth of B2C and B2X sector and of e-commerce have determined companies to identify and develop new means of delivery that are aimed at ensuring a flexibility of the delivery process, a growth in the quality of delivery process and an increase in the final customers' satisfaction through the use of lockers/delivery points, pick-up points (Georgescu,

Budica, 2013: 322-331). The paper concludes on the investments in logistics and equipment which had the role of improving this internal activity but also streamlining the activity of couriers in a time when transport, access to shops and institutions, gatherings, free movement in general were hugely limited by the pandemic. Thus the main research question raises the issue of the effects of the pandemic over the economic policies and strategic positioning for certain sectors of the economy.

### **Drifting international economy? Resilience, strategic decisions and economic policies during Covid-19 pandemics - a literature review**

The Covid-19 pandemic context has triggered a series of questions regarding the economic response of the countries experiencing restrictions and challenges to circulation and gatherings, access to institutions, shops and other services, the work of enterprises and public institutions, access to the education system and to health etc. The literature has pointed towards the links between the international economic crisis fueled by the economic policies and political decisions during the Covid-19 pandemics and citizens' positive or negative attitudes towards internationalization (Obermeier, 2021: 15-25).

The governments' responses to the pandemics have impacted all sectors. Researches have highlighted the context and chances for recovery for citizens' rights, freedoms, health and wellbeing (Olimid, Georgescu, Gherghe, 2022: 38-51; Georgescu, 2022: 194 – 204). The pandemic hit the economy and finances (Pan, Yue, 2021), tourism and travelling, the environment and climate policy (Obergassel, Hermwille, Oberthür, 2021: 1298-1306), commerce (Grant, Banomyong, Gibson, 2021). Especially the transportation and delivery services sector was overwhelmingly changed by the pandemics, the health security policies adopted and implemented shifting the market more towards the online and courier, express delivery solutions. These changes are constantly assessed in order to correlate the needs of consumers with the EU regulatory framework (European Commission, 2016; European Commission, 2021).

Researches have pointed out towards last mile delivery strategies such as crowd logistics (Gläser, Jahnke, Strassheim, 2021), or other niche activities linked to e-commerce as requested by new generations of consumers (Grant, Banomyong, Gibson, 2021) and the millennials and young adults new trends in purchasing behavior (Burlea-Schiopoiu, Ogarca, Barbu, Craciun, Baloi, Mihai, 2021). Various transportation models (especially road freight which fundamentals nowadays parcel courier deliveries) have been verified in relation to environmental issues, time waste and warehouse efficiency and resulted in sharing solutions (Grote, Cherrett, Whittle, Tuck, 2021; Barbu, Florea, Ogarcă, Barbu, 2018: 373-387). The search for efficient, low-cost delivery solutions that would meet the customers' expectations for courier services has impacted the so-called "gig economy" (Polkowska, 2021).

Due to the limitation or even ban during lockdown of access to shops, malls, restaurants, public institutions, banking units, free movement in general, the labor market suffered severe changes. The economic recession hit severely the labor market throughout 2020-2021 as is seen in the unemployment dynamics (Baert, 2022: 1447-1454; Su, Dai, Ullah, Andlib, 2022: 1752-1764). The displaced labor force was constrained to identify other employment opportunities as the EU and national governments launched a quest for solidarity (Voicu, Peral, Rusu, Rosta, Comșa, Vasile, Coromina, Tufis, 2021: S887-S904). As such, the courier services labor market was capable to receive and fill the employment gap. The influx of workforce from economic

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fields and businesses severely affected by the pandemics has resulted in increased supply of labor for delivery services which helped increase delivery performance but raised concerns over job security and consequently financial stability (Huang, 2021).

Consequently, as regards performance of last mile delivery solutions, studies have tested the relationship among clients' expectations on the one hand and speed, reliability and context (Zhong, Lomas, Worth, 2021).

The role of EU and national governance in managing the health crisis and the economic and financial crisis that followed was crucial (Cifuentes-Faura, 2021: 242-255). EU governance policies and measures were studied from an institutionalism perspective to assess the evolution or devolution of the integration process, the historical decisions, institutional situations, functions, political arenas proving to be beneficial in highlighting the different roles played by national and EU political actors (Schmidt, 2020: 1177-1193). Governments' actions in response to the health crisis influenced the severity of the economic crisis which followed (Popic, Moise, 2022: 507-528).

### **Research methodology**

The paper presents the results obtained from research on trends and evolutions of courier services economic sector in the form of developing a model for assessing and forecasting market developments. The study uses several methods of trend extrapolation for the period 2018-2024 using the values collected by the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for postal and courier sector entrepreneurs on the economic solutions delivered during the 2018-2022 period.

By statistical modeling the study configured a technique for evaluating and forecasting the dynamics and perspectives of market evolution for courier services in Romania in 2024. The research empirically anticipates the evolution of the courier services market correlating other interdependent sectors and the development of the IT and e-commerce sector. The development of the IT and e-commerce are some of the new technological trends that influenced the dynamics of this economic sector: digitization of communication, e-commerce, e-retail, online purchase and marketplace, parcel locker delivery and /or pick-up units, self-service/automated units, B2C parcels delivery tracking, GPS time and route estimation, online payments and e-invoicing, logistical warehouse evolution (parcel bands, automated computer assisted parcel sorting etc.), broadband internet, the development and wide use of mobile apps for e-commerce and mobile apps for courier services, larger supply chain automatization, the appearance and broader use of mobile scanners and mobile printers etc.

The scientific approach was guided by the following research questions: Q1. Is there a trend in the use of new technologies for parcel delivery? Q2. Can one forecast the value of the use of new technologies for parcel delivery for years to come? Q3. Which is the most appropriate method for these calculi? Consequently, the study launched the following hypotheses for validation: H1. The courier services industry has been positively influenced by the growth of e-commerce and technology development in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Analysis, findings and discussions**

Observing the extremely spectacular evolution of online stores and of the IT sector (European Commission, 2021), we tried to show the influences that technology exerts on courier companies and the workforce employed in the private sector. The

research results allowed to validate the theory that there are relationships and influences of other areas of activity on the postal and courier services sector and it appeared necessary to research this direction. We analyzed the dynamics and prospects of courier services in Romania through the following directions: (1) the evolution of self-service units in the postal and courier sector in 2018-2021 and prospects for 2022-2029 dynamics and (2) the evolution of the value of conventional postal units in 2019-2021 and prospects for 2022-2029 dynamics. In the analyses we used the following analysis methods: average growth method, linear trend method and parabolic trend method, and the absolute, relative and average indicators to account for absolute changes, dynamics index and growth rate.

The analysis of secondary data collected through the official reports highlights the absolute, relative and average indicators for self-service revealed in Figure 1 in which we observe that this particular service obtained by technological investments has registered a strong increase during 2018-2021, especially relevant for the pandemic years 2020 and 2021. During the analyzed period the data revealed an average value of self-service of 0.69 thousand units, an average positive change of 0.79 thousand units, a super-unitary average index of dynamics of 282.50%, which translates to a 182.50% average positive rate.

**Figure 1.** Absolute, relative and average indicators for self-service units

Years	Absolute indicators (thousand units)			Relative indicators (%)		Average indicators					
	Level	Absolute changes		Dynamics index		Growth rate		Calculated from absolute values		Calculated from relative values	
	$y_i$ Values	$\Delta_{i/1}$	$\Delta_{i/i-1}$	$I_{i/1}$	$I_{i/i-1}$	$R_{i/1}$	$R_{i/i-1}$	$\bar{y}$	$\Delta$	$\bar{I}$	$\bar{R}$
2018	0.11	0	0	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.69	0.79	282.50	182.50
2019	0.44	0.33	0.33	400.00	400.00	300.00	300.00				
2020	1.02	0.91	0.58	927.27	231.82	827.27	131.82				
2021	2.48	2.37	1.46	2254.55	243.14	2154.55	143.14				

Source: Authors' own calculations.

Figure 2 presents the situation of predicting the evolution of self-service units through the average growth method.

**Figure 2.** Average growth method for self-service units

Years	$y_i$	$t_i$	$\bar{y}_i = y_i + t_i * y_i$	$(y_i - \bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	0.11	0	0.11	0
2019	0.44	1	0.9	0.2116
2020	1.02	2	1.69	0.4489
2021	2.48	3	2.48	0
Total				0.6605

Source: Authors' own calculations.

The findings in Figure 2 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.41$  and a variation coefficient  $v=59.00\%$  which means that the method does not fully adjust the data series.

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**Figure 3.** Linear trend method

Years	$y_i$ (thousand units)	$t_i$	$t_i^2$	$y_i*t_i$	$\bar{y}_i$	$(y_i-\bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	0.11	-3	9	-0.33	-0.14	0.06
2019	0.44	-1	1	-0.44	0.63	0.03
2020	1.02	1	1	1.02	1.39	0.14
2021	2.48	3	9	7.44	2.16	0.10
Total	4.05	0	20	7.69		<b>0.34</b>

*Source: Authors' own calculations.*

The findings in Figure 3 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.29$  and a variation coefficient  $v=42.27\%$  which means that the method does not fully adjust the data series.

**Figure 4.** Parabolic trend method

Years	$y_i$ (thousand units)	$t_i$	$t_i^2$	$t_i^3$	$t_i^4$	$y_i*t_i$	$y_i*t_i^2$	$\bar{y}_i=a+b*t_i+c*t_i^2$	$(y_i-\bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	0.11	-3	9	-27	81	-0.33	0.99	0.15	0.0016
2019	0.44	-1	1	-1	1	-0.44	0.44	0.35	0.0081
2020	1.02	1	1	1	1	1.02	1.02	1.11	0.0081
2021	2.48	3	9	27	81	7.44	22.32	2.43	0.0025
Total	4.05	0	20	0	164	7.69	24.77		0.0203

*Source: Authors' own calculations.*

The findings in Figure 4 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.096$  and a variation coefficient  $v=13.95\%$  which means that the method does not fully adjust the data series.

**Figure 5.** Forecast of self-service units evolution for 2022-2029

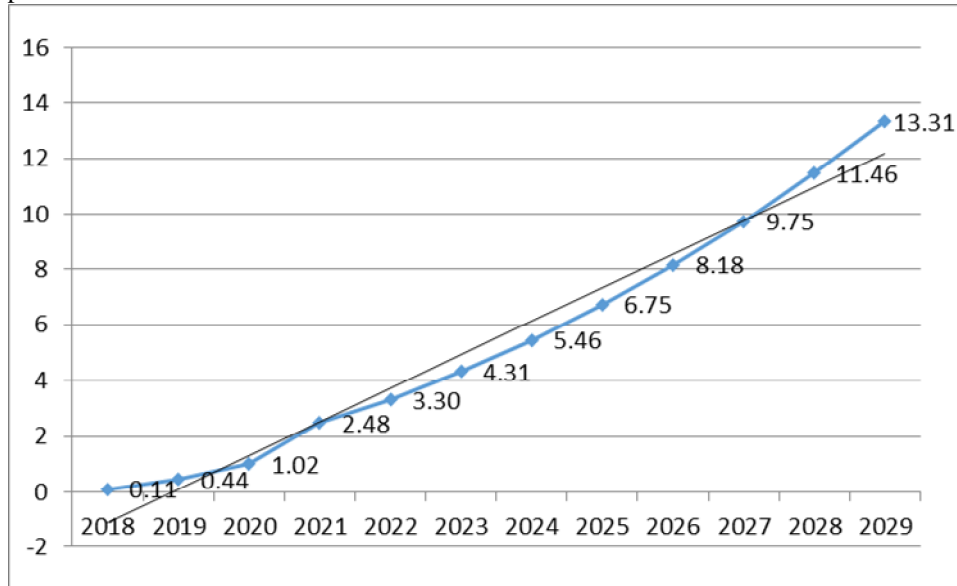
Years	$t_i$	$\bar{y}_i=a+b*t_i+c*t_i^2$
2022	4	3.30
2023	5	4.31
2024	6	5.46
2025	7	6.75
2026	8	8.18
2027	9	9.75
2028	10	11.46
2029	11	13.31

*Source: Authors' own calculations.*

We observe a constant growth in the number of self-service (automated) which is also confirmed through the appearance of these equipment for courier operators. The results show that the methods listed above do not fully adjust the data series. This is explainable by the limitations of the study due to insufficient data, insufficiently trained or informed customers, still reticent to the new technology. Since the parabolic trend method has resulted in the smallest values, we have selected this method for the forecast

of self-service units evolution for the period 2022-2029. This trend is highlighted in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** Graphical representation of the forecast of self-service units evolution for the period 2022-2029



Source: Authors' own calculations.

We observe an opposite situation for post office units. The analysis of secondary data collected through the official reports highlights the absolute, relative and average indicators for postal office revealed in Figure 7 in which we observe that this particular service obtained by technological investments has registered a strong decrease during 2018-2021, especially relevant for the pandemic years 2020 and 2021. During the analyzed period the data revealed an average value of post units of 35.81 thousand units, an average negative change of -0.77 thousand units, a sub-unitary average index of dynamics of 98.39%, which translates to a 1.61% average negative rate of decrease.

**Figure 7.** Absolute, relative and average indicators for post office units

Years	Absolute indicators (thousand units)			Relative indicators (%)		Average indicators					
	Level	Absolute changes		Dynamics index		Growth rate		Calculate d from absolute values		Calculated from relative values	
	$y_i$ Values	$\Delta_{i/1}$	$\Delta_{i/i-1}$	$I_{i/1}$	$I_{i/i-1}$	$R_{i/1}$	$R_{i/i-1}$	$\bar{y}$	$\Delta$	$\bar{I}$	$\bar{R}$
<b>2018</b>	48.8	0	0	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	35.81	-0.77	98.39	-1.61
<b>2019</b>	48.34	-0.46	-0.46	99.06	99.06	-0.94	-0.94				
<b>2020</b>	47.27	-1.53	-1.07	96.86	97.79	-3.14	-2.21				
<b>2021</b>	46.48	-2.32	-0.79	95.25	98.33	-4.75	-1.67				

Source: Authors' own calculations.

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**Figure 8.** Average growth method for postal units

Years	$y_i$	$t_i$	$\bar{y}_i = y_i + t_i * y_i$	$(y_i - \bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	48.8	0	48.8	0
2019	48.34	1	48.03	0.0961
2020	47.27	2	47.26	0.0001
2021	46.48	3	46.49	0
Total				<b>0.0962</b>

Source: Authors' own calculations.

The findings in Figure 8 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.16$  and a variation coefficient  $\nu=0.43\%$  which means that the method fully adjusts the data series.

**Figure 9.** Linear trend method

Years	$y_i$ (thousand units)	$t_i$	$t_i^2$	$y_i * t_i$	$\bar{y}_i$	$(y_i - \bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	48.8	-3	9	-146.4	48.92	0.02
2019	48.34	-1	1	-48.34	48.12	0.05
2020	47.27	1	1	47.27	47.32	0.00
2021	46.48	3	9	139.44	46.52	0.00
Total	190.89	0	20	-8.03		<b>0.07</b>

Source: Authors' own calculations.

The findings in Figure 9 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.129$  and a variation coefficient  $\nu=0.36\%$  which means that the method fully adjusts the data series.

**Figure 10.** Parabolic trend method

Years	$y_i$ (thousand units)	$t_i$	$t_i^2$	$t_i^3$	$t_i^4$	$y_i * t_i$	$y_i * t_i^2$	$\bar{y}_i = a + b * t_i + c * t_i^2$	$(y_i - \bar{y}_i)^2$
2018	48.8	-3	9	-27	81	-146.4	439.20	48.84	0.0016
2019	48.34	-1	1	-1	1	-48.34	48.34	48.20	0.0196
2020	47.27	1	1	1	1	47.27	47.27	47.40	0.0169
2021	46.48	3	9	27	81	139.44	418.32	46.44	0.0016
Total	190.89	0	20	0	164	-8.03	953.13		<b>0.0397</b>

Source: Authors' own calculations.

The findings in Figure 10 show a mean estimation error  $\sigma=0.996$  and a variation coefficient  $\nu=0.28\%$  which means that the method fully adjusts the data series.

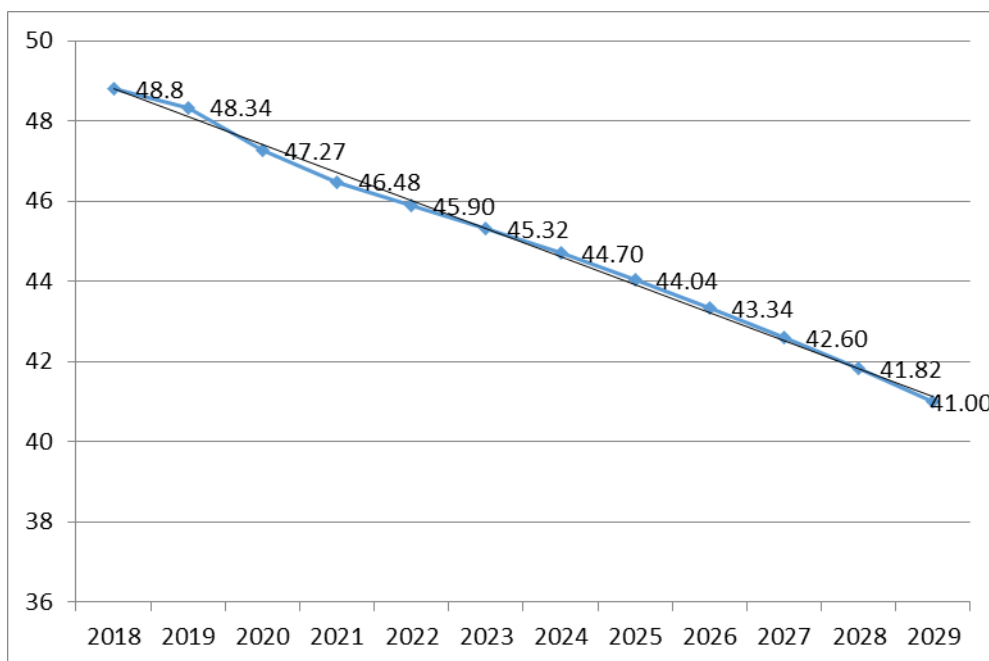


**Figure 11.** Forecast of postal units dynamics during 2022-2029

Years	$t_i$	$\bar{y}_i=a+b*t_i+c*t_i^2$
2022	4	45.90
2023	5	45.32
2024	6	44.70
2025	7	44.04
2026	8	43.34
2027	9	42.60
2028	10	41.82
2029	11	41.00

Source: Authors' own calculations.

We observe a constant decrease in the number of postal conventional units. The results show that the methods listed above fully adjust the data series. Since the parabolic trend method has resulted in the smallest values, we have selected this method for the forecast of postal units devolution for the period 2022-2029. This trend is highlighted in Figure 11.



Source: Authors' own calculations.

### Conclusions

From all the methods employed we selected the parabolic trend method due to the recorded values. Thus, we could estimate the number of postal units in the sector of postal and courier services for 2022-2029 using the appropriate trend functions through

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the parabolic trend method. We also forecast in an innovative way the number of self-service automated units in the period 2022-2029 using the appropriate trend functions through the parabolic trend method. The results of the dynamics index suggest that in 2021 the values show a 22.5-fold increase for self-service units compared to the values recorded in December 2018 before the pandemic. This result has to take into account the fact that the study presents some limitations considering that not all companies have adopted this technology, the larger population being still reserved to select this delivery option. Also, we consider that at some point this increase will stop as the market cannot sustain this trend limitless.

### Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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