



The evolving interaction between traditional marketing channels and the digital age

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Article info

Review paper

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.46793/ICEMIT23.175Z>

UDC/ UDK:

339.138:658.87-052(497.11)

Abstract

In an era defined by digital transformation, this paper investigates the enduring impact of traditional marketing channels on consumer behavior within contemporary markets. It investigates the complex interaction between traditional marketing channels and the digital age, considering how these channels persist and adapt in the era of digitalization. A group of 248 respondents from Serbia participated in a questionnaire-based study, capturing engagement, preferences, and interactions with messages sent via traditional marketing channels. The study investigates how engagement levels are affected by factors such as recalling traditional marketing messages and engaging in digital actions following exposure. The results showed that traditional marketing remains relevant, with television commercials and print advertisements being encountered and recalled most frequently.

Keywords: Traditional marketing, digital age, consumer behavior, engagement, preferences

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, influenced by the constant technological advancements and inevitable integration of online platforms into daily life, consumer behavior has undergone significant changes (Sima, Gheorghe, Subić & Nancu, 2020). The widespread use of smartphones, the omnipresence of the internet, and the popularity of social media have fundamentally altered how people interact with brands and make purchasing decisions (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). This digital landscape has empowered consumers with unprecedented access to information, enabling them to compare products and engage with brands globally (Darmody & Zwick, 2020). Consequently, their expectations now revolve around personalized and interactive experiences (Melero, Sese & Verhoef, 2016).

As a result, businesses have been compelled to adapt their marketing strategies to this new reality. The traditional paradigm of one-sided communication through mass media has given way to a more dynamic and participatory relationship between consumers and brands (Lou, 2022). In this environment, digital marketing tactics such as targeted ads, influencer collaborations, and social media engagement have gained prominence (Baumöl, Hollebeek & Jung, 2016; Voorveld, 2019). However, amid these transformative changes, traditional marketing channels persist, sparking questions about their continued effectiveness and relevance in shaping consumer behavior. The coexistence of traditional and digital marketing accentuates the complexity of modern consumer behavior. This paper explores this complex interaction, exploring how traditional marketing channels navigate the digital age while continuing to leave their imprint on consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchase choices.

In the contemporary business landscape, both traditional and digital marketing strategies aimed at engaging consumers and promoting products or services coexist strategies (Wiener, Hoßbach & Saunders, 2018). Traditional marketing, rooted in well-established practices such as television, print, radio, and direct mail, still hold an important place because they are recognized and trusted by a certain group of people who prefer these more traditional ways of getting information (Todor, 2016).

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However, the digital revolution has transformed the ways we communicate. The advent of the internet, social media, search engines, and mobile applications has provided businesses with a whole array of tools for digital marketing (Melović, Jocović, Dabić, Vulić & Dudic, 2020). Digital marketing strategies, characterized by precision targeting, real-time analytics, and dynamic customer engagement strategies (Aluri, Price & McIntyre, 2019; Kannan, 2017), are an inevitable part of communication of a generation of consumers used to constant connectivity and information accessibility (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). This mix of traditional and digital approaches means businesses need to find the right balance, recognizing the different preferences of their customers while making the most of the wide array of tools available to reach and communicate with them.

In light of the evolving marketing landscape, it is important to assess the efficacy of traditional marketing channels. While digital strategies have opened up new ways to reach consumers (Bala & Verma, 2018), traditional methods still hold a special place (Todor, 2016). Understanding whether these traditional ways are still effective amid changing consumer trends is crucial. Consequently, understanding how the traditional methods interact with today's digital world and how they affect consumer decisions is crucial, not only for academic reasons, but also for practical application to help businesses make smarter marketing choices.

This exploration gains additional emphasis due to the interconnected nature of traditional and digital marketing approaches (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p.7). As businesses strive to navigate the interplay between these distinct but interconnected approaches, questions arise regarding the optimal allocation of resources and the role that traditional methods play in an integrated marketing framework (Valos, Haji Habibi, Casidy, Driesener & Maplestone, 2016). The need to holistically evaluate the relevance and impact of traditional channels in modern marketing strategies forms the basis for informed decision-making in crafting comprehensive marketing campaigns. By taking a closer look at whether traditional methods are still effective, we can gain valuable insights that will help businesses make better decisions, allocate their resources wisely, and meet the preferences of different types of consumers.

This paper offers research on understanding the evolving dynamics between traditional marketing channels and the digital age. Additionally, the research presented in this paper seeks to provide insights that clarify the adaptive strategies employed by traditional marketing approaches and their coexistence with digital platforms, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding contemporary consumer behavior. This research is a way for both academics and businesses to learn how to create marketing strategies that work well in today's diverse and ever-changing marketplace.

2. Literature review

The advent of digitalization has fundamentally reshaped how consumers make decisions (Ismail, Khater & Zaki, 2017). The traditional linear decision-making model has evolved into a dynamic and iterative process, largely influenced by the availability of digital information. Online platforms offer consumers a wealth of reviews, ratings, and user-generated content that significantly impact their perceptions and choices (Rasool & Pathania, 2021). The phenomenon known as the "Zero Moment of Truth" (ZMOT), introduced by Google, underscores this shift (Ertemel & Başçi, 2015). Consumers now actively engage in research before making a purchase, leveraging digital tools to gather information, compare options, and assess peer experiences (Karimi, Papamichail & Holland, 2015). As a result, businesses must recognize the significance of digital touchpoints in influencing consumers (Kannan, 2017) even before they set foot in physical stores. This evolution calls for a deeper understanding of how consumers navigate the digital landscape and how their digital interactions translate into purchasing decisions.

While digital marketing strategies have gained prominence, the impact of digitalization on traditional marketing channels cannot be overlooked (Matarazzo, Penco, Profumo & Quaglia, 2021). Traditional channels, such as television, print, and radio, have witnessed a transformation in their effectiveness and reach due to digitalization. The emergence of second-screening, where consumers engage with digital devices while consuming traditional media (Neate, Jones & Evans, 2017), highlights the interconnected nature of these channels. Furthermore, the symbiotic relationship between online and offline platforms has underscored the potential for traditional channels to amplify the impact of digital campaigns, and vice versa (Kumar, Choi & Greene, 2017). Businesses are tasked with finding the optimal balance between the strengths of each channel to engage consumers effectively in a digitally infused landscape.

The rise of digitalization has also given rise to a phenomenon known as "multichannel behavior," where consumers seamlessly navigate both online and offline touchpoints during their purchasing journey (Chou, Shen, Chiu & Chou, 2016). Consumers often start their exploration online, conducting research, reading reviews, and comparing prices. However, this digital engagement is frequently followed by in-store visits to examine products physically before making a final decision. The reverse is also true, with consumers engaging with products in-store and subsequently seeking more information online. This interplay between digital and physical touchpoints creates a holistic consumer experience that requires seamless integration across channels. Businesses must recognize the importance of consistent messaging, branding, and customer service across both digital and traditional channels to cater to this multichannel behavior (Melero, Sese & Verhoef, 2016).

It is important to note that distinct age groups display specific digital behaviors, which profoundly shape their response to marketing efforts (Slootweg & Rowson, 2018). Digital natives, such as millennials and Gen Z, are more receptive to digital marketing, embracing platforms like social media and mobile apps for product discovery and engagement. On the other hand, older generations might prefer traditional channels due to established habits and a degree of skepticism toward digital platforms (Munsch, 2021). Acknowledging these generational nuances is crucial for tailoring marketing strategies to effectively engage diverse consumer segments. Understanding the digital behaviors and preferences of each generation allows businesses to craft messages that resonate and adapt channels that align with consumers' digital comfort levels.

Consumers frequently develop significant psychological and emotional bonds with traditional marketing methods. Tangible forms of marketing, such as print advertisements and direct mail, have been shown to trigger sensory experiences that create deep emotional connections. These physical interactions can lead to more enduring memory recall, strengthening the impact of the messaging. Similarly, television commercials have the power to establish emotional associations through visual and auditory cues. These emotional connections contribute to stronger brand recognition and preference among consumers (Magids, Zorfas & Leemon, 2015).

Traditional marketing channels have undergone a transformative shift by integrating digital elements into their established strategies. This evolution represents an adaptive response to the changing landscape shaped by the digital age. While the core strategies of traditional marketing, such as brand messaging and targeted reach, remain central, the incorporation of digital elements infuses these strategies with a new dimension of interactivity, personalization, and real-time engagement. One notable evolution is witnessed in print media's integration of augmented reality (AR) and quick response (QR) codes. Traditional print advertisements now incorporate interactive elements that, when scanned with a smartphone, lead consumers to digital platforms. This synergistic blend bridges the gap between the physical and digital worlds, allowing consumers to access additional content, promotions, or product information instantaneously. Such integration capitalizes on the tangibility of print while leveraging the dynamic capabilities of digital interaction (Yaoyuneyong, Foster, Johnson & Johnson, 2016).

Television, too, has seamlessly merged with digital avenues, embracing online video streaming platforms and social media (Lad, Butala & Bide, 2019). Television advertisements are no longer confined to scheduled airtime but are shared on digital platforms, expanding their reach and enabling consumers to engage with them on their own terms. The incorporation of hashtags, user-generated content, and interactive polls during live broadcasts adds layers of engagement that resonate in the digital realm. Thus, traditional television marketing adapts its core storytelling strengths to the interactive and shareable nature of the digital space.

Moreover, radio advertising has embraced podcasting, allowing for targeted content delivery in an on-demand format. Brands leverage podcasts to establish thought leadership and engage audiences deeply (Sullivan, 2019), aligning with the traditional radio's capacity to capture listeners' attention. Additionally, radio advertisements often direct listeners to websites or social media pages, underscoring the integration of digital elements to extend the engagement beyond the auditory experience.

Considering these changes in the integration of digital elements into traditional marketing channels while retaining their essential strategies demonstrates a strategic response to the demands of the digital age. This adaptation allows brands to uphold their established strengths while embracing interactivity, personalization, and real-time engagement enabled by digital platforms. The seamless integration of these elements demonstrates the durability and innovation of traditional marketing channels in an increasingly digital landscape.

3. Research methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the contemporary impact of traditional marketing channels within the context of the digital age. The central focus is to recognize how these established channels resonate with consumers, both in terms of emotional connections and behavioral responses, among the ever-expanding digital domain. To understand this complex interaction, a comprehensive questionnaire has been designed to capture key aspects of consumer engagement, perceptions, and preferences.

Besides general demographic questions needed for the sample analysis, the questionnaire included 13 questions, ranging from the frequency of encountering traditional marketing channels in daily life to the likelihood of recalling specific advertisements. Through rating scales, respondents communicated their level of engagement, allowing for a quantifiable assessment of the impressions these channels leave. Moreover, the questionnaire delves into the factors influencing consumer decisions to engage with traditional marketing, providing insights into the mechanisms driving consumer interest and involvement.

A significant aspect of this study revolves around understanding the intersection of traditional marketing channels and digital platforms. By evaluating respondents' likelihood to take digital actions after encountering traditional marketing messages and their engagement with various digital platforms, the research seeks to illustrate the extent of integration

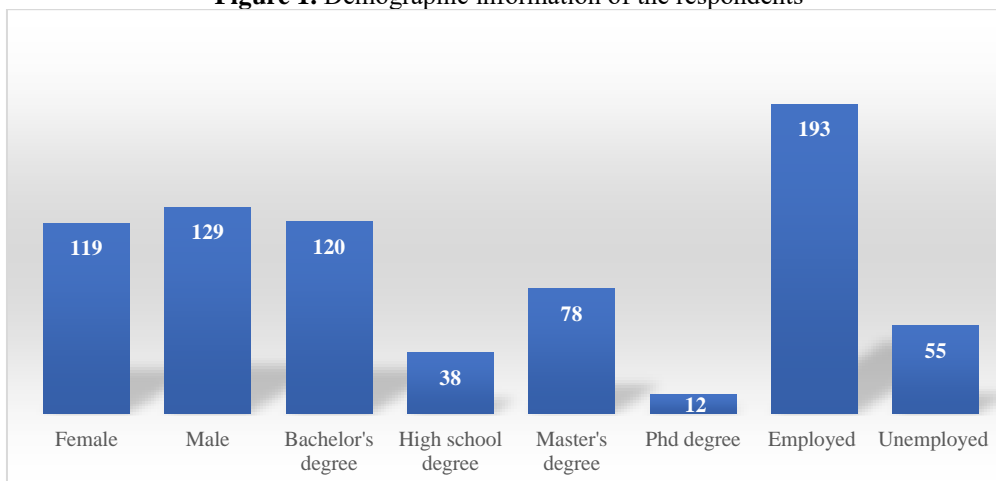
between these approaches. Furthermore, this study recognizes the evolving landscape of consumer interactions through investigating the likelihood of sharing traditional marketing content via digital platforms. This aspect not only underlines the potential for cross-channel synergy, but also highlights the relevance of traditional marketing in supporting meaningful consumer interactions. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and was distributed online to gather responses from participants. Subsequently, the collected data was examined and analyzed using SPSS software, version 23, to extract meaningful insights and draw conclusive findings.

4. Discussion

In the contemporary landscape of marketing research, understanding consumer behavior within the framework of traditional and digital marketing channels has gained significant attention. To shed light on the complex interaction between these marketing channels, a comprehensive survey was conducted among 248 respondents from Serbia. This study aimed to explore the dynamics of consumer engagement, preferences, and interactions with traditional marketing channels in the context of the digital age.

The survey included a diverse group of participants, with a balance between female and male respondents with varied educational backgrounds, which added depth to the dataset. They represented a range of academic achievements, including bachelor’s degrees, high school education, Master's degrees, and PhDs. This wide educational spectrum allowed for a comprehensive exploration of consumer behavior, considering different levels of cognitive engagement and critical analysis of marketing messages. The employment status of the participants offered a practical perspective through which to assess the implications of marketing strategies on real-world decisions. The group consisted of both employed and unemployed individuals, which provided insights into the effects of marketing communications on individuals with varying purchasing power and decision-making considerations. Detailed demographic information of the respondents is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Demographic information of the respondents



Source: Author

The findings of this study shed light on several key aspects of consumer behavior and their interaction with traditional marketing channels in the context of the digital age. The results reveal intriguing patterns that can help marketers and businesses better understand how consumers engage with and respond to traditional marketing channels.

The data indicates that a substantial proportion of participants (28% occasionally, 38% often, 22% very often) encounter traditional marketing channels in their daily lives. This suggests that despite the rise of digital platforms, traditional channels continue to have a notable presence in individuals' surroundings. Furthermore, a notable portion of participants (31%) indicated a moderate likelihood of remembering specific traditional advertisements, while a substantial segment (26%) expressed they are likely to recall them, and 13% of respondents reported a high probability of recalling such advertisements. This suggests that traditional marketing still demonstrates an effective capacity to engage consumers' attention and memory.

Regarding the recall of the marketing messages shared via different channels, television commercials emerged as the most encountered traditional channel, and had the highest average recall rating. This aligns with the visual and auditory nature of television ads, which often leave a lasting impression on viewers. Print advertisements also garnered a substantial response and were associated with a moderate average recall rating. Interestingly, radio advertisements were encountered by less than one third of the participants, and also had a quite low average recall rating, with only direct mail having a lower recall rating. This could be attributed to the absence of visual cues in radio ads, which may limit their

memorability. Table 1 shows detailed results on traditional marketing channels the respondents have encountered recently and the recall rating.

Table 1. Traditional marketing channels the respondents have encountered recently and the recall rating

Marketing Channel	Which traditional marketing channels have you encountered recently?	For each traditional marketing channel you encountered, please rate your recall of the advertised product/service on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Low, 5 = High).
Television Commercials	81%	3,9
Print Advertisements	48%	3,3
Radio Advertisements	29%	2,7
Direct Mail	19%	2,5
Billboards and Outdoor Ads	39%	3,1

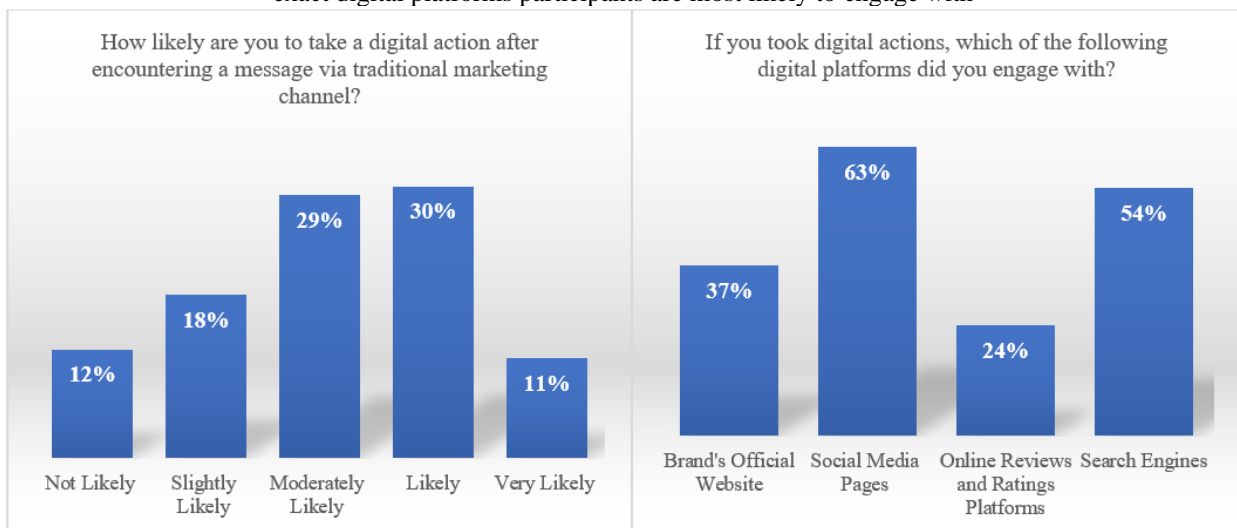
Source: Author

The assessment of participants' engagement with traditional marketing channels revealed a diverse spectrum. Notably, a considerable number of respondents (40%) reported a moderate level of engagement, while 25% and 7% expressed high engagement and very high engagement, respectively. This suggests that traditional marketing channels can foster a meaningful degree of interaction with the audience. In addition, 46% of the respondents made a purchase or took a desired action as a direct result of encountering messages via a traditional marketing channel, emphasizing their ongoing importance.

The survey also revealed diverse factors that influence respondents' decision to engage with traditional marketing channels. The highest percentage (58%) indicated that relevance to their interests and needs plays a pivotal role in their engagement. Additionally, a significant percentage of the respondents (49%) cited emotional appeal as a driving factor. Eye-catching visuals or design were noted by 42% of respondents, 37% were influenced by promotional offers or discounts, while familiarity with the brand played a role for 33% of participants. Overall, these findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of factors that shape individuals' interactions with traditional marketing channels.

The survey examined participants' likelihood to take digital actions following exposure to traditional marketing channels. Additionally, the exact digital platforms that participants are most likely to engage with after encountering traditional marketing content were explored. These results are presented in Figure 2. What can be noted from the results presented is that more than 40% of the respondents expressed likelihood or high likelihood of taking digital actions, while only 12% reported being not likely at all to take digital actions after encountering traditional marketing content. Additionally, social media pages stand out as the most commonly used digital platform after encountering traditional marketing content, closely followed by search engines. These findings imply that traditional channels can effectively prompt individuals to explore digital platforms for further engagement, emphasizing the interconnectedness of different marketing channels.

Figure 2. Likelihood of taking a digital action after encountering a message via traditional marketing channel and the exact digital platforms participants are most likely to engage with



Source: Author

The data collected indicates a broad range of participant attitudes towards the integration of digital elements into traditional marketing channels. When asked about their likelihood of engaging with a traditional marketing channel if it also includes a digital element such as a QR code or a website link, a substantial percentage of the respondents (29%)

expressed moderate likelihood, while a combined 33% reported being likely or very likely to engage with such hybrid strategies. Conversely, 38% of participants indicated a lower inclination, with 17% reporting not being likely at all. These findings highlight the complex interplay between traditional and digital components in marketing strategies, suggesting that careful consideration of audience preferences is necessary to maximize engagement and resonance.

Participants' inclination to share or discuss traditional marketing content through digital platforms showcases the potential for amplifying the reach of traditional campaigns. A significant number of respondents reported a moderate likelihood to engage in such activities (34% moderately likely, 23% likely), with a smaller percentage (5%) indicating a very likely inclination, thus suggesting that traditional marketing can trigger conversations and interactions in the digital realm, contributing to extended brand exposure. Despite living in digital age, a majority of participants (59%) believe that traditional channels have a unique impact on emotions and perceptions compared to digital channels. This result emphasizes the lasting importance of traditional marketing in shaping consumer experiences. However, when asked about the importance of adapting traditional marketing to the digital age, only 7% of the respondents do not see the need for adaptation, while a substantial number of participants (43% important, 16% very important) emphasized the need for evolution while preserving the core essence of traditional strategies.

5. Conclusion

This paper offers valuable insights into the complex interaction between traditional marketing channels and the digital age, providing a diverse understanding of consumer behavior and preferences. The findings underscore the ongoing significance of traditional marketing channels in the contemporary landscape, revealing their capacity to engage and resonate with consumers. The study has demonstrated that despite the rise of digital platforms, traditional marketing channels, such as television, print, and radio, continue to hold influence in individuals' daily lives, with television commercials emerging as a dominant channel in terms of encounter frequency and recall ratings.

The data reveals a diverse range of factors that influence consumer engagement with traditional marketing channels. Factors such as relevance to interests, emotional appeal, eye-catching visuals, promotional offers, and brand familiarity play pivotal roles in shaping consumer interactions. These findings emphasize the need for businesses to craft comprehensive marketing strategies that align with these varied influences, taking into account both the sensory and emotional aspects of consumer engagement. Moreover, this research illustrates the symbiotic relationship between traditional and digital marketing approaches, showcasing how traditional channels can effectively prompt individuals to engage with digital platforms. The integration of digital elements into traditional strategies further enhances their impact and provides an avenue for extending consumer interactions beyond initial exposure.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research is context-specific to Serbia and may not fully capture the variations of consumer behavior in different cultural or regional settings. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on quantitative data, and future research could explore qualitative aspects to provide deeper insights into the emotional and psychological dimensions of consumer engagement with traditional marketing. Moving forward, future research directions could explore the evolving landscape of consumer interactions by examining the impact of emerging technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality on traditional marketing channels. Exploring the dynamics of cross-channel integration and real-time engagement strategies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in an ever-evolving marketing landscape.

In conclusion, this research highlights the complex relationship between traditional marketing channels and the digital age, revealing their coexistence, adaptation, and continued relevance. By comprehensively examining consumer engagement, perceptions, and preferences, businesses can craft strategic marketing approaches that resonate with diverse audiences and leverage the strengths of both traditional and digital platforms. This holistic understanding of consumer behavior provides a roadmap for businesses to navigate the complications of the modern marketing landscape and prosper in an era of dynamic and interconnected communication.

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