



# Comparing digital to traditional follow-up in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration: A youth perspective on trust and satisfaction

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## Abstract

Public employment services are increasingly becoming digital. Previous literature has highlighted potential and intersectional risks associated with digitalizing these services. To address this, the current study explores the relationships between traditional and digital follow-up on the one hand, and trust and satisfaction on the other, among a sample of 1195 young people between the ages 18–25 registered with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate any variations in associations between different groups of young people who require varying levels of support (low, medium and high). Results for the whole sample suggested that both digital activity plans and face-to-face meetings were related to trust and satisfaction. For the group with low support needs, digital follow-up was positively associated with both trust and satisfaction with employment services. Among those with high support needs, both face-to-face meetings and digital follow-up were linked to trust and satisfaction. In sum, our results reveal that digital forms of follow-up are not inferior to the more traditional types of follow-up with regards to trust and satisfaction.

**Keywords**

digitalization, follow-up, electronic government, youth, trust, satisfaction

**Introduction**

The increasing application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the provision of public services, often described as digital government, has sparked questions about how technologies mediate relationships between service providers and clients (Buf-fat, 2015; Aasback, 2021). The traditional form of interaction, meeting face-to-face, provides richer information than digital interaction, and is often considered appropriate for solving complex problems (Madsen & Kræmmergaard, 2015). However, digital interaction could also provide new opportunities for connecting with young clients, providing them with an accessible, flexible, and instant service in a familiar format, which many consider a “safe space” (Fang et al., 2018). The overall objective of the present study is to explore the role of type of follow-up (traditional vs digital) for trust and satisfaction, as indicators for perceived service quality among youth receiving employment services in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

Digital interaction enables clients to seek services from the comfort of their own home, without restraining them to public service offices or their opening hours (Lindgren et al., 2019). We use the term digital interaction to describe computer-mediated contact between public services and clients. Typically, this contact lacks visual and contextual information, placing new responsibilities on clients to communicate their needs. Young clients are often considered digital natives – people who grew up with such technologies. It has been shown that previous experiences with digital interaction can influence their choice of communication channel (Madsen & Kræmmergaard, 2015). Despite this digital advantage, their online skills and engagement seem to vary, and favor otherwise privileged individuals (Hargittai, 2010). Indeed, e-government tends to reproduce existing social patterns, including marginalization (Larsson, 2021; Schou & Pors, 2019). For this reason, digital interaction between public services and vulnerable youth might not be as straightforward as first expected.

**Trust and satisfaction**

Citizens’ trust in public institutions has received increased attention in research literature in recent decades (Van de Walle, 2017; Christensen & Lægreid, 2005). According to Offe (1999), trust can be defined as “the belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to my/our wellbeing and refrain from inflicting damage upon me/us” (1999, p. 47). Trust in government institutions can be said to be two-dimensional, with both an institutional and a personal aspect (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005). In the context of NAV, this implies that a user’s trust in NAV can be directed towards individual actors, such as a guidance counselor, or in the organization as a whole. It is the former dimension of trust, i.e. the user’s trust in their guidance counselor that is an issue for investigation in the study at hand.

Citizen satisfaction with public services can be viewed as a cognitive appraisal that involves comparing the pre-service expectations with the post-service evaluation of the service delivered (Oliver, 2014). Based on previous experiences and information, citizens form a set of expectations towards a service institution. These expectations, in turn, represent a comparison basis for evaluating satisfaction with the services as citizens experience them in the present. Any gap between expectations and the perceived service quality at present is referred to as “expectancy disconfirmation” and results in low satisfaction scores (Van Ryzin, 2004).

While trust and satisfaction with public services are related (Kampen et al., 2006), they are not always positively correlated (Fledderus, 2015). For example, citizens may trust their government officials but still be dissatisfied with the quality of public services, or vice versa. Moreover, whereas satisfaction seems to relate directly to the outcomes of services, trust is more closely linked to the evaluation of the service delivery process (Bouckaert & van de Walle, 2003; Van Ryzin, 2015). Nonetheless, both trust and satisfaction are regarded as important outcomes of public services and may as such be viewed as indices of service quality (Fledderus, 2015).

While there is research examining the satisfaction and trust of NAV clients with their services overall (Nyberg et al., 2021) and with digital services in particular (Hansen et al., 2018), there are few studies comparing how traditional and digital modes of interaction are associated with perceived service quality. This is the gap in knowledge that we aim to address in the current study.

## Research context

### NAV and young clients

NAV comprises the public employment services, social services, and the national insurance administration. This forms a large welfare organization, which consumes about one-third of the national budget each year. All Norwegians will be in contact with NAV during their lifetime, from claiming child benefits to pensions – and all the life events in between that require social and economic support, such as unemployment. In this article, we focus on the labor-oriented follow-up of young clients, which is a core task at the local NAV offices. Despite this focus, clients can have more complex needs, receiving both social services and benefits, in addition to labor-oriented counselling.

Young clients in NAV are a heterogeneous group ranging from those positioned closer to the labor market to those with complex service needs, such as clients with social problems or health issues. Often, research focuses on clients in vulnerable situations – that is, situations that places them at risk of labor-market exclusion. Examples of risk factors are low levels of education and health issues (Fyhn et al., 2021). Clients' family background and socio-economic situation can also make them vulnerable (Fyhn et al., 2021). However, there are also clients in NAV with lower support needs, who primarily register as jobseekers to receive benefits. Yet, there are some common characteristics that can put them all at risk. First, young clients often have limited work experience, which can make it difficult for them to find a job. Second, these clients often have limited experience with navigating public services, which can result in underconsumption of services. However, it is important to help these clients back to work to avoid long-term exclusion from the labor market. This makes young clients a prioritized group in NAV.

Since clients are heterogeneous and have varied needs, public service organizations assess and categorize clients to prioritize limited resources, organize services and structure frontline work (Caswell et al., 2010; Gjersøe, 2016; Van Berkel et al., 2017). In NAV, all clients are assessed to determine their service needs. This includes an assessment of their current situation and its influence on labor market participation, as well as their subsequent need for support to find a job. The four categories are “standard effort” (low support), “situational effort” (medium support), “specially adjusted effort” (high support) and “permanently adjusted effort” (“parked”; Gjersøe, 2021). However, the latter category of clients usually does not receive employment services due to decision letters indicating various forms of permanent disability and reduced work ability that makes them unable to enter/reenter the labor market (Fugletveit & Lofthus, 2021).

## Digital services in NAV

NAV is often considered a prime example of public sector digitalization. The organization operates under “ideal” conditions, with a population that has access to digital technologies and the skills to use them (see, for example, European Commission, 2022). NAV increasingly utilizes digital platforms to connect with clients. Now, clients have access to more information on NAV’s webpages, different communication channels (written chat, video chat, chatbot, etc.) and digital self-service solutions. In addition, workers document more of their work online, such as posting summaries from face-to-face meetings in the digital dialogue, meaning that clients have greater “backstage” access to frontline work and new opportunities to “edit” the case presentation (Røhnebæk & Løberg, 2021).

In 2017, NAV introduced a new “Channel Strategy” aiming to route clients through multiple media channels (Fugletveit & Lofthus, 2021), organizing the interaction between NAV and clients. The general idea is to route clients with low needs for support to digital channels and meet clients with complex service needs face-to-face. Clients who are not digital will be followed up as before in NAV, through letters, phone calls and face-to-face meetings. The purpose of these new communication channels is not to reduce the number of face-to-face meetings, but rather to reallocate resources – by encouraging resourceful clients to use digital communication channels, it is supposed to free up time to follow up vulnerable clients. In addition, digital channels encourage clients to schedule and plan appointments in advance, which is supposed to reduce ad hoc meetings. These channels also reflect the internal organization of NAV, showing how digitalization and organization is becoming interweaved (Breit, 2019). Local NAV offices provide labor-oriented counselling in one channel. Other requests are in principle directed to centralized contact centers. Using the correct channel will lead clients to the person in NAV who can answer their question, which is supposed to make services better.

According to recent research, one of the most frequently used digital communication channels for interaction between NAV and clients is the dialogue in the digital activity plan (Proba, 2022). This is a digital tool comprising several components. First, the objectives for the follow-up are described in the digital activity plan. These are decided jointly between the client and the NAV counselor. Second, the client may suggest activities to achieve the objectives and report status for the activities. Finally, the digital activity plan also contains a dialogue function, in which the client can make direct contact with their counselor, and vice versa (Hermanrud, 2022). While this plan can provide clients with greater ownership of their case, it can also raise expectations of active clients, placing new responsibilities on them (Bergum et al., 2020; Breit et al., 2021; Pors & Pallesen, 2021).

## Study objectives

The overall aim of this study was to explore relationships between types of follow-up and young clients’ service perceptions. The first objective was to investigate associations between the degree to which clients received different types of digital and traditional follow-up, and how they perceived the services provided by NAV in terms of overall satisfaction and trust. The second objective was to explore whether these associations differed between the three support categories (low, medium and high support).

## Methods

### Design and data collection procedure

This study was designed as a cross-sectional study of youth aged 18–25 years and registered with NAV. The study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (reference number 737672). Individuals within this age span receiving permanent disability pension were excluded as they most often do not receive any assistance from NAV other than monthly monetary benefit. The survey was developed in close collaboration with NAV and a group of young people to make sure that the questions were relevant and easy to understand for the target group (see Sadeghi et al., 2023 for details).

The survey consisted of questions regarding demographics, frequency of types of follow-up, overall satisfaction with NAV, and trust towards the frontline workers. A total of 51 228 young people/individuals met these inclusion criteria. Of these, a random sample of 15 228 individuals were drawn and invited to the web-based survey, of which 1195 participated in the survey. This constitutes a response rate of only 8%, which is not surprising given the established finding that young people are a particularly hard-to-reach survey population (Schoeni et al., 2013). Respondents were asked if they consented to the collection of registry data from NAV. For those who consented, registry data on need for support were linked to these respondents' survey responses. Hence, two study samples were defined for this study: Sample 1 encompassed all survey respondents ( $N = 1195$ ), while Sample 2 constituted a sub-sample of respondents for whom registry data on need for support were collected ( $N = 622$ ).

Sample selection analyses (see Table 1) indicated some differences between the study samples and the population, based on distributions of gender, age and need for support. Females were somewhat overrepresented in our samples, while there were only minor differences regarding age. High-support clients were slightly underrepresented. However, the pattern of need for support was comparable between the sample and the population (highest prevalence of clients with high need for support, followed by medium and low need for support).

**Table 1.** Sample selection analyses: Characteristics of the study samples compared with the population on distributions of gender, age and need for support

	Sample 1 <sup>A</sup> (N=1195)	Sample 2 <sup>B</sup> (N=622)	Population <sup>C</sup> (N=51228)	Difference Sample 1 and Population	Difference Sample 2 and Population
Gender (% female)	63.0	62.0	48.0	pp <sub>diff</sub> = 15.0***	pp <sub>diff</sub> = 14.0***
Age (M)	22.5	22.4	22.2	M <sub>diff</sub> = 0.26***	M <sub>diff</sub> = 0.18***
NFA low (%)	-	8.0	13.0	-	pp <sub>diff</sub> = 5.0***
NFA medium (%)	-	16.0	21.0	-	pp <sub>diff</sub> = 5.0***
NFA high (%)	-	52.0	43.0	-	pp <sub>diff</sub> = 9.0***

Note. <sup>A</sup>All clients who responded on the survey; <sup>B</sup>Sub-sample for whom registry data were collected; <sup>C</sup>Population-level (aggregated) data obtained from the NAV; pp<sub>diff</sub> = difference in percentage points between compared groups (tested with chi square test); M<sub>diff</sub> = mean difference between compared groups (tested with one-sample t-test); M = mean; NFA = need for support; \*\*\*p < .001

## Measures

*Type of follow-up (predictors).* To measure type of follow-up, we asked respondents to rate the frequency to which they have received the following follow-up types: the traditional types of follow-up face-to-face meetings and phone calls, and the digital types of follow-up

video meetings and dialogue in the digital activity plan. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4 (0=not at all; 1=1-2 times the last six months; 2=1-2 times a month; 3=once a week; 4=several times a week).

*Trust (outcome).* Trust in guidance counsellor was measured by means of a nine-item scale partly inspired by the Citizen Trust in Government Organisations scale (Grimmelikhuisen & Knies, 2017). Each of the nine items were rated on scales ranging from 0 to 4. In an attempt to ensure approximately equal difference between the adjacent response categories, text labels appeared only on the lower (0=completely disagree) and upper (4=completely agree) ends, with numbers in between. A mean score of the nine items was calculated, where higher scores indicated higher levels of trust. Analyses of structural validity and internal consistency were conducted to explore the measurement properties of the nine-item trust scale. Exploratory factor analysis identified a satisfactory one-factor solution (% explained variance=76) with excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha=.96$ ).

*Satisfaction (outcome).* Overall satisfaction with NAV was measured by a single item with the following wording: “Thinking about your experiences with NAV during the last six months, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with NAV?”. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction on a six-point scale ranging from 0 to 5. Text labels appeared only on the lower (0=very dissatisfied) and upper (5=very satisfied) end, with numbers in between. Previous research has demonstrated acceptable validity of single-item measures of satisfaction (e.g., Cheung & Lucas, 2014).

*Need for support (grouping variable).* Clients’ estimated need for support (low, medium, high) was based on registry data collected from NAV. Need for support was utilized as a grouping variable, enabling separate analyses for clients with low, medium and high need for support, respectively.

*Covariates.* Gender (0=female; 1=male), age (18–25 years) and educational level were included as covariates in the main analyses. Educational level included the following values: 0=lower secondary school; 1=started upper secondary school but not completed; 2=upper secondary school; 3=post-secondary vocational school; 4=higher education (1–3 years); 5=higher education ( $\geq 4$  years).

## Statistical analyses

The main study variables were analyzed descriptively and presented in terms of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, as appropriate. Associations between types of follow-up on the one hand, and trust and satisfaction on the other, were analyzed by means of multiple linear (OLS) regression. OLS regression presupposes continuous outcome variables. Trust and satisfaction were measured ordinally in our study, but OLS test assumptions were appropriately met in our data, i.e., in terms of approximately equal difference between adjacent categories on the response scales, and by the outcome variables having satisfactory distributed residuals. Variance inflation factors (VIF) were estimated in order to explore potential multicollinearity. Multicollinearity was deemed a concern if VIFs exceeded 2.5 (Johnston et al., 2018). All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS version 27, and statistical significance was defined as  $p < .05$ .

## Results

As shown in table 2, clients reported quite high levels of trust in their guidance counsellor ( $M = 2.90$  on a scale ranging from 0 to 4), but somewhat lower satisfaction with services

provided by NAV ( $M = 2.69$  on a scale ranging from 0 to 5). Digital activity plan was unambiguously the most frequently received type of follow-up, while video meetings were the least frequent. Clients with medium need for support generally reported lower frequency of all types of follow-up than their counterparts.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for the main study variables

	Sample 1 <sup>A</sup>	Low support <sup>B</sup>	Medium support <sup>B</sup>	High support <sup>B</sup>
Trust, $M$ ( $SD$ )	2.90 (1.10)	2.83 (0.97)	2.81 (1.24)	3.01 (1.02)
Satisfaction, $M$ ( $SD$ )	2.69 (1.60)	2.60 (1.66)	2.70 (1.64)	2.69 (1.55)
Reg. digital activity plan, %	37.9	40.0	32.0	40.9
Reg. video meetings, %	3.1	1.8	0.9	1.8
Reg. phone calls, %	16.7	15.0	10.5	16.8
Reg. face-to-face meetings, %	7.4	7.0	3.2	7.3

Note. <sup>A</sup>All survey respondents; <sup>B</sup>Sample 2 (sub-sample of Sample 1);  $M$  = mean;  $SD$  = standard deviation; Reg. = regularly (at least 1-2 times a month) receiving the specific type of follow-up

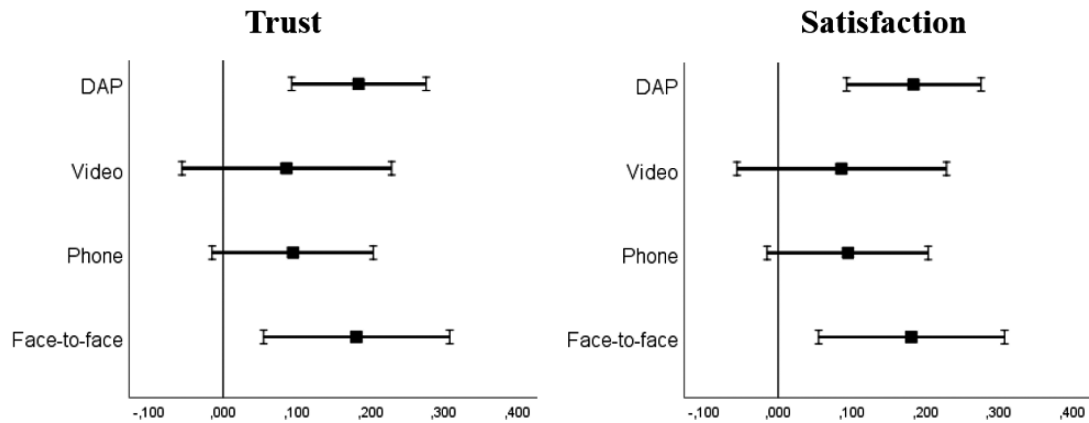
### Are types of follow-up associated with trust and satisfaction?

Associations between types of follow-up and the outcomes (trust and satisfaction) are presented in Table 3 and Figure 1. Traditional face-to-face meetings and digital activity plan were significantly associated with both trust and satisfaction, even when adjusting for covariates. A one-unit increase in the frequency of face-to-face meetings was associated with positive changes of 0.18 points on the trust scale (potential range: 0-4), and 0.28 points on the satisfaction scale (potential range: 0-5). An equal increase in the frequency of receiving a digital activity plan was comparable with face-to-face meetings, with positive changes of 0.18 points on trust and 0.33 points on satisfaction. Frequency of phone calls and video meetings were not significantly associated with trust or satisfaction. Variance inflation factors ranged from 1.01 to 1.33, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

**Table 3.** OLS regression with trust and satisfaction as outcomes (Sample 1)

	Trust			Satisfaction			VIF
	b	CI for b	$\beta$	b	CI for b	$\beta$	
Face-to-face meetings	.18**	.06, .31	.11**	.28**	.12, .44	.12**	1.27
Phone calls	.10	-.02, .20	.07	.03	-.11, .17	.02	1.33
Video meetings	.09	-.06, .23	.04	.16	-.02, .33	.05	1.06
Digital activity plan	.18***	.09, .28	.15***	.33***	.22, .45	.19***	1.20
Age	-.04	-.08, .01	-.07	-.05	-.10, .00	-.06	1.16
Gender	-.08	-.24, .08	-.03	-.18	-.38, .02	-.06	1.01
Education	.15***	.07, .23	.15***	.13**	.04, .23	.09**	1.18
$R^2$	.081			.079			

Note. b = unstandardized coefficient; CI = 95 % confidence interval;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; VIF = variance inflation factor;  $R^2$  = explained variance; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001



**Figure 1.** Forest plots showing associations between types of follow-up and the outcomes (trust and satisfaction) (Sample 1), adjusted for covariates. Unstandardized regression coefficients (b) with 95 % confidence intervals are presented in the plots. DAP = digital activity plan.

Do relationships between types of follow-up and trust and satisfaction differ between support groups?

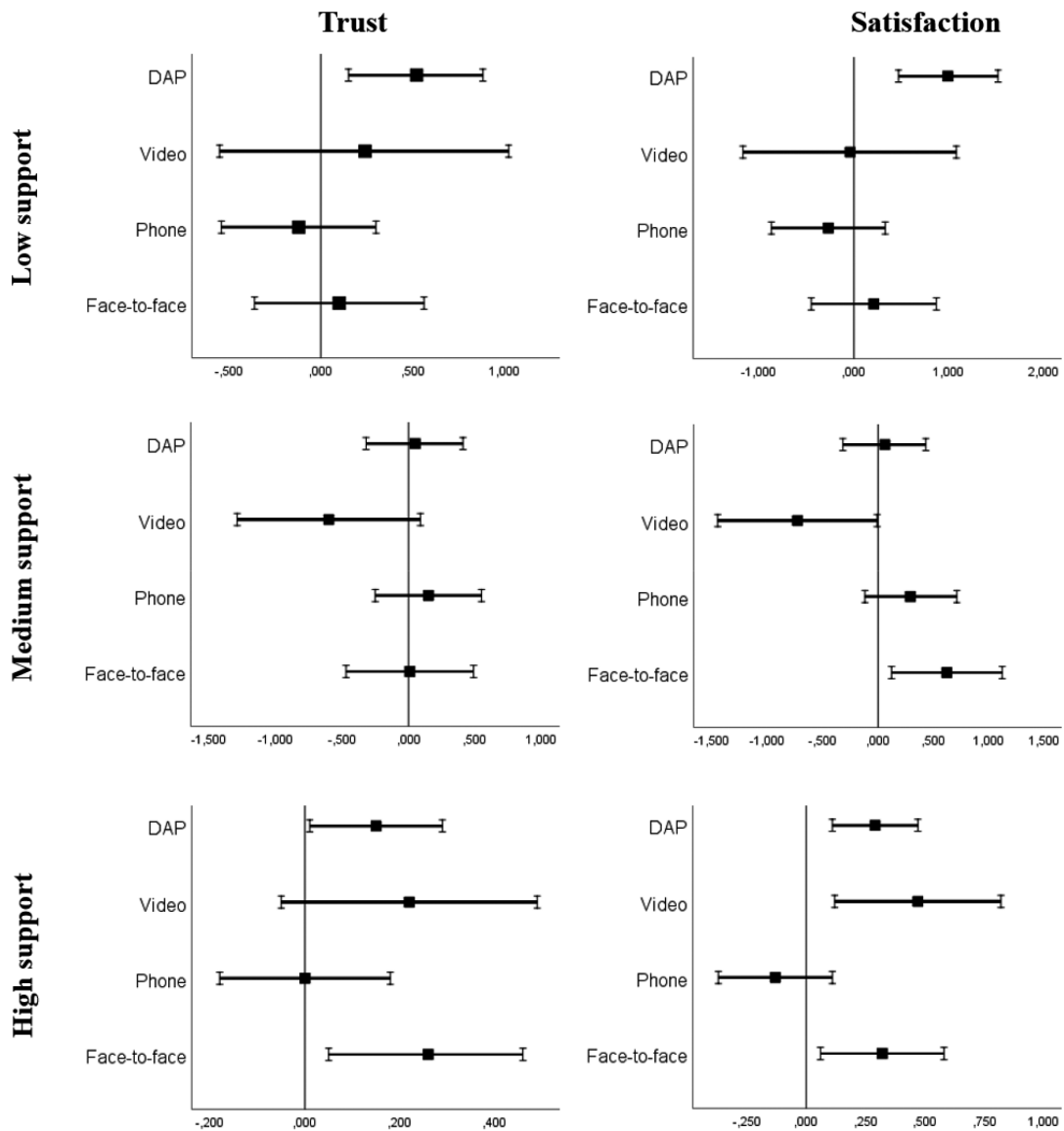
Associations between types of follow-up and the outcomes (trust and satisfaction), according to need for support, are presented in Table 4 and Figure 2, indicating some differences between the groups. Increased use of digital activity plan was associated with higher trust and satisfaction for clients with low need for support, but unrelated for clients with medium need for support. Face-to-face meetings were positively associated with satisfaction for clients with medium need for support, positively related to both trust and satisfaction for clients with high need for support, and unrelated for clients with low need for support. Video meetings were positively associated with satisfaction for clients with high need for support, and unrelated for those the low support group. The higher frequency of video meetings was associated with lower satisfaction for medium support clients. Multicollinearity was not a concern, due to variance inflation factors ranging from 1.03 to 1.53.



**Table 4.** OLS regression with trust and satisfaction as outcomes, according to need for support (Sample 2)

	Low support			Medium support			High support		
	Trust b (CI)	Satisf. b (CI)	VIF	Trust b (CI)	Satisf. b (CI)	VIF	Trust b (CI)	Satisf. b (CI)	VIF
<i>Type of follow-up</i>									
Face-to-face meetings	.10 (-.36, .56)	.21 (-.45, .87)	1.34	.01 (-.47, .49)	.62* (.12, 1.12)	1.13	.26* (.05, .46)	.32* (.06, .58)	1.27
Phone calls	-.12 (-.54, .30)	-.27 (-.87, .33)	1.31	.15 (-.25, .55)	.29 (-.12, .71)	1.21	.00 (-.18, .18)	-.13 (-.37, .11)	1.34
Video meetings	.24 (-.55, 1.02)	-.04 (-1.17, 1.08)	1.07	-.60 (-1.29, .09)	-.73* (-1.45, -.01)	1.04	.22 (-.05, .49)	.47** (.12, .82)	1.08
Digital activity plan	.52** (.15, .88)	.99*** (.47, 1.52)	1.29	.05 (-.32, .41)	.06 (-.32, .43)	1.13	.15* (.01, .29)	.29** (.11, .47)	1.20
<i>Covariates</i>									
Age	-.10 (-.26, .06)	-.12 (-.35, .10)	1.30	.00 (-.15, .16)	-.04 (-.20, .12)	1.21	-.04 (-.10, .02)	-.06 (-.14, .02)	1.15
Gender	.22 (-.46, .90)	-.21 (-1.18, .76)	1.19	-.06 (-.66, .53)	-.58 (-1.20, .04)	1.06	-.04 (-.30, .21)	-.06 (-.39, .26)	1.03
Education	.43** (.13, .73)	.233 (-.20, .66)	1.53	.06 (-.25, .37)	.13 (-.20, .45)	1.19	.12 (-.00, .24)	.16* (.01, .31)	1.19
R <sup>2</sup>	.328	.292		.055	.166		.079	.081	

Note. b = unstandardized coefficient; CI = 95 % confidence interval for b (lower, upper); VIF = variance inflation factor; R<sup>2</sup> = explained variance; \*p <.05; \*\*p <.01; \*\*\*p <.001



**Figure 2.** Forest plots showing associations between types of follow-up and the outcomes (trust and satisfaction), according to need for support (Sample 2) and adjusted for covariates. Unstandardized regression coefficients (b) with 95 % confidence intervals are presented in the plots. DAP = digital activity plan.

## Discussion

In the study at hand, we have investigated how traditional and digital follow-up are related to satisfaction and trust among youth receiving employment services from NAV. Moreover, we explored differences between support categories regarding associations between follow-up and trust and satisfaction. Overall, the results revealed moderate levels of satisfaction with the services and rather high levels of trust among the youth in a time with increasing application of digital services, and both digital and traditional follow-up were associated with trust and satisfaction for the whole sample. Some differences between the categories of youth were found. Whereas for the low support group, only digital follow-up yielded positive associations with trust and satisfaction, the picture was more nuanced for the high-support group. In the following sections, we will discuss these main findings.

## **Associations between types of follow-up and trust and satisfaction for the whole sample**

Our findings indicated that overall, digital forms of follow-up are not inferior to the traditional ones. In fact, considering the whole sample as one, dialogue in the digital activity plan was associated with trust and satisfaction to a higher degree than face-to-face-meetings. However, these differences were small. The fundamental observation is that those who to a high extent receive follow-up face-to-face and via the digital activity plan are more satisfied and trustful towards their counsellors compared to those who don't receive such follow-up to the same extent. This could mean that merely receiving frequent follow-up is the main factor associated with trust and satisfaction.

Nevertheless, we did not detect the same associations between video meetings and telephone follow-up on the one hand and trust and satisfaction on the other. First, this indicates that it is the specific forms of digital activity plan and face-to-face-meetings that are the active elements in the associations with trust and satisfaction. Second, our findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between various forms of digital and traditional follow-up. Whereas both phone calls and face-to-face meetings are considered traditional forms of follow-up, video meetings and digital activity plan are examples of digital interaction. Thus, it could be unvarnished to solely distinguish between digital and traditional follow-up. Future research should therefore take this notion into consideration.

## **Associative differences between categories of youth**

Our study revealed some noteworthy associative differences between categories of youth in need of various levels of support. For those in need of low support, our findings indicated that only the follow-up form dialogue in the digital activity plan was linked to trust and satisfaction. This implies that this specific form of follow-up is adequate for this group of youth and probably superior to other forms of follow-up. One reason for the findings related to the digital activity plan could be improved access to counselors. Previously, clients had to call or show up at local offices to reach their counselors, which often involved communication with intermediaries (Løberg, 2021). Now, digital dialogue provides them with a direct line of communication (Breit et al., 2021; Løberg, 2021).

Although digital activity plan seems to be the most appropriate type of follow-up for the low support group, the findings are less straightforward for those in need of high levels of support. This latter group of youth are considered to have more complex problems and hence higher need for support from NAV in order to (re)enter the labor market. Face-to-face-meetings are believed to be well suited for solving complex problems (Reddick, 2009; Aasback, 2021; Madsen & Kræmmergaard, 2015). It is perhaps more surprising that digital interaction is also linked with trust and satisfaction for this high support group. Previous research based on the perspectives of frontline workers indicates that building trust with clients through digital interactions is more challenging compared to traditional modes of interaction (Aasback, 2021). However, other scholars have demonstrated that the digital activity plan can benefit those with high need for support (Liaaen et al., 2021).

The finding that for the high support group, a wide range of follow-up types (digital activity plan, video meetings and face-to-face meetings) are associated with both trust and satisfaction, suggests they are in need of a variety of follow-up methods. On the one hand, the results could imply that the individual clients within this group need different forms of follow-up depending on the situation in question. On the other hand, the findings could

also mean that the group in question is more heterogeneous than their counterparts, and hence different kinds of follow-up are deemed satisfactory for the different clients, meaning that one size does not fit all. These two indications are not necessarily mutually exclusive and both propositions can operate side by side. The practical implications of our findings regarding those in need of high level of support are consistent with a large body of literature arguing that digital interaction, for many reasons, cannot replace face-to-face meetings, but rather complement them (Byrne & Kirwan, 2019; Mishna et al., 2019; Hansen et al., 2018; Sand et al., 2020; Bryan et al., 2020; Edwards et al., 2017).

## Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. The response rate of 8% is considered particularly low. This is perhaps not surprising considering young employment seekers are a challenging population to reach. However, the low response bias may impact the validity of the results in this study. In addition, women are overly represented in this sample while there were only minor differences detected in terms of age. Notably, gender is not a significant predictor in the analyses. The survey was web-based, distributed via NAV, and required a basic understanding of the Norwegian language. Even though the eligible sample was randomly drawn from the target population (youth registered at NAV), we cannot rule out selection bias in the final study samples due to factors such as language comprehension, digital skills, and trust in NAV.

The cross-sectional design used in this study makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between the variables with a high degree of certainty. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. For instance, even though it was found that trust and satisfaction are linked to frequent use of digital activity plans, it would be incorrect to assume that such use causes the outcomes. It is possible that individuals who are already more satisfied and trusting are inclined to use digital activity plans more frequently. Therefore, in order to advance such investigations, future research should consider using more suitable designs such as longitudinal and experimental studies.

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