Digital Vs. Traditional Outreach: A Consumer-Focused Comparative Study on Perceived Effectiveness and Decision Impact

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Abstract

This study looks into a key issue facing just about all customer-oriented companies: the question of whether digital outreach techniques (social networks, email messages, WhatsApp communications, and online ads) are indeed more effective than traditional outreach methods (e.g., telephone calls, personal visits, referrals, and word of mouth) in influencing the consumers' involvement in the process of making decisions to buy a particular good, or whether efficiency depends on a specific stage of the guest journey and characteristics of a transaction. The research has collected data from 163 participants through the usage of a structured questionnaire, which included 25 items measuring perceived factors (accessibility, trust, personalization, and speed) and downstream impact (queries, confidence, satisfaction, probability of recommendation) on the 5-point scale. The study applied different statistical methods, including percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, linear regression analysis, and one-way ANOVA. The findings show no clear winner among the digital channels that were analyzed because the average scores of all 20 items are between 3 and 3.3. Digital outreach seems to win a little because of its speed, while traditional outreach is a little more efficient because of the degree of personalization and trust. The biggest and most frequent finding is that satisfaction is higher when digital outreach and traditional outreach are combined rather used by themselves, in which findings are consistent with past studies on hybrid/omnichannel marketing strategy.

1. Introduction

Regardless of their size or area of activity, every business has to reach out to prospective customers. In the 20th century, this usually entailed using the methods which are now referred to as "traditional" — cold calling, print and radio advertisements, face-to-face contact, and word of mouth among others. However, with the advent of the digital age, that is no longer the case, as electronic means of communication, such as social media, email, and internet advertisements, have become the norm thanks to their efficiency and speed. It should be noted that the old, traditional method of outreach has not totally passed into oblivion. The vast majority of goods, especially high value ones, require a certain amount of personal contact before a decision is made. The combination of the effectiveness of digital methods and the trustworthiness of traditional outreach is in the center of the study described below. This study is aimed at answering the question whether electronic outreach is more effective than face-to-face method with regards to customer decision-making process. This particular question was motivated by my experience with lead generation and outreach efforts during a month-long marketing internship in the interiors trading sector, witnessing the use of both online and offline methods in practice every day. The internship by itself is not the topic of this research; it was simply the practical entry point from which the research question was shaped and is now being examined according to a consumer survey that has been conducted independently.

2. Objectives of the Study

Primary objective:

1. To investigate the different efficacies of traditional and digital methods in influencing the consumer's perceptions, engagement levels, and purchasing behaviors.

Secondary objectives:

1. To analyze the perceived accessibility, speed, credibility, and personalization of both digital and traditional outreach methods.
2. To find out whether perceptions of the different factors (accessibility, trust, etc.) on a statistical

basis account for the future influence on decision making and engagement levels.

3. To find out the existence of significant differences in outreach outcomes among the segments of the population based on their demographic and professional characteristics.
4. To establish the correspondence between hybrid outreach method and higher satisfaction from outreach in comparison with using either outreach method alone.

3. Need for the Study

1. Marketing budgets of small firms are typically very tight, and decisions on where to spend those budgets are often made based on habits, rather than evidence.
2. Commentaries on digital marketing vs. traditional marketing, however, are often general and lack concrete consumer survey data to compare the two.
3. Digital technology is being adopted much faster nowadays, but consumers still rely on traditional and word-of-mouth techniques and this creates a question for companies.
4. Current literature is divided on whether to support the effectiveness of digital approach or emphasize the continuing role of trust-based human contact.

4. Scope of the Study

The research described in this study has specific limitations it is related to how consumers perceive and respond to both traditional and digital advertising. It, however, does not focus on any particular company, product, or marketing strategy. The dates of data collection span from 2024 to mid-2026 and were conducted online, with no geographical constraints on respondents. Another limitation is that the study does not delve into post-purchase behavior or any loyalty factors; it is more about the influence of outreach and decision-making prior to making a purchase.

5. Review of Literature

Comparative Effectiveness of Digital and Traditional Marketing

Many recent papers show that digital marketing is very effective in the decision-making process of buyers through making marketing more widespread, less costly, and more engaging. At the same time, traditional marketing remains relevant for building brand trust and visibility (Gobbilla & Kiran, 2025). The systematic review of literature on the marketing of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) states that digital marketing is often better than the traditional marketing strategies in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, thus "allowing companies with fewer resources to grow (ATDE/Sage, 2025). Nonetheless, other works have shown that traditional marketing is still good in building brand awareness and reaching some audience segments, while digital marketing provides better measurability and flexibility solutions, with the appropriate mix depending on the KPI that is supposed to be improved (IJFMR, 2025; Deepa, 2022).

Trust, Word-of-Mouth, and Personal Recommendation

A new area of literature focuses specifically on the subject of trust. For example, the Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Study from 2021 surveyed 40,000 consumers from all over the world and found that 88% of consumers trust recommendations from acquaintances more than branded recommendations or advertisements, a finding that is consistent across many countries. Additionally, in the field of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), it has been shown that trust plays a mediating role in the connection between reviews/e-WOM and purchase decisions (rather than reviews leading to purchases directly) (Acadlore, 2024; Cogent Business & Management, 2025); this mediation appears to be stronger in the case of costly purchases. Ali and Javed (2023) focused on the young demographic group aged 18 to 25 similar to the demographic group of this study and concluded that e-WOM influences consumer intention to buy indirectly through trust and emotional impact rather than directly.

Hybrid and Combined Outreach Approaches

A common theme emerging in various studies is that hybrid approaches achieve better outcomes than either purely online or offline approaches. For example, Gobbilla and Kiran (2025) suggest that a mix of digital and traditional

methods can create excellent hybrid omnichannel solutions. Additionally, Kaushik (2016), who examined 110 clients, came to the conclusion that in order for ad campaigns to succeed, they must make sure to apply both traditional techniques and digital ones simultaneously, as demonstrated by the numerous failures of those startups that only used the digital marketing strategy. Further study in the home décor sector demonstrates that, although digital transformation allows for acquiring more customers, the physical experience still matters for high-involvement goods, as people frequently need to see or touch such products.

Comparable Quantitative Studies

The research which is closely similar to this study in both methodology as well as findings is a survey conducted in Kosovo among 400 respondents (HighTech and Innovation Journal, 2022), employing OLS regression in analyzing digital and traditional marketing effectiveness. The results indicate that both channels scored high enough on the effectiveness scale (traditional mean score is 3.65, digital mean score is 3.51), but preference to digital distribution means that digital marketing explains higher percentage of behavior variance as compared to the traditional channel (69.3% against 50.9%), showing similar overall trend presented in Section 8.

SME-Specific and Resource-Constrained Contexts

A different strand of research literature concentrates entirely on how smaller, less-resourced businesses are managing the issue of going digital versus staying traditional. The analytical comparison of marketing methods in India published in IJPREMS indicates that consumer engagement varies significantly between the two approaches, making a case for a balanced approach rather than defaulting to which method is less expensive to employ. In an early comparative research study conducted when internet penetration was growing rapidly in India, Das & Lall (2016) report having found that digital marketing may be cheaper to scale, however, traditional methods still have advantages in engaging older and less digitally inclined consumer segments — something that is of particular relevance to businesses dealing with different age groups rather than solely with the digitally adept demographic.

Outbound vs. Inbound Lead Generation Benchmarks

Industry-level benchmark research provides a different, but useful approach. According to the TOPO Lead Generation Benchmark Study (mentioned in SalesEcho, 2026), outbound (traditional) lead generation campaigns generate visible results in four to eight weeks; while inbound (digital) methods, such as SEO and content marketing, take six to twelve months to be effective. The same study discovered that cold outreach is 30-50% more effective than semi-warm inbound leads, but companies that use a combination of outbound and inbound marketing achieved much higher levels of growth than those working with outbound or inbound lead generation only.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

This research makes use of a quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research design. The goal was not to assess the effectiveness of an experimental intervention but rather to describe the current consumer behaviours and attitudes towards both digital and traditional outreach methods. A structured questionnaire was employed to allow for scoring and statistical analysis of the responses received.

6.2 Sampling

1. Population: General consumers
2. Sample Size: 163 respondents
3. Sampling Method: Convenience sampling

6.3 Data Collection

- Format: Five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) for 20 items, plus 5 demographic items.
- Mode: Structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms.

6.4 Data Analysis Tools

- Software: Python (pandas, scipy) and Microsoft Excel
- Tests: Percentage analysis, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, one-way ANOVA

6.5 Ethical Considerations

- People were encouraged to participate free of any influence.
- Responses were collected in anonymity, and no private information except initials was requested.
- Participants had the chance to withdraw at any time from the questionnaire without consequences.

6.6 Data Quality Note

During the data cleaning process, some responses showed signs of carelessness and were completed too quickly. This included some responses that were very similar across the answers (repeat answers for all 20 items) and a few responses received together in a short time span possibly indicating group completion. Correlation tests of a few logically related items in a subset of the sample indicated lower than expected correlation. The responses were not discarded and incorporated in the analysis but with a comment about these limitations highlighted in Section 11.

7. Results

7.1 Demographic Profile

Category	Breakdown
Gender	Male 51.5% | Female 48.5%
Age	18-25: 52.8% | 26-30: 40.5% | Other brackets: 6.7% combined
Occupation	Student 49.1% | Other 34.4% | Salaried 6.1% | Business Owner 6.1% | Self-Employed 4.3%
Digital Interaction Frequency	Occasionally 79.8% | Frequently 9.2% | Very Frequently 6.7% | Rarely 4.3%

7.2 Descriptive Statistics — Factor Effect and Impact Scores

Section B (Factor Effect, Q6-15) and Section C (Impact, Q16-25) each range from 10 (all Strongly Disagree) to 50 (all Strongly Agree) when items are summed per respondent.

Score	N	Mean	SD (approx.)
Section B Total (Factor Effect)	163	31.9	8.9
Section C Total (Impact)	163	31.9	9.0

7.3 Item-Level Means and Standard Deviations

The table below reports the mean and standard deviation for each of the 20 individual Likert items, scored 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
Q6	Digital easier to access/respond to	3.29	1.34
Q7	Digital gives faster information	3.33	1.26
Q8	Trust digital as much as direct contact	3.13	1.33

Q9	Traditional feels more personalised	3.14	1.38
Q10	Digital = less time/effort	3.10	1.27
Q11	Digital gives enough info, no human contact needed	3.05	1.29
Q12	Need direct interaction to feel confident	3.19	1.25
Q13	Easier to clarify doubts via digital	3.17	1.36
Q14	Digital drives first awareness	3.24	1.36
Q15	Traditional gives more credible first impression	3.25	1.24
Q16	Outreach method affects decision to enquire	3.28	1.23
Q17	More confident after traditional interaction	3.10	1.38
Q18	Outreach method affects decision speed	3.02	1.27
Q19	Traditional resolves concerns more effectively	3.20	1.17
Q20	Higher satisfaction with hybrid (both channels)	3.28	1.32
Q21	More likely to recommend after personal engagement	3.09	1.33
Q22	Prefer personal interaction for high-value purchases	3.23	1.26
Q23	Prefer businesses to go primarily digital going forward	3.21	1.33
Q24	Digital alone is enough to convert a purchase	3.14	1.33
Q25	Overall, digital is more effective than traditional	3.31	1.27

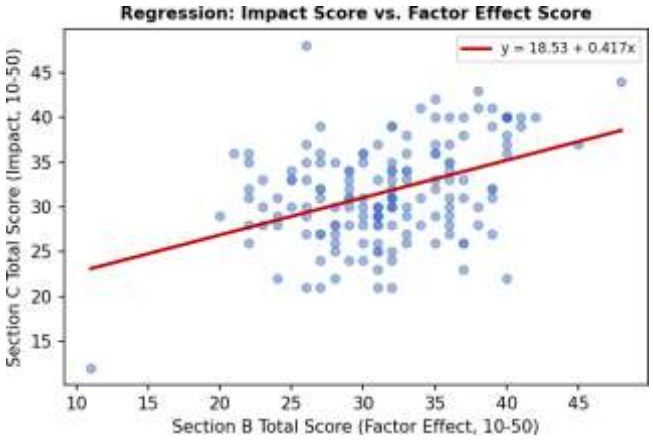
7.4 Correlation and Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression was run to test whether perceived factor-effect scores (Section B) predict downstream impact scores (Section C).

Null Hypothesis (H0): Section B (Factor Effect) score does not significantly predict Section C (Impact) score.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Section B (Factor Effect) score significantly predicts Section C (Impact) score.

Statistic	**Value**
Pearson r	0.419
R Square	0.175
Regression Equation	C_total = 18.53 + 0.417 x B_total
t-statistic (slope)	5.85
Degrees of Freedom	161
F-statistic	34.20
Significance (p-value)	< .001 (2.69E-08)



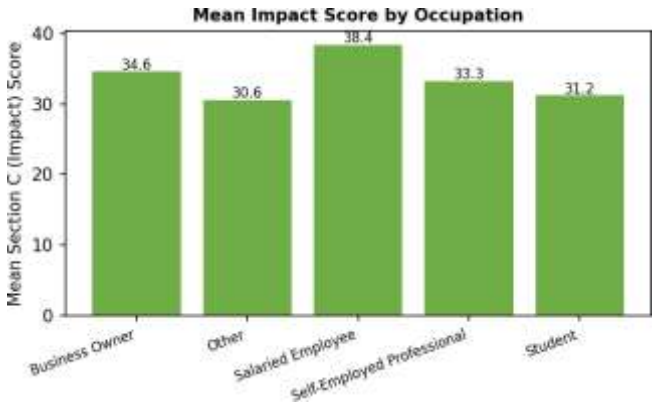
Interpretation: The regression model is found to be significant, $F(1,161) = 34.20$, $p < .001$. Section B (Factor Effect) conveys that it accounts for around 17.5% of the variance in Section C (Impact) scores ($R^2 = 0.175$). The positive sign of the slope (0.417) implies that respondents who rate digital/traditional outreach better in terms of accessibility, trust and personalisation report more positive impact. The obtained result allows rejection of the null hypothesis: the factor value is a good predictor of impact value, but the moderate R^2 shows that roughly 82.5% of the impact variance is predicted by the factors not included in this model, which corroborates with the overall finding of this research about the fact that the preference for a particular channel is not sufficient for explaining consumer decision making behaviour.

7.5 One-Way ANOVA — Impact Score by Occupation

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in mean Impact (Section C) score across occupation groups.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in mean Impact (Section C) score across occupation groups.

Occupation	**N**	**Mean**	**Variance**	
Business Owner	10	34.60	24.04	
Other	56	30.61	20.17	
Salaried Employee	10	38.40	10.49	
Self-Employed Professional	7	33.29	27.24	
Student	80	31.21	35.51	
Source	**df**	**F**	**F Critical (α=.05)**	**p-value**
Between Groups (Occupation)	4	5.73	2.43	< .001 (2.50E-04)
Within Groups	158	–	–	–



Interpretation: The values of F (5.73) being greater than F critical (2.43) and having a p-value < .05 results in null hypothesis rejection: average Impact scores differ with respect to occupational groups. The highest average Impact score (38.4) comes from employees. Business owners scored the second-highest score of 34.6, while students and the general category of "Other" groups report lowest scores (31.2 and 30.6 respectively). In other words, the comparison of scores by occupational groups suggests that the direct involvement of work activities in the area plays an important role in the perceptions of outreach method effectiveness in terms of influence on the decisions being made. Nonetheless, the results should be treated with caution because of small size of sub-groups (Business Owner, Self-Employed).

7.6 Section-Level Findings Summary

1. There isn't any significant difference among the outreach channels; average scores of the twenty Likert scales are within a narrow band of 3.0-3.3 on a scale of five points.
2. Digital outreach is slightly quicker in regard to the speed of information and initial awareness.
3. Traditional outreach is slightly better in terms of personalization, trust in the first impression, and addressing customer issues.
4. Satisfaction is the highest when both kinds of outreach are applied in combination instead of relying on one of them; this is the most important and literarily proven conclusion of this study.
5. The perceptions of the factor effects are good predictors of further influence (regression, $p < .001$) while the influence indexes vary significantly depending on the occupation of a respondent (ANOVA, $p < .001$).

8. Discussion

The findings from Section 8 match the previous literature rather than oppose it. The range of values between 3.0 and 3.3 concerning 20 Likert items corroborates the finding of Deepa (2022) that both channels have similar level of effectiveness depending on the specific context. The slight preference of digital outreach in terms of the speed of outreach (Q7) and its initial awareness level (Q14) is observed to be in line with the viewpoints of Gobbilla and Kiran (2025) about its effectiveness. The slight advantage of traditional outreach concerning personalisation (Q9) and the trustworthiness of first impression (Q15) from the results corroborate the finding made by Nielsen (2021) and previous studies on e-WOM that trust during interpersonal communication of personal character is higher than that of any marketing technique used.

Furthermore, the regression result from Section 8.4 contributes to scholarly literature in the sense that it demonstrates statistical confirmation of certain conclusions drawn from literature and adds new dimension not yet tested by previous researchers.

This supports the broader assertion that channel perception influences consumer behaviour more than merely indicates that it is related. In terms of the actual impact, the results indicate the limited strength of the predictor variable, with the R^2 of 0.175 suggesting that channel perception is only one of the reasons behind the impact which is in line with the key findings of this study, namely, that the outreach method influencing consumer decisions is not enough alone.

Impact scores for different occupations as shown by the ANOVA results is a new finding not specifically mentioned in any of the existing literature reviewed which usually describes consumers as a uniform group. However, higher impact scores for salaried workers and business owners compared to students may be explained by the fact that they are more involved in making purchasing decisions and are more likely to be exposed to marketing in their professional lives.

9. Practical Implications

1. Instead of viewing traditional and digital outreach as opposites, companies, especially those that are small or short on resources, ought to view the two types of outreach as an opportunity to mix their effort across both mediums based on data.
2. The advantages offered by traditional outreach regarding credibility at the first impression (Q15) and address of customer questions or concerns (Q19) suggest that there is an advantage for companies that rely mainly on digital outreach to include some human contact earlier in the customer journey than is usually expected, and employ personal outreach only towards the closing phase of the transaction.
3. When it comes to specific high-value or high-involvement product categories (Q22), since the digital information alone does not seem to be sufficient in such cases, the plan for the outreach strategy has to include the provision of a stage of human contact before closing the deal.
4. The large differences in the impact scores across the professions suggest that the outreach plan ought to be based on the profession of consumers to whom it is applied rather than being unified across different target segments.

10. Limitations of the Study

1. The sample (163 respondents, convenience-sampled) is bias towards younger ones and students and isn't representative of the population at large.
2. Self-reported information is about perception and recall, not about real behaviour.
3. Some responses demonstrate signs of low effort or hurried completion (see Section 7 data quality discussions) which can weaken the relationships studied.
4. The regression model used here is a simple bivariate one, leaving out non-measured variables (e.g., product category, sensitivity to prices, past brand experiences) that can explain some part of unexplained variance.
5. The sizes of ANOVA groups in the Business Owner and Self-Employed Professional categories are not big enough (n = 10 and n = 7 respectively), which prompts caution when generalising the findings about these occupations.

10.1 Directions for Future Research

1. Occupation-level ANOVA results presented in Section 8.5 being statistically reliable despite small subgroup sample sizes for business owners' and self-employed persons' categories can be achieved only if the study included a bigger and more demographically diverse sample.
2. The use of longitudinal research design can help define whether digital outreach preference will continue improving or reach a plateau because digital tools will have matured.
3. In future research, more specific questions could be asked on a certain product category (e.g., electronics, groceries, real estate) in order to decide whether the established digital-to-physical ratio varies more strongly across different purchase categories or not, compared to the general purpose survey.
4. Including extra variables in the regression model (such as product categories, price sensitivity, previous experience with the brand) is likely to increase the R^2 value of the straightforward model.

11. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to find out if digital outreach is better than traditional outreach for influencing consumer engagement and decisions, or if this outcome could be affected by contextual factors. The results obtained do not allow for arriving at a straightforward answer to this question. The analysis of responses from 163 participants

suggests that both digital and traditional outreach had similar performance regarding every variable measured, with digital being slightly better for speed and awareness and traditional being superior because of its increased levels of trust and personalization. Regression analysis shows that perceived outreach quality has a true predictive power when it comes to future engagement and decision-making results, while ANOVA enables to confirm that this effect varies depending on respondents' career. The key finding that turns out to be the most reliable and consistent with existing research is that the usage of both types of outreach together proves to be the most effective and non-embarrassing for businesses.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument (Abridged)

All items below used a five-point scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree, except Q1-Q5 (demographic).

Section A: Demographic Information

Q1. Initials Q2. Gender Q3. Age Group
Q4. Occupation/Status

Q5. Frequency of digital brand interaction (weekly)

Section B: Factor Effect (Q6-Q15)

Q6. Digital outreach is easier for me to access and respond to than traditional outreach. Q7. Digital outreach gives me faster access to information than traditional outreach.
Q8. I trust information received through digital channels as much as through direct/personal communication. Q9. Traditional outreach feels more personalised to my specific needs than digital outreach.
Q10. Engaging through digital channels requires less time, travel, or effort than traditional channels.

Q11. Digital outreach usually gives me enough information to decide without needing direct human contact. Q12. I generally need some form of direct interaction before I feel fully confident about a decision.
Q13. It is easier for me to ask follow-up questions through digital channels than traditional channels.

Q14. Digital outreach plays a bigger role than traditional outreach in how I first learn about a product/service. Q15. My first impression of a business feels more credible when formed through traditional outreach.

Section C: Impact (Q16-Q25)

Q16. The outreach method used influences whether I choose to enquire further.

Q17. I feel more confident proceeding with a purchase after a traditional interaction than after digital contact alone.
Q18. The outreach method used affects how quickly I move from initial interest to a final decision.
Q19. My concerns or questions are resolved more effectively through traditional communication than digital channels.
Q20. My overall satisfaction is higher when a business uses both digital and traditional outreach together.
Q21. I am more likely to recommend a business after it has engaged with me through personal/traditional communication.

Q22. For high-value or high-involvement purchases, I prefer some form of personal interaction before finalising my decision.

Q23. I would prefer businesses to primarily use digital methods to stay in touch with me going forward. Q24. Digital outreach alone is usually enough to convince me to move forward with a purchase.
Q25. Overall, I find digital outreach more effective than traditional outreach in influencing my purchase decisions.

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Declaration

The author prepared this manuscript using original data from surveys (with a sample size of 163) used for his current research project. This manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere, including the journals mentioned earlier. The author followed the format followed by journals in order to prepare his manuscript in a way in which submissions can be made later.