

DIGITAL VS. TRADITIONAL: SELECTED VIEWS ON CREATING OPTIMAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION MIX

DIGITALNO VS. TRADICIONALNO: ODABRANI POGLEDI NA KREIRANJE OPTIMALNE MARKETINŠKE KOMUNIKACIJE

M Market-Tržište
Vol. 37, Special Issue, 2025, pp. 85-97
UDK 658.8:658.89
658.8:316.77
DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.22598/mt/2025.37.spec-issue.85>
Review

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Abstract

Purpose – This study serves as the initial phase of a broader research project. Its aim is to examine age-specific consumer preferences as one of the fundamental starting points for understanding effective marketing communication—particularly from the perspective of the transition from traditional to digital media.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The analysis is based on the empirical research, in which the media preferences of Central European consumers were identified using the CAWI method through a questionnaire distributed to a sample of over 5,000 respondents. To better examine the selected context, graphical representations of differences based on cluster analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient were employed.

Findings and Implications – The results indicate that different age groups exhibit distinct preferences for traditional versus digital media. An effective communication mix should be based on a thorough understanding of the target market. The findings show that customers aged 55 and older tend to prefer traditional

Sažetak

Svrha – Ovo istraživanje predstavlja početnu fazu šireg znanstvenog projekta. Cilj mu je ispitati dobno specifične potrošačke preferencije kao jedno od temeljnih polazišta za razumijevanje učinkovite marketinške komunikacije – posebno u kontekstu prijelaza s tradicionalnih na digitalne medije.

Metodološki pristup – Analiza se temelji na empirijskom istraživanju u kojem su medijske preferencije potrošača iz srednje Europe ispitane CAWI metodom putem upitnika distribuiranog uzorku većem od 5.000 ispitanika. Kako bi se bolje sagledao odabrani kontekst, korišteni su grafički prikazi razlika dobivenih klaster-skom analizom uz primjenu Pearsonovog koeficijenta korelacije.

Rezultati i implikacije – Rezultati pokazuju da različite dobne skupine iskazuju različite preferencije prema tradicionalnim i digitalnim medijima. Učinkovit komunikacijski miks trebao bi se temeljiti na detaljnom razumijevanju ciljnog tržišta. Rezultati pokazuju da potrošači stariji od 55 godina preferiraju tradicionalne medije, iako

media, though they can still be effectively reached in the digital space through age-based targeting. Conversely, the data suggests that television is nearing the limits of its effectiveness for consumers under the age of 34. A combined use of communication channels is therefore highly recommended.

Limitations – The main limitation of the research is the local nature of the dataset. However, this does not significantly affect the quality or relevance of the findings.

Originality – By identifying distinct clusters, the study provides a foundation for better understanding the media market from the perspective of the target customer. As the media landscape continues to undergo digital transformation, thorough examination of this shift is essential.

Keywords – marketing communication, communication mix, internet, media, customer

ih se i dalje može uspješno dosegnuti putem digitalnih kanala uz dobno primjerene aktivnosti. S druge strane, podaci sugeriraju kako televizija sve manje djeluje na potrošače mlađe od 34 godine. Stoga se snažno preporučuje kombinirano korištenje različitih komunikacijskih kanala.

Ograničenja – Glavno ograničenje istraživanja jest lokalni karakter prikupljenih podataka. Ipak, to značajnije ne utječe na kvalitetu ni na relevantnost dobivenih rezultata.

Doprinos – Istraživanjem su identificirani različiti klasteri koji omogućuju bolje razumijevanje medijskog tržišta iz perspektive ciljnih potrošača. Budući da se medijski okruženje kontinuirano mijenja uslijed digitalne transformacije, detaljno ispitivanje tih promjena postaje nužno.

Ključne riječi – marketinška komunikacija, komunikacijski miks, internet, mediji, potrošač

1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving efficiency in a rapidly evolving and competitive market environment remains one of the core challenges in modern business practice. Notably, the concept of efficiency comprises several dimensions. This study specifically investigates the dimension of marketing effectiveness, focusing on the allocation of promotional resources and their impact on consumer engagement.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed remarkable technological progress (Tamilia, 2009). However, the application of such technologies in civilian sectors was significantly constrained due to the disruption caused by two global conflicts. In the post-conflict period, particularly in the latter half of the century, a shift towards the practical application of technology in the marketplace was observed. This development led to the emergence of the first multimedia mass communication formats, combining visual and auditory elements to enhance message delivery. Television became the dominant medium during this era, marking a new phase in marketing communication (Danaher, 2011).

In contrast to earlier forms of media, television introduced a passive mode of content consumption, requiring minimal effort from the audience. Its multimedia nature—enabling the simultaneous use of image and sound—contributed to its widespread influence and long-standing role as the central platform for mass marketing. This dominance persisted until the early 2000s, when the rapid proliferation of the internet began to transform the media landscape (Rowley, 2001).

While the internet emerged as a complementary medium in the 1990s, the subsequent rise of social media and digital platforms redefined its role in marketing communication (Felix, Rauschnabe & Hinsch, 2017). As a fully digital mass medium, the internet has integrated all previous modes of content dissemination (Muhlhauser, 1998; Pollák & Dorčák, 2010), rendering traditional, linear distribution models increasingly obsolete. Conse-

quently, consumer behaviour adapted to the new, non-linear digital ecosystem, characterized by selective, on-demand content consumption. This transformation—commonly described as the shift from offline to online environments—is well-documented in existing literature.

According to Statista (2022), by 2023, the average consumer spent approximately twice as much time engaging with digital media as with traditional media. This shift presents a critical research problem: how to construct an optimal marketing communication mix in an era dominated by digital engagement. Addressing this challenge requires a nuanced understanding of media preferences across different consumer segments.

This paper serves as the initial phase of a broader research initiative. It aims to explore whether consumer preferences for media content sources are influenced by age. Accordingly, the central research question is formulated as follows:

Are consumer preferences for media content sources influenced by age?

Although the question is dichotomous in form, it is not expected to yield a simple binary answer. Rather, the complexity of the subject matter necessitates a contextual and layered analysis. To address this, the paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, a review of the relevant literature is provided, outlining the conceptual foundations and theoretical background. This is followed by a description of the research methodology and the presentation of empirical findings. The results are subsequently discussed in light of their implications for marketing theory and practice. Finally, conclusions are drawn, limitations are acknowledged, and directions for future research are proposed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of the theoretical framework, the authors examine the fundamental pillars of marketing communication within both offline and digital environments. Since the second half of the twentieth century, corporate market-

ing communication has been predominantly shaped by traditional mass media. Although these media are referred to by various terms in the literature (de Witt, 2011; Krasnoyarova, 2015), for the purposes of this study, the terms “traditional media” or “brick-and-mortar world media” will be used—where brick-and-mortar denotes media associated with the physical, as opposed to the virtual (i.e., immaterial), world.

With the advent of the new millennium, virtual media began to occupy an increasingly prominent role in companies’ marketing mixes (Kannan & Li, 2017; Steinhoff, Arli, Weaven & Kozlenkova, 2019; Huang & Rust, 2021). This development was market-driven, spurred by the rapid increase in the number of internet users (Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018). For consistency, the term “digital media” will be used throughout this study to describe media associated with the virtual environment.

In terms of classification, Horňák and Vopálenská (2009) categorize media into five types: print, auditory, audio-visual, spatial, and mixed. Print media include both periodical and non-periodical formats, typically used for promotional purposes (e.g., posters, leaflets). Auditory media rely on sound and are perceived through the auditory system (e.g., radio). Audio-visual media engage both the auditory and visual senses. Spatial media present content in multidimensional forms, while mixed media integrate multiple methods of content dissemination to suit the needs of specific content creators.

According to the authors, each of these forms of media dissemination exists in both traditional and digital formats. In the following section, the authors explore key milestones in the evolution of the media market.

2.1. Print and auditory media

Print and audio media were among the earliest formats utilized and controlled by companies for marketing communication purposes (Kinal, 2019; Heredero, 2021). Radio broadcasting began experimentally in the 19th century and represented a major breakthrough in the media

landscape. Radio receivers were relatively accessible to a broad segment of the population, and unlike print media, their effectiveness was not hindered by lower levels of literacy. Even in its earliest stages, radio was considered a modern medium, as its initial broadcasts already included advertising content.

Print media, on the other hand, have undergone a long and complex evolution since their inception by Johannes Gutenberg (Abrahams et al., 2012; Mathai & Jeswani, 2021). From early books and pamphlets (precursors to modern newspapers), to gazettes (folded sheets containing printed news), and subsequently to journals introduced around 1960, the format continued to evolve through the development of magazines and newspapers into the forms known today (Hawkins, 2022).

2.2. Audio-visual media

The history of television can be traced back to January 6, 1884, when 32-year-old Berlin student Paul Gottlieb Nipkow filed a patent application for an electric telescope. At its core was the now-famous Nipkow disk, which became a fundamental component of all televisions and television cameras until the 1920s. This event marked the beginning of television broadcasting as a new form of mass communication (Joo, Wilbur, Cowgill & Zhu, 2013). Cinematic imagery in television advertising had a profound influence on brand perception. The mere fact that a product appeared on television often led viewers to associate it with high quality, even subconsciously. In this context, television proved difficult to replace, offering promotional potential that few other media could match.

Television had the unique ability to evoke emotion and demonstrate excitement, authority, beauty, and even a “larger-than-life” presence—qualities that made it highly persuasive and memorable. It was widely utilized by companies seeking to showcase product functionality, visual appeal, or status. However, as noted by Cézár (2007), both television and print media began to lose their capacity to shape brand identity in

the early years of the new millennium. Advertisers who had grown their brands through traditional channels became concerned that their relevance would fade unless they adapted to new modes of consumer engagement.

Traditional media had served as the backbone of marketing communication for decades. Print media, rooted in historical tradition, contributed to shaping the reputations of organizations that could afford to utilize them. Until the rise of television, radio successfully competed as a leading promotional medium. Television, however, became the dominant force in mainstream messaging and brand positioning (Keinonen, 2018). Compared to today, the late twentieth century offered a relatively limited and predictable set of marketing communication tools, which were also easy to implement.

2.3. Mixed media in digital endowment

In less than five decades, the internet has undergone a remarkable transformation—from its origins as ARPANET, a military-academic project, to the launch of the first websites. Initially, the internet posed no direct challenge to marketing management. However, this changed significantly during the final decade of the twentieth century, as development accelerated rapidly (Ahern, 1997; Petrazzini & Guerrero, 2000; Modis, 2005). While the first twenty years of the internet were dominated by a relatively small group of professionals, the subsequent decade brought about a period of hyper-evolution.

In less than five years after the launch of the first Mosaic browser, major digital platforms such as

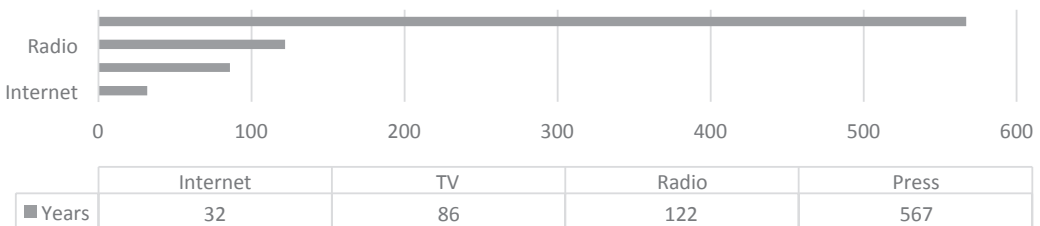
PayPal and Google emerged, reshaping the internet landscape. The pace of change increased further in the early 2000s. Within a decade of its creation, Facebook had amassed more than one billion registered users (Pollák & Dorčák, 2016). Today, this virtual social network is approaching three billion users (Meta Investor Relations, 2023).

The emergence of new-generation platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram further elevated the demands placed on marketing communication. In his book *Hit Makers*, Thompson (2017) argues that while marketers attempt to adopt current trends, these trends often lose their authenticity and appear outdated by the time they are implemented. With the number of internet users now in the billions, managing marketing communication in the digital environment has become an increasingly complex task. There are no longer any clear gatekeepers; the flow of information is decentralized and largely uncontrollable.

2.4. Decomposition of initial knowledge framework

This research is based on the assumption that the digital environment—represented by the internet—has the capacity to integrate all forms of media communication. This assumption has been confirmed in practice, as major media companies have increasingly phased out traditional, physical media formats in favour of expanded digital infrastructure. The internet, as a medium, has been present on the market for just over 30 years. Figure 1 illustrates the longevity of various media types, based on historical tradition, as interpreted by the authors.

FIGURE 1: Longevity of media



Source: Authors

Although the transition from offline to online may appear to be a hallmark of the third decade of the twenty-first century, this is not entirely accurate. As shown in the Figure 2, representing data from a developed reference market, the sharp increase in time spent online began at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. The turning point occurred between 2017 and 2018, and saturation and stabilization are expected by 2023 (Statista, 2022).

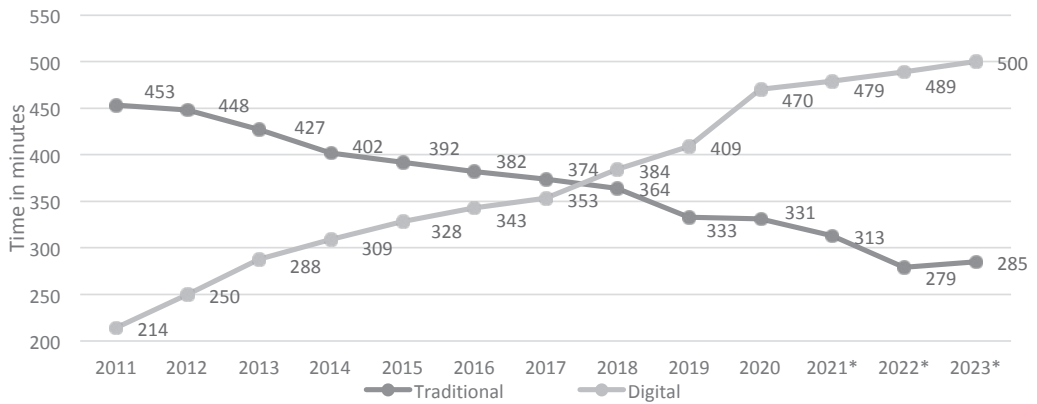
nication tools in constructing an effective marketing mix. This problem is translated into the following central research question:

Are consumer preferences for media content sources influenced by age?

This question is further articulated as a hypothesis:

H: *There is a statistically significant relationship between users' age and their preferred method of obtaining information.*

FIGURE 2: Time spent per day: Traditional vs. Digital media in U.S.A.



Source: Statista Research Department (2022). Time spent per day with digital versus traditional media in the United States from 2011 to 2023. Statista Inc.

Having established the trend, the paper proceeds to address the core research issue: the selection of optimal components in an effective marketing communication mix. A deeper understanding of this issue requires an exploration of the relationship between consumer age and media content preferences.

3. RESEARCH

The aim of this paper is to explore the fundamental aspects of marketing communication in the context of the ongoing transition from traditional to digital media. The research problem arises from observed shifts in consumer preferences regarding media content, emphasizing the need for a strategic selection of commu-

The variables used include user age (categorized into six age groups) and preferred information sources (five media types, comprising three traditional and two digital).

The research sample comprises nearly 5,000 users of a selected internet portal from in Slovakia. Participants were explicitly identified as internet users, allowing the researchers to ensure a digitally competent respondent base and to avoid possible ambiguities resulting from a misunderstanding of the questionnaire's wording. Although the sample was extracted from the anonymized database of the portal, the survey was conducted in the Slovak language. The nationality and language proficiency of respondents were not verified. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis.

The local specificity of the data is further addressed in the limitations section.

Data collection was carried out using the CAWI method, via an online questionnaire. The items were measured on five-point Likert scales and presented in Slovak. A total of 1,584 valid responses were processed using contingency tables and evaluated through non-parametric statistical methods. The significance level was set at 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$). Selected results were presented using histograms and cluster-based graphical visualizations.

3.1. Presentation of the main findings

The first step in presenting the findings involves analysing the age distribution of respondents. Table 1 summarizes the sample composition.

TABLE 1: Representation of the population in the sample in terms of age

Age range	Relative Frequency (%)*	Frequency (N)
16-24	31	484
25-34	45	707
35-44	15	239
45-54	7	113
55-64	2	39
65-74	0	2
N applicable 1584		

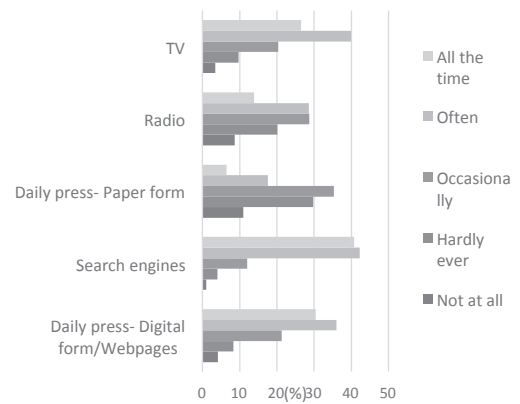
* Percentages are rounded to integers

Source: Authors

Due to the small sample sizes in the 55–64 and 65–74 age groups, these categories were merged into a new group labelled 55+ for the purposes of statistical analysis.

Preferences for information sources are illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: Visualization of findings - the preferred way of obtaining information



Source: Authors

The Figure 3 clearly shows that internet search engines are the most preferred method of obtaining information, followed by websites and television. Traditional media such as printed daily newspapers and radio lag significantly behind.

To verify the stated hypothesis, chi-square test results for each medium are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Hypothesis verification

Medium DO age	Chi-square.	df	P
TV	143.94	df=16	p=0.00
Radio	142.25	df=16	p=0.00
Daily press- Paper form	58.22	df=16	p=0.00
Search engines	96.50	df=12	p=0.00
Daily press- Digital form/ Webpages	72.56	df=16	p=0.00

Source: Authors

In all cases, the chi-square values exceed the critical value for the given degrees of freedom, and the p-values are significantly below the

0.05 threshold. Thus, the hypothesis can be confirmed: there is a statistically significant relationship between age and preferred information source across all tested media types.

3.2. Presentation of selected contexts

The analysis identified significant age-based differences in media preferences, thereby confirming the paradigm introduced in the opening section of the paper. Specifically, respondents under the age of 34 prefer internet search engines as their primary source of information, followed by websites as a secondary source. Interestingly, for the 35–44 age group, television remains a relevant source of information. In contrast, respondents aged 45–54 show a clear preference for websites and digital editions of newspapers, a pattern that mirrors the behaviour of the under-34 cohort. The 55+ age group demonstrates a dominant preference for offline sources, which aligns with prior expectations. Cluster-based visualizations provided deeper insight into the relationships among the age groups and their media preferences. Figure 4 presents a comparison of preferences for traditional versus digital versions of the daily press.

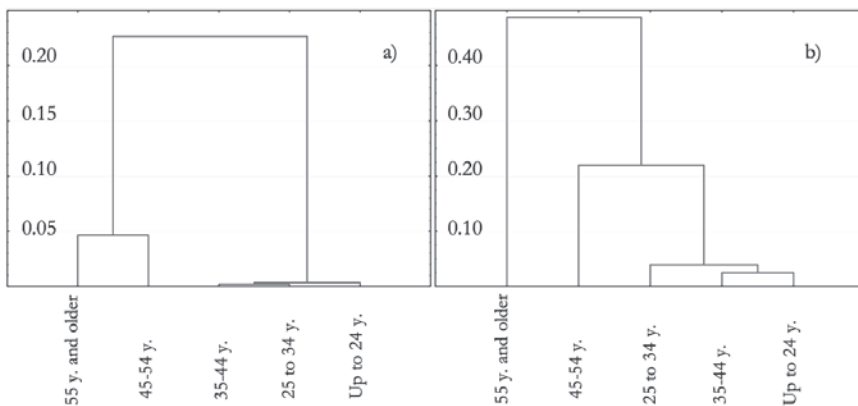
Both diagrams reveal two dominant clusters. The first, labelled the *offline cluster*, includes primarily respondents aged 45 and older. The second, the *online cluster*, consists predominantly of respondents under the age of 45. When constructing a communication mix, it is essential to consider which cluster is being targeted, as these segments appear to be largely distinct and mutually unresponsive.

The second graph below visualizes the relationship between the age of users and their preferences towards using internet search engines as a source of information. From the point of view of preferences, regardless of age, internet search engines turn out to be the most preferred information source. The correlation of the preferred information source and the age of the users is presented in the Figure 5.

The graph (Fig. 5) reveals substantial gaps between the age groups, with the 55+ group emerging as the most distinct in its behaviour. This suggests that targeting the 55+ group via search engines may be ineffective unless campaigns are specifically tailored by age.

Figure 6 presents the correlation between age and preference for two traditional media: radio and television.

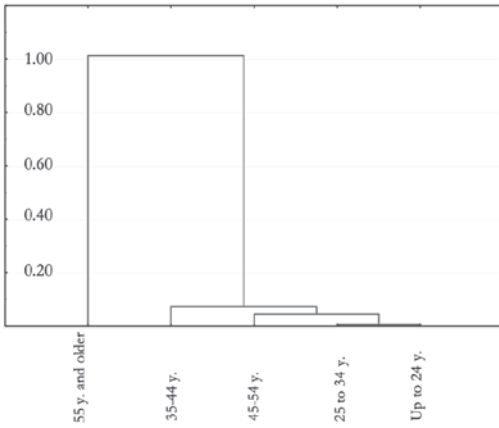
FIGURE 4: Graphical illustration of differences*- Traditional (a) and digital (b) daily press



* Diagram for 5 cases, simple connection, 1-Pearson's r.

Source: Authors

FIGURE 5: Graphical illustration of differences* - Internet search engines



* Diagram for 5 cases, simple connection, 1-Pearson's r.

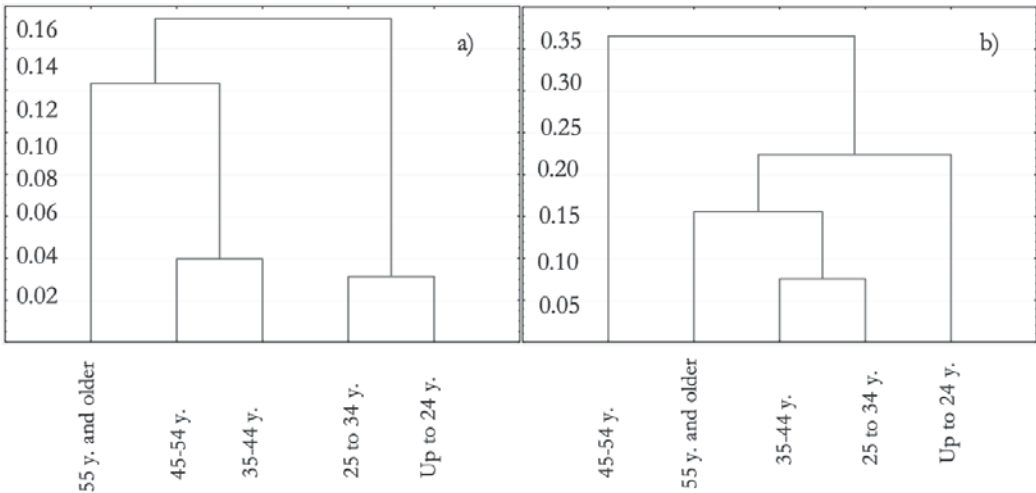
Source: Authors

tion remains a relevant information source for certain segments. However, for respondents under the age of 35, television is approaching the lower threshold of effectiveness as a communication channel.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The optimal selection of communication tools within the marketing mix represents a crucial step toward achieving efficiency. In the second half of the twentieth century, marketing managers operated primarily within the domain of traditional media, with television at the forefront of mass communication. At the time, it was nearly impossible to effectively target specific market segments, as the potential benefits of precise

FIGURE 6: Graphical illustration of differences* - TV (a) and radio (b)



* Diagram for 5 cases, simple connection, 1-Pearson's r.

Source: Authors

The visualizations indicate relatively small distances between clusters, with television showing the smallest variation across age groups. Despite the changing media landscape, televi-

targeting were often outweighed by the high costs of implementation. As a result, only highly profitable segments were actively pursued, while others remained informationally underserved.

However, profitability was not the only limitation. A further constraint was the physical accessibility of the target audience to specific media. Cézar (2007) introduced the concept of media exposure, defined as a set of time windows during which consumers are within the effective reach of a given medium. Within this framework, he identified black spots—time periods in which it was physically impossible to reach the target audience with any communication message. This situation is comparable to the pre-mobile era, when both parties had to be near fixed telephone lines in order to communicate.

This phenomenon, referred to as *media overshadowing*, remained relatively common even into the early years of the twenty-first century. With the development of mobile technologies, broadband networks, and social media platforms (Paetsch, Dorčák, Pollak, Štrba & Kršák, 2017), this limitation has become largely obsolete. The internet has not only integrated traditional mass media but also transformed communication technologies into portable, real-time tools. Today's environment is characterized by the near-instantaneous availability of information—anytime and anywhere. The primary concern is no longer access to information, but rather the credibility and authenticity of that information.

Faced with continuous innovation and growing competition, content producers are under pressure to diversify their communication strategies across an expanding array of media channels. Although this creates new opportunities to target specific segments, the speed of change often outpaces the development of effective communication tools. Marketing managers thus face the ongoing challenge of adapting to a constantly moving target. In this environment, mastering the foundational communication toolkit is more essential than ever.

The findings of this research confirm the existence of significant age-based differences in preferences for information sources. This vali-

dates the central hypothesis and provides an affirmative answer to the research question. However, as noted in the introduction, the seemingly binary nature of the question conceals a more complex reality that warrants deeper examination. While preferences are clearly influenced by age, users also form unique behavioural clusters that cannot be addressed effectively through simple demographic targeting alone.

This complexity is especially evident in the case of internet search engines. Visual data representations have revealed substantial gaps between age groups, with the 55+ cohort emerging as the most distinct. Attempts to target this group through generic online strategies—without age-specific customization—are unlikely to yield effective results.

Similarly, the application of offline communication practices in digital environments often proves ineffective, even in situations that might appear analogous—such as adapting print media content for web platforms or repurposing television content for YouTube or other social media channels. In these cases, it is essential to account for user-specific preferences across platforms, to develop integrated marketing strategies based on advanced data analysis, real-time behavioural tracking, and dynamic segmentation. Ultimately, a holistic and adaptive approach to managing marketing communication—one that reflects the pace of market evolution—represents one of the greatest ongoing challenges for both marketing theorists and practitioners.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the fundamental premises of marketing communication in the context of the ongoing transition from traditional to digital media. Based on reference literature, it can be stated that the shift toward digital media is not exclusive to the third decade of the twenty-first century. Its origins can be traced back to the turn of the millennium.

This transition has been driven by several key determinants. The first was the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) during the 1990s. Improvements in infrastructure facilitated the diffusion of innovation into everyday life. However, the static nature of the internet, combined with various technological limitations, continued to restrict its full potential. It was not until the turn of the millennium that the internet moved beyond its niche of early adopters and began reaching broader segments of the population. Another important driver of this evolution was the emergence of search engines, which made digital content more transparent and accessible. In parallel, the introduction of the first social media platforms brought interactivity into the online space, increasing user engagement. Nevertheless, during this early phase, the internet remained only a marginal tool within the marketing communication mix.

The third accelerating determinant was the expansion of data networks, accompanied by the widespread adoption of portable, internet-connected devices. These developments enabled seamless and real-time access to digital content. By the early 2010s, a significant shift from offline to online media consumption began to take shape. Around 2017–2018, time spent online equalled, and soon after surpassed, time spent offline among users in the United States. As of the early 2020s, this trend has stabilized, with digital media accounting for nearly twice as much daily usage time compared to traditional media.

In just 32 years, the internet has reshaped the media landscape. Compared to the nearly 570 years it took for print to evolve into a dominant medium, this represents an unprecedented historical development. The internet has successfully integrated all prior forms of content dissemination, becoming a convergent and multifunctional medium. However, this transformation occurred over a relatively short time span and within a single generation. It would be a mistake to assume that digital media can fully

satisfy the informational needs of all audience segments, regardless of age. Similarly, it would be erroneous to presume that communication strategies designed for analogue contexts can be seamlessly transferred into the digital environment.

This research has confirmed the validity of a key paradigm: age-related differences significantly influence user preferences for media content sources. The most notable divergences were found between users under and over the age of 45—particularly in the case of daily press consumption, regardless of format (print or digital). Additionally, television, once the dominant medium of the twentieth century, appears to be losing its effectiveness among users under the age of 34. Conversely, internet search engines show limited impact among the 55+ age group, particularly when no age-specific targeting is applied.

The most effective communication mix for the 25–34 age group combines websites and search engines. In contrast, this same combination proves least effective for the 55+ segment. These findings highlight that search engines, while powerful, are not a universal solution to all challenges of digital marketing communication. It is also important to acknowledge that the internet has not yet reached its full communicative potential. The digital ecosystem is evolving rapidly, creating new opportunities for more effective content dissemination on a near-daily basis. In this context, the ambition to conduct ongoing research on the transition from offline to online media appears fully justified and necessary.

The local nature of the dataset represents the primary limitation of the present study. The research sample consists of Central European respondents, with linguistic localization focused on the Slovak market. However, the internet as a medium is unique in its ability to eliminate geographical barriers. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that the findings may be partially generalized beyond the Central European context. More specifically, the results may be

generalizable to other markets with characteristics similar to those of developing market economies. Another key limitation lies in the inherently dynamic nature of the research topic itself. As technology continues to evolve, ongoing research is required to maintain the relevance and accuracy of findings.

In light of the aforementioned limitations, future research should focus primarily on the evolving nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The dynamic character of digital media and marketing communication creates continual opportunities to expand and refine the existing knowledge base. Given the developing nature of the market in which this research was

conducted, there is potential to generate context-specific insights that can be shared in a peer-to-peer format. Such an approach would contribute to both academic understanding and practical application, thereby supporting the advancement of knowledge in marketing science and practice alike.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by the Slovak Republic scientific grant agency VEGA, grant number 1/0110/24. This research was funded by the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, grant number 01SVV22.

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