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The Influence of Search Engine Marketing on the Consumer Decision Making Process in South Africa

De Abreu, Delia Maria Freitas

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The Influence of Search Engine Marketing on the Consumer Decision Making Process in South Africa

Delia Maria Freitas De Abreu

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

Johannesburg, 2013

ABSTRACT

Information overload is an issue which consumers are increasingly faced with, and Internet search engines act as a means to assist consumers in overcoming this problem. In an age of technological advancement where Internet and search engine usage has demonstrated exponential growth, marketers have witnessed the emergence of search engine marketing as a new marketing channel of importance. Search engine marketing is unique in that it occurs closer to consumer purchase decisions than any other marketing channel has accomplished before: at the exact moment when a consumer is actually looking for a desired product or service.

This research investigates how Internet search engines as marketing channels influence information search, evaluation of alternatives and the purchase decision of South African consumers.

A mixed method approach was used as the research paradigm, with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative phase involved a convenience sample of 10 face-to-face interviews, and the resultant data was content analysed to understand the important issues related to search engine marketing that influence consumer decision processes. These issues were used to develop the questionnaire for the quantitative phase, which was administered electronically and completed by 201 respondents. The resultant data was analysed using exploratory factor analysis. The quantitative study served to confirm the findings from the qualitative study and provide more reliable insights about the population, while ultimately also answering the research questions.

The results of this research found that South African consumers' search for information is influenced by a "search criteria" factor, while the evaluation of alternatives is influenced by an "evaluation criteria" factor, and the purchase decision is influenced by a "purchase criteria" factor, all related to search engine marketing. Additionally, a number of contingency factors, which do not form part of but influence the decision making process of South African consumers, were

identified as “high and low involvement”, “sponsored listings”, “purchasing offline” and “type of product”.

The key message of this research is that search engine marketing campaigns are critical to the long-term profitability of companies operating in an electronic age. The identified factors relating to search engine marketing that influence the decision making process should be considered by marketing managers, and search engine marketing strategies formulated accordingly. And finally, new search engine marketing strategies should ideally be integrated with current marketing strategies to ensure optimal success.

DECLARATION

I, Delia Maria Freitas De Abreu, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Delia Maria Freitas De Abreu

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 2013

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my Mother. Thank you for your endless encouragement and support from the day I started until the day I was finally complete. Your love, kindness and faith are an inspiration to me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to:

Professor Geoffrey Bick, my supervisor – Thank you for your continued guidance, patience and motivation. The valuable input you so willingly provided and all the time and effort you put into assisting me to complete my research report is genuinely appreciated.

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Derrick, the Love of my Life – Thank you for always being there for me and giving me much needed love and support, especially during the 'final stretch'.

I truly could not have done this without you all.

And most importantly, I thank the Almighty God for giving me the strength and ability to do this.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to determine how Internet search engines as marketing channels influence the decision making process of South African consumers.

1.2 Context of the study

Total comprehension and assimilation of the vast quantity of information that humans are exposed to is impossible, which is why reducing valves are sought by consumers so as to make sense of the overload of information available (Rust 1997). Reducing valves serve as a solution to the problem of information overload by decreasing the amount of information a human is presented with, at certain points in time, into amounts which are easier to absorb. Rust (1997) goes on to say that search engines are the reducing valves for the Internet since they break down the millions of possible websites into manageable numbers for consumers, therefore increasing the usefulness and popularity of the Internet, and consequently leading to the Internet's exponential growth.

Search engines utilise computer programmes called spiders to search the Internet and crawl through website pages, analysing and storing words found within the content of the pages, so that when a user types in a keyword or phrase into a search engine the spider can apply a mathematical algorithm to determine relevant website pages based on the query, which are then listed for the user in the search engine results page (Younger 2005).

Since a search engine supports the finding of and provides immediate access to information on the Internet (Watson, Zinkhan and Pitt 2000), consumers are likely to use search engines as an entry point to Internet browsing and locating websites, enabling search engines to possibly hold the greatest potential for marketing on the Internet (Telang, Boatwright and Mukhopadhyay 2004).

Search engine marketing has recently become a popular means by which consumers can be reached when they appear to be searching for a product (Zwass 2005). Porter (2007a) describes search engine marketing as Internet marketing methods for increasing website visibility in search engine results pages.

Search engine marketing commonly includes organic search engine optimisation and pay-per-click search engine advertising (Yang 2006). Organic search engine results are not affected by paid placements on search engine result pages, but rather pay-per-click adverts are independently placed beside the organic results (Darrow and Ferrera 2009).

Applying search engine optimisation techniques to websites, such as improved website structure and content, positively affects the organic search engine rankings of websites (Porter 2007a). In contrast to websites' organic search engine rankings which may be influenced but cannot be guaranteed, Porter (2007a) explains that pay-per-click advertising entails bidding on keywords related to websites, where high bids receive top advertising positions in the sponsored listings of search engine results pages when consumers search on the keywords, and the advertiser only pays when consumers actually click on the advert.

Lay Leng (2006) recognises that the Internet has reduced the gap between buyers and sellers, with search engines such as Google enabling small and large business alike to attract online traffic. The marketing environment is therefore changing and marketers are responding through experimentation with newer tools such as search engine advertising (Court, French and Knudsen 2007).

Internet usage in South Africa is of particular relevance. According to Goldstuck (2010) South Africa had 5,3 million individual Internet users in 2009, and this number is conservatively projected to reach 10,9 million by 2015. The Internet is therefore becoming mainstream in South Africa with evident growth in Internet usage over recent years (Goldstuck 2010), which in turn indicates potential for search engine marketing growth in the long-term as well.

Although the Internet could hold greater marketing potential than any of its media predecessors, including television, ensuring that Internet searches lead to favourable information that will encourage product purchases remains a challenge for marketers (McGaughey and Mason 1998).

Since search engines are relatively new marketing channels, academic research in this area is currently limited. There is little known to date with regards to how the consumer decision making process is influenced by search engine marketing, within the South African context.

This research report serves as a fundamental platform for enabling adequate development of search engine marketing campaigns in line with consumer decision making processes, ultimately aimed at obtaining long-term profitability for businesses operating in an electronic age, by examining the influence of search engine marketing on the decision making process of South African consumers.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 Main problem

The research problem is to determine how search engine marketing influences information search, evaluation of alternatives and the purchase decision of South African consumers.

1.3.2 Sub-problems

The first sub-problem is to determine how search engine marketing influences South African consumers' search for information.

The second sub-problem is to determine how search engine marketing influences South African consumers' evaluation of alternatives.

The third sub-problem is to determine how search engine marketing influences South African consumers' decision to purchase.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study fills a gap in search engine marketing literature and academic research, which is currently limited and unclear. Research in this area is particularly lacking from a South African perspective. This lack of research may result from the fact that search engine marketing is in its infancy.

When Cammie Dunaway, a senior marketer at Yahoo!, was interviewed to discuss adaptation challenges in a changing marketing environment, she said: “Today if you’re a marketer and you don’t understand search engine marketing, you’re not doing your job – yet it didn’t really exist five years ago!” (Court et al. 2007:19).

According to Jaillet (2003), most research studies conducted examine consumer behaviour once they reach vendor websites. Studies pertaining to pre-purchase behaviour are therefore lacking. Although Web methodologies can be used to track consumer search behaviour, what goes on in the mind of the consumer while utilising search engines has not been studied (Jaillet 2003).

Search engines and their influence on the consumer decision making processes, in an age where search engines are increasingly being used by consumers as a means to find relevant information, products and services, are becoming crucial for marketers aiming for success into the future. The evolution of technology and the Internet has paved the way for search engine marketing to become an increasingly important element in the marketing mix.

The study provides guidance to marketing managers, by educating them on search engines as marketing channels in an electronic age, while enabling the development and adequate integration of search engine marketing campaigns with current marketing strategies, based on the determined understanding of the influence search engine marketing has on the decision making process of South African consumers. Expenditure on marketing channels where the potential for a substantial return on investment exists is what marketing managers ultimately aim to achieve, and this study provides a basis to achieve this goal with regards to search engine marketing.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

- The study excludes mobile search, since search is more problematic on mobile devices such as cellular phones, and would require consideration of various additional aspects.
- The study is confined to obtaining views from an Internet search engine user perspective, and excludes the Internet search engine supplier perspective.
- The study is focused on the three core consumer decision making process stages of relevance to search engine marketing influences, i.e. information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision. The study therefore excludes the stages of problem recognition and post-purchase behaviour in the consumer decision making process.
- The literature reviewed mainly focuses on search engine marketing worldwide since literature pertaining to South Africa with regards to this subject is currently limited.

1.6 Definition of terms

Search Engine: “A database of Web pages, a method for finding Web pages and indexing them, and a way to search the database. Search engines rely on spiders – software that follows hyperlinks – to find new Web pages to index and ensure that pages that have already been indexed are kept up to date.” (Malaga 2008:147)

Search Engine Marketing (SEM): “Often used to describe acts associated with researching, submitting, and positioning a website within search engines to achieve maximum website exposure. SEM includes tactics such as search engine optimisation, paid listings, and other search engine related services and functions that will increase exposure and traffic to websites.” (Bielski 2008:41)

Sponsored Listings or Paid Adverts or Paid Search or Pay-Per-Click: “A type of contextual advertising where website owners pay an advertising fee, usually based on click-throughs or ad views, to have their website search results show in top placement on search engine result pages.” (Bielski 2008:41)

Natural Listings or Organic Listings or Organic Search: “Results are returned based on the natural indexing of the website, as opposed to paid advertising or editorial changes made by the search engine itself.” (Bielski 2008:41)

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO): “The process of increasing the amount of visitors to a website by ranking high in the search engine results of a search engine. SEO helps to ensure that a website is accessible to a search engine and improves the chances that the website will be found by the search engine.” (Bielski 2008:41)

Search Engine Results Page (SERP): “The listing of Web pages returned by a specific query on a search engine.” (Malaga 2008:149)

Search Terms or Keywords or Keyword Phrases: “Words searchers put into a search box to find information on a particular product, service, or item. Keywords and keyword phrases have different tiers.” (Edwards 2008:63)

Search Engine Ranking: “The position of a website in the search results of search engines for a particular keyword phrase or search term. Ranking results are shown in the search engine results pages in descending order from the number 1 ranked website down.” (Edwards 2008:63)

Universal Resource Locator (URL): “The address of a Web page on the Internet.” (Stokes 2009:68)

1.7 Assumptions

- It is assumed that respondents have basic computer and Internet skills required to utilise search engines, and are therefore sufficiently knowledgeable about the issues being questioned, so as to respond with accurate answers.
- Since Google is the dominant search engine with 83% market share globally (NetMarketShare 2013), and the respondents in the study were found to use Google most of the time, the study will primarily consider Google, and it is assumed that the differences when considering other search engines are sufficiently minor such that the research can be generalised to all search engines.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

While converting Internet browsers into paying customers is important, if the website cannot be found then no potential customers will exist (Jaillet 2003). Studies have repeatedly shown that over 80% of Internet users rely on search engines to reach their destination, and therefore search engines are said to originate the majority of all website traffic (Green 2003; Raisinghani 2005; Fill 2009; Stokes 2009). Websites with high search engine rankings will generate the most traffic since they are most likely to be found by consumers.

Technology improves consumer decision making by assisting in information integration and processing, such that the right information is provided to consumers at their fingertips (Su 2008). Search engines are the primary tool for Internet searching, which consumers utilise for looking up product information prior to online or offline purchases made (Kumar, Lang and Qian 2005).

The literature portrays the importance for marketers to learn the language and grasp the dynamics of search engine marketing, at a time when Internet and search engine usage continues to demonstrate exponential growth. An understanding of consumer decision making and how the stages of information search, evaluation of alternatives and the purchase decision are influenced also forms part of the literature.

This chapter firstly discusses the Internet, providing some background to the Internet and describing Internet marketing while introducing search engine marketing. An in-depth account of search engines and search engine marketing then follows, including how marketing is adapted for search engines. An outline of consumer behaviour is then provided, with a specific focus on the consumer decision making process and its influencers. The chapter concludes by integrating the literature into a final section encompassing the influence of search engine marketing on the consumer decision making process, which leads to the three research questions that this study answers.

2.2. The Internet and Internet marketing

The literature review begins by introducing the origins and capabilities of the exponentially growing network known as the Internet. Online retail and the extent of Internet usage in South Africa are also discussed. A brief overview of Internet marketing then follows, where search engine marketing is introduced.

2.2.1 Background to the Internet

Comprised of over 30 trillion pages and constantly growing (Google 2013), the Internet has become the main information and data provider since it first appeared in the latter part of the twentieth century (Özad and Kutoğlu 2010). Özad and Kutoğlu (2010) further communicate that the Internet constitutes the largest electronic network, essentially incorporating a massive collection of computers connected to each other with networks within a single enormous net throughout the world.

The Internet initially originated during the cold war in the second half of the twentieth century with a four computer network called Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) which was designed by the United States Department of Defence for military purposes, as a precaution against the nuclear attack threats of the Soviet Union (Özad and Kutoğlu 2010). Özad and Kutoğlu (2010) continue to explain that these four computers communicated in separate networks, whereas later Local Area Networks (LANs) were developed and began functioning by Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and Internet Protocol (IP). The LANs were connected to Wide Area Networks (WANs), and only in the 1990's with the World Wide Web (WWW) did the Internet acquire its actual meaning (Özad and Kutoğlu 2010).

The variety of capabilities provided by the Internet include electronic mail, voice over IP, forums and discussion groups, as well as global information access and retrieval (Laudon and Laudon 2004; Fill 2009). From a business transaction perspective, Laudon and Laudon (2004) affirm that Internet technology provides the primary structure to enable electronic commerce. For buyers in online

markets, discovering new sellers, product information and prices is simplified through Internet technology (Su 2008; Stokes 2009).

Internet shopping has emerged as one of the most important channels for conducting transactions between buyers and sellers (Su 2008). Yu and Wu (2007) and Su (2008) characterise online retail with the advantage of convenience, which includes the speed and ease of shopping.

Goldstuck (2011) states that 80% of online retail operations are profitable. During the global financial crisis, global online retail slowed in most regions but did not turn negative, i.e. total sales did not decline anywhere in the world, indicating that for now online retail globally and in South Africa is recession-proof (Goldstuck 2011).

The total amount spent on online retail goods in South Africa in 2010 reached over R2 billion, and the growth rate of online retail in South Africa in 2010 was more than four times that of offline retail, i.e. 30% versus 7% (Goldstuck 2011). Online retail in South Africa can therefore be said to have entered a phase of sustained acceleration.

Goldstuck (2011) attributes the dramatic rise in online retail to the ongoing increase in the number of experienced Internet users in South Africa. In 2010 there were 3,6 million South Africans who had been online for five years or more, and by 2015 a figure of 6,8 million is projected which is almost double the potential e-commerce market currently (Goldstuck 2011).

Figure 1 illustrates the sustained growth in Internet users in South Africa from 100,000 in 1994 to 5,3 million in 2009, and projects further growth between 2010 and 2015. It is clear that the number of Internet users in South Africa is rapidly increasing, projected to reach 10,9 million in 2015, and this opens up immense opportunities for companies to escalate profits by including this new online retail channel as part of their overall business strategies.

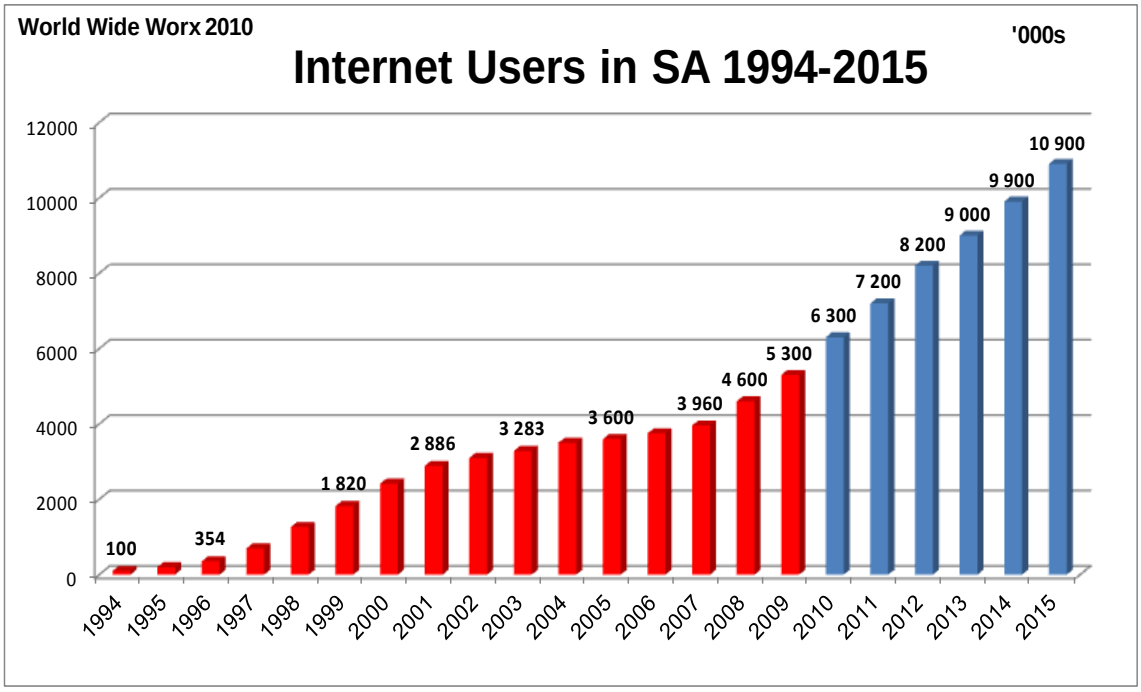


Figure 1: Internet Users in South Africa (Goldstuck 2010:138)

According to Goldstuck (2011) the growth in online retail in South Africa represents a shift in shopping activity, from the physical space to the online space.

Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2001) found that the determinants for retail success generally include location, nature and quality of assortment, price, advertising and promotion, sales personnel, services offered, physical store attributes, nature of store clientele, store atmosphere, and post-transaction service and satisfaction. These are similar to the findings of Goldstuck (2011) for online retail in South Africa, where the main success factors were identified as stock availability, speed of fulfilment, quality of products, design appeal of website, competitive prices, after-sales services, product range, and usability of website.

Successful companies need to remain at the forefront of and adapt their strategies to include this important emerging technology that is the Internet. It was no better summed up than when Philip Kotler quoted: “The Internet will create new winners and bury the laggards” (Swanepoel 2007:1).

2.2.2 Internet marketing

The increased growth and usage of the Internet extends towards increased opportunities, particularly with regards to marketing. Characterised by its ease of entry, time independence, interactivity, relatively low setup costs and global nature, the Internet represents an extraordinary opportunity for marketers to communicate with new and existing markets in an extremely integrated manner (Berthon, Pitt and Watson 1996). Since its inception, the Internet has evolved from a communications medium into a highly sophisticated commercial marketing medium (Swanepoel 2007).

Internet marketing is defined as "the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of both parties" (Mohammed, Fisher, Jaworski and Paddison 2004:4). Internet marketing can therefore be regarded as a new online method of marketing to consumers, with the same ultimate aim as any other form of marketing, namely to satisfy customer needs in exchange for company profits.

According to Fill (2009), the main forms of traditional media include broadcast (television, radio), print (newspapers, magazines), outdoor (billboards, transit), in-store (point-of-purchase) and other (cinema, exhibitions). Digital media includes the Internet, databases, multimedia, mobile phone technologies, video conferencing, interactive television, electronic kiosks and business applications software (Fill 2009). Fill (2009) continues to describe the Internet as the fastest growing advertising medium.

Mohammed et al. (2004), Kotler and Keller (2006) and Hairong (2011) identify various forms of Internet advertising including banner ads, sponsorships, microsites, interstitials, affiliate programs, rich media, content-target advertising and search-related ads.

Goldfarb and Tucker (2008) believe that search platforms are advantageous over other online advertising platforms, due to the use of a consumer's own search terms in order to match their interests with that of advertisers. Jansen, Sobel and Zhang (2011) attest to the fact that the most popular form of Internet

marketing is search engine advertising, which is therefore becoming increasingly important for companies to utilise as a promotional tool so as to ensure potential customers using search engines see their adverts on search engine results pages.

Green (2003) asserted that the role of search engines in Internet marketing and commerce is becoming increasingly important. It can be inferred that companies need to consider the potential impact of Internet marketing and particularly search engine marketing on profitability. Companies need to gain a better understanding as to how this new marketing medium can be integrated with current marketing activities for optimal success.

2.3. Search engines and search engine marketing

The literature review continues with an understanding of search engines and their role as marketing channels. A history and introduction to search engines is provided first, followed by a comprehensive account of search engine marketing. A brief discussion about adapting marketing for search engines concludes this section.

2.3.1 Background to search engines

Search engines enable consumers to search for required information on the Internet from the convenience of a home computer (Teo and Yeong 2003; Laudon and Laudon 2004). In addition, search engines enable buyers and sellers to find each other, providing only selected information, narrowing buyer choices to a chosen assortment, and targeting particular items to particular customers (Shugan 2004). Search engines such as Google and Yahoo! have altered online commerce significantly, transforming the manner in which consumers and vendors interact (Jansen, Brown and Resnick 2007).

Conflicting opinions exist as to which was the first search engine, and defining a search engine in the context of the early days of the Internet is difficult (Hawkins 2003).

Edwards (2008) goes back through the pre-Internet to early Internet periods and suggests a history of search engines, as follows:

1945 – Vannaver Bush authors a landmark article published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in which he intimates the principles of hypertext and memory extension.

1960s – The SMART (Salton's Magic Automatic Retriever of Text) Information Retrieval System is developed at Cornell University by a group headed by Gerard Salton.

1963 – Theodor Holm (Ted) Nelson coins the term 'hypertext'. Holm is also credited with the first use of the words 'hypermedia' and 'virtuality'.

1990 – Archie, a tool for indexing FTP archives, and considered to be the first Internet search engine, is written and implemented by Alan Emtage, Bill Heelan, and J. Peter Deutsch, while students at Montreal's McGill University.

The 1990's saw Yahoo, AltaVista, and Inktomi emerge as popular search engines, but as Cusumano (2005) points out, these search engines did not maintain their leading positions.

Although Google is said to be the first search engine utilised by many, it only began to build up momentum in 2000, benefiting from second-mover advantage while improving on previous search engine technologies, to gain and maintain a leading position in the Internet search business (Cusumano 2005). As Google co-founder and CEO Larry Page so aptly stated: "The perfect search engine would understand exactly what you mean and give you back exactly what you want" (Google 2013). The success of Google can be attributed to the relevancy of the results provided to its users.

Overture, known at the time as GoTo.com, pioneered search-based adverts in 1998, and Google launched AdWords in 2000, with Yahoo! and MSN following thereafter (Özlük and Cholette 2007; Goldfarb and Tucker 2008; Stokes 2009).

Kumar et al. (2005) are of the opinion that consumers develop search strategies aimed at improving the search process and reducing search cost, which will affect their purchase decisions. Being free of charge, convenient, and relevant,

search engines reduce consumer search cost (Kumar et al. 2005). Similarly, Jie, Xiao and Liu Sheng (2006) conclude that consumers take price and quality into consideration when making purchase decisions, and as such competitive strategies must be based on the online search behaviour of consumers. Darrow and Ferrera's (2009) view is that search engines have become increasingly popular largely because they are free to use. The fact that search engines are a no cost way to search for information seems to be a predominant reason for their use by consumers.

Shugan (2004) discusses search services as an emerging technology in the rapid growth phase of their potentially long life cycles. The growth in search engine usage by consumers and increased importance of search engine marketing in recent times demonstrates how the views of Shugan (2004) continue to hold true.

2.3.2 Search engine marketing

In the same way that search engines are essential to the Internet experience, search is essential to marketers (Stokes 2009). Search engine marketing can be simply described as using search engines for marketing purposes.

Although keyword-related banner advertisements and paid submissions are mentioned as possible search engine marketing actions, Sen (2005) and Jansen et al. (2007) conclude that search engine optimisation, to rank in organic listings, and sponsored listings are generally more adopted and effective search engine marketing strategies.

A search engine uses its proprietary matching algorithm to determine organic listings according to their relevance to a consumer's search query (Jansen et al. 2007; Agarwal, Hosanagar and Smith 2011). Search engine optimisation is the method used to optimise websites so as to achieve preferred organic search engine rankings (Stokes 2009). Alongside the organic listings are sponsored listings which companies can acquire by bidding on relevant keywords at a per click-through rate, and search engines use a combination of the submitted bid and past click performance to rank the order of the sponsored listings which

appear when that keyword is used by the consumer in the search query on a search engine (Agarwal et al. 2011).

Sen's (2005) findings conclude that although the most popular search engine marketing strategy for sellers is sponsored listings, buyers trust links displayed in a search engine's organic results more, and are therefore likely to follow these links. Results of the research conducted by Jansen et al. (2007) also found that consumers prefer organic listings in search engine results and consider them more relevant, viewing them first more than 82% of the time. Since search engine optimisation efforts will positively affect organic search engine results, it is implied that search engine marketing strategies should prioritise search engine optimisation.

According to Jansen et al. (2007), consumers view sponsored listings primarily as adverts and are less likely to select them, although they do appreciate sponsored listings if relevant. Jansen et al. (2007) also report that approximately 30% of consumers searching on a search engine interact with sponsored listings, indicating a potential growth market for sponsored listings. Agarwal et al. (2011) specify that by 2014 the rapidly growing Internet advertising spending will reach $34 billion, with 40% of this spending occurring on sponsored listings. It therefore seems apparent that relevant sponsored listings are indeed still worthwhile as part of a company's search engine marketing strategy, despite organic listings being preferred by consumers.

Google is the search engine of choice, receiving approximately 2,314,800 searches per second which equates to over one-hundred billion searches each month (Google 2013). Google obtains user confidence in its organic results due to the fact that humans are not involved and the results are not manipulated, resulting in objective information untainted by paid placement (Hwai-Hui, Lin and Hsien-Tang 2006). Google is also currently the dominant player in the keyword advertising market, with a share of over 50% (Özlük and Cholette 2007). In addition, Jansen et al. (2007) and Stokes (2009) report that sponsored listings accounted for 99% of Google's annual revenues. Google discovered how advertising on the Internet could work effectively, by targeting the

advertising to consumers at the moment they need it most: when searching for information (Vise 2005).

Search engine marketing is considered important because the consumer is in search mode, i.e. actually looking to find information on a topic of choice, which is referred to as 'pull marketing' and therefore differs to the 'push marketing' approach used by traditional advertising such as television, radio and print (Swanepoel 2007). Swanepoel (2007) further explains that once consumers are in search mode, they are much more receptive to the right type of information compared to when it is 'thrown' at them. In addition, Porter (2007b) is of the opinion that search engine marketing provides an ideal way to locate customers since they are searching for specific information, products or services at that exact point in time, and therefore customers are located much further along in the purchase process than other forms of marketing are capable of. These opinions are in line with that of Agarwal et al. (2011) who further construe that sponsored listings are a unique advertising form compared to offline advertising and other types of online advertising since it occurs close to a consumer's purchase decision and is matched based on the consumer's stated information need. Search engine marketing can therefore be deemed an ideal marketing platform to attract consumers with pre-determined purchase intentions.

The keywords used by consumers in their search engine queries may reflect their underlying purchase intent, and consumers with high purchase intents focus their search more to target a few products whereas consumers with low purchase intents tend to have broader search patterns (Agarwal et al. 2011).

Prominence in search results is said to affect consumer search behaviour and choice (Armstrong, Vickers and Jidong 2009). Research shows that 93% of search engine users do not look past the first two search engine results pages, i.e. the first 20 results, which creates intense competition amongst companies to obtain the highest search engine ranking possible (Thompson 2004). Stokes (2009) reports that users are unlikely to view search engine listings beyond the first 30 results. In addition, Su (2008) recognises that when search engine results do not provide an acceptable match to the consumer's requirements, the consumer has no choice but to commence further searches with differing

keywords, rendering the search process as iterative. There seems to be agreement that companies should attempt to have their websites ranked as highly as possible in search engine results for targeted keywords so as to increase the likelihood of being found by consumers.

A website which is highly ranked in search engine results creates value for brand perception, with research showing that search engine listings have the potential of stimulating brand recall by 220% (Stokes 2009). Brand mentions in the keywords used on sponsored listings enhance a company's brand image and market reach, and are said to correlate with increased conversions and higher sales revenues (Jansen et al. 2011). It can further be deduced that company brands should definitely partake in search engine marketing, ranking as highly as possible on search engine results for their brand keywords, aiming towards increased consumer awareness and ultimate profitability.

Since most Internet shoppers utilise search engines to find online stores, Su (2008) is of the opinion that companies allocate a portion of their marketing budgets to building cohesive search engine strategies including optimising their websites for search engines and purchasing sponsored listings, which will as a result increase volumes of relevant traffic to online stores. Organisations that take advantage of the unique benefits of search engine marketing early will gain competitive advantage far into the future (Porter 2007b).

2.3.3 Adaptation of marketing for search engines

According to Rust (1997) marketers have been accustomed to using traditional media such as television, radio, magazines, or personal selling when presenting messages to consumers. The emergence of new online media such as search engines therefore requires a shift in marketing thinking and actions.

Rust (1997) uses the analogy of pharmaceutical companies necessitating marketing to doctors even though they are not the end users, and similarly marketing to search engines is required to reach consumers. It is implied that marketing to computers, where search engines act as the intermediaries

between the marketer and consumer, is becoming increasingly important to marketers (Rust 1997).

McGaughey and Mason (1998) acknowledge that the Internet holds great potential as a promotional tool and combines many of the most salient features of traditional marketing including television, radio, magazine, newspaper, telephone and mail. McGaughey and Mason (1998) continue by ascertaining that the Internet can be used throughout the promotional mix and may even change promotional activity effectiveness. According to Stokes (2009), the online promotional mix is an extension of the offline, with some differences including the fact that online promotion can be tracked, measured and targeted in a more sophisticated manner compared to offline.

As explained by Hairong (2011), the attitudinal equity of a brand can be built through online advertising, in a similar way to traditional media. The Internet is regarded not only as a medium in itself but also as a valuable extension of traditional channels (Hairong 2011). As some studies have shown with campaigns using both offline and online media, although traditional channels such as television, radio and print may attract more consumers, search engine marketing tends to convert more consumers into paying customers (Hairong 2011).

Kotler and Keller (2006) suggest that an integrated marketing strategy, encompassing the four P components of the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) to influence consumers, is the ideal approach for creating, communicating and delivering value for consumers. Technology has accelerated the move towards integrated marketing communications (Fill 2009). An integrated communications strategy involves selecting communication options that reinforce and complement each other, such that a marketer can utilise a combination of traditional media such as television, radio, print, public relations and events as well as Internet communications using search engines so that each contribute on their own and also improve the effectiveness of others, to ultimately maximise profitability (Kotler and Keller 2006).

2.4. Consumer behaviour and consumer decision making

The literature review continues further with a description of consumer behaviour, and applicable behaviour models are also indicated. Particular emphasis is then placed on the consumer decision making process and the factors influencing the core stages of information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision.

2.4.1 Consumer behaviour

Blackwell et al. (2001:6) define consumer behaviour as “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services”. The component of the definition referring to ‘obtaining’ is those activities which lead up to and include the purchase of a product (Blackwell et al. 2001), which encompasses the core consumer activities of focus for this research study.

The model of consumer behaviour shown in Figure 2 is the starting point for understanding consumer behaviour. As Kotler and Keller (2006) explain, marketing and environmental stimuli enter the consumer’s consciousness, and psychological processes combine with consumer characteristics to result in decision processes and purchase decisions. The task of marketers is to understand what happens in the consciousness of the consumer between marketing stimuli arriving and final purchase decisions (Kotler and Keller 2006).

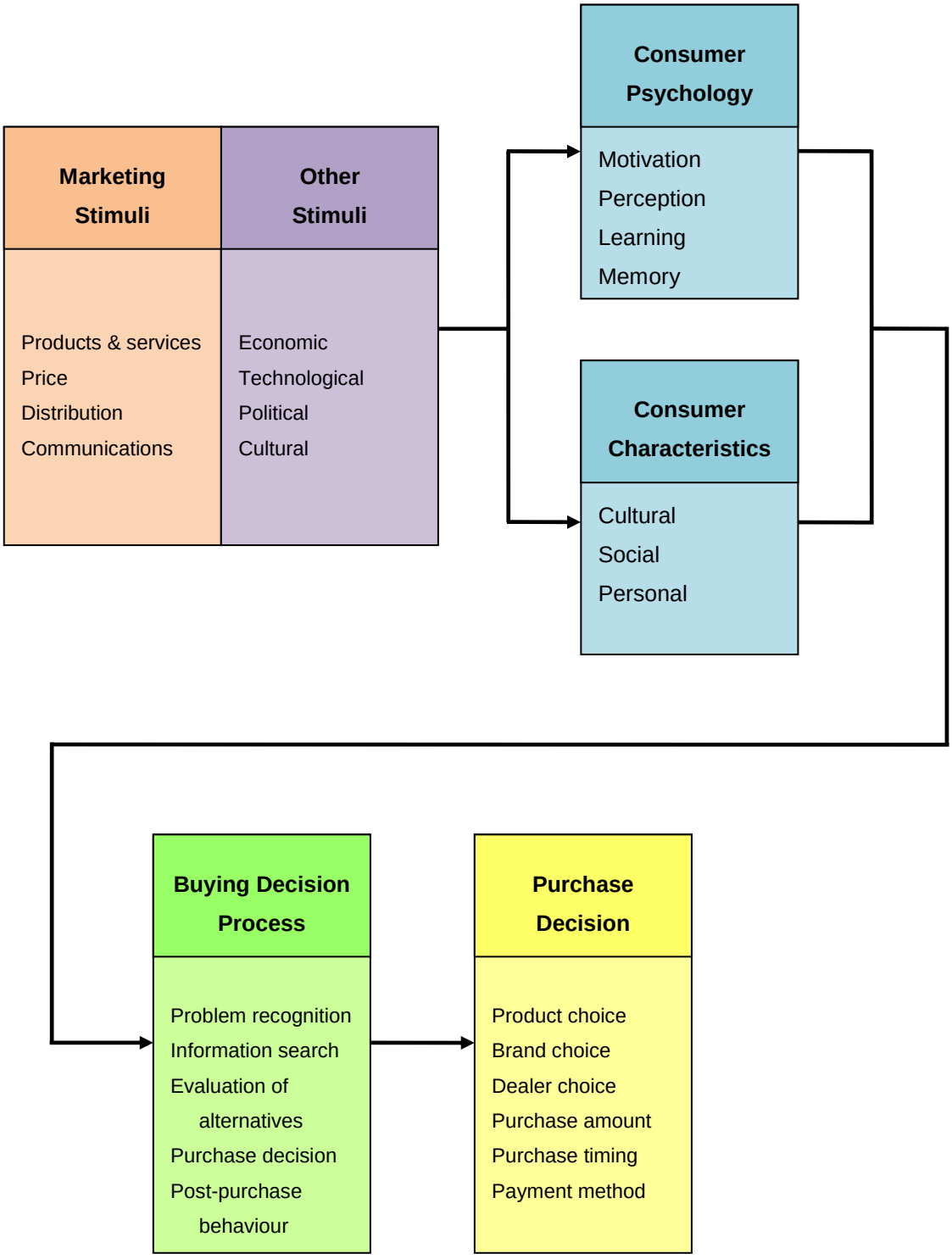


Figure 2: Model of Consumer Behaviour (Kotler and Keller 2006:184)

Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010) further explain that consumers respond to marketing influences and the situation simultaneously, as Figure 3 illustrates. Depending on the situation, consumers behave and react differently, thereby ultimately influencing consumption responses, i.e. the decision making process.

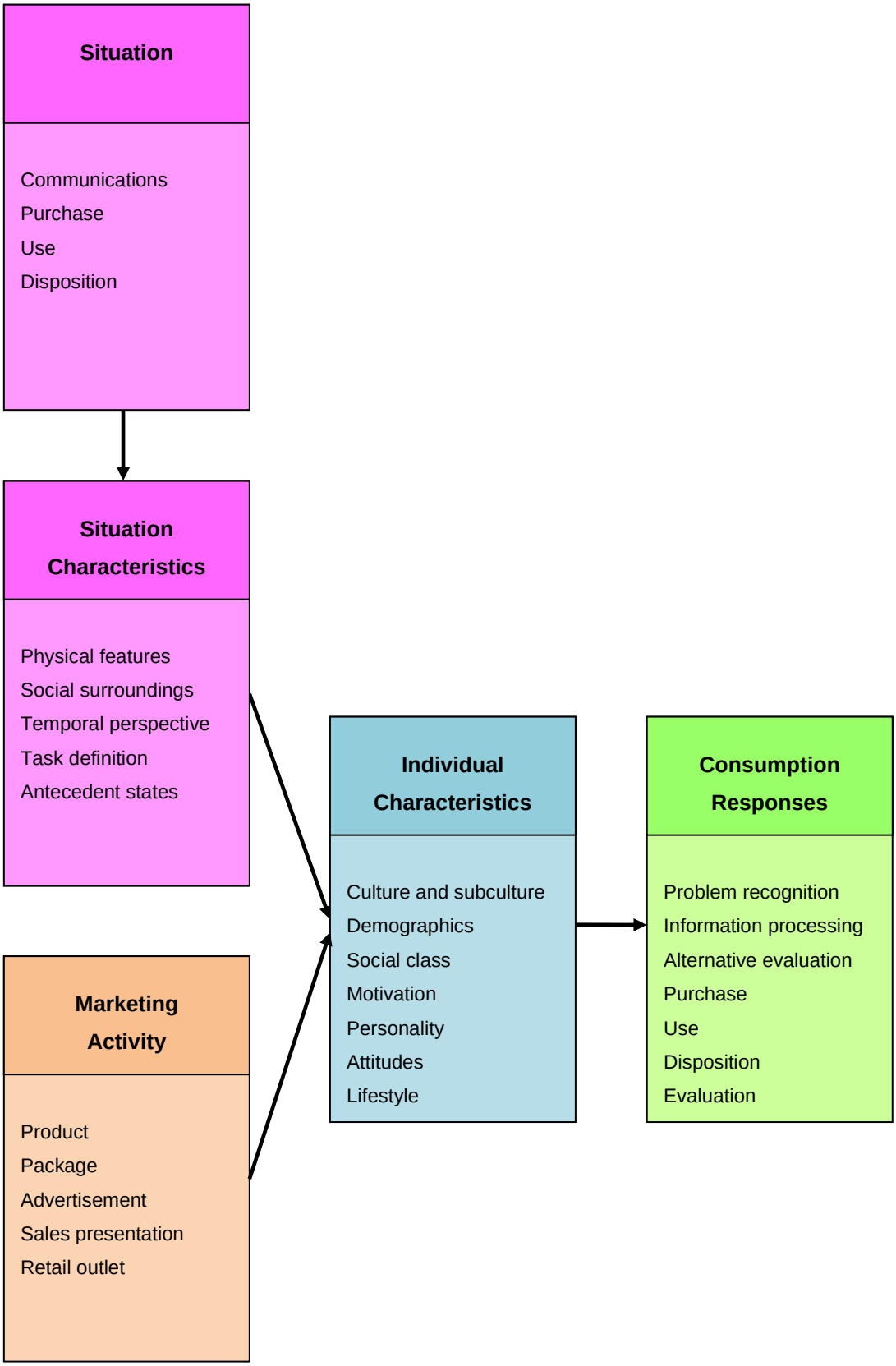


Figure 3: The Situation Interacts with the Marketing Activity and the Individual to Determine Behaviour (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh 2010:471)

2.4.2 Consumer decision making process

The classical problem solving approach to the purchasing decision, commonly known as the consumer decision making process, is illustrated in Figure 4.

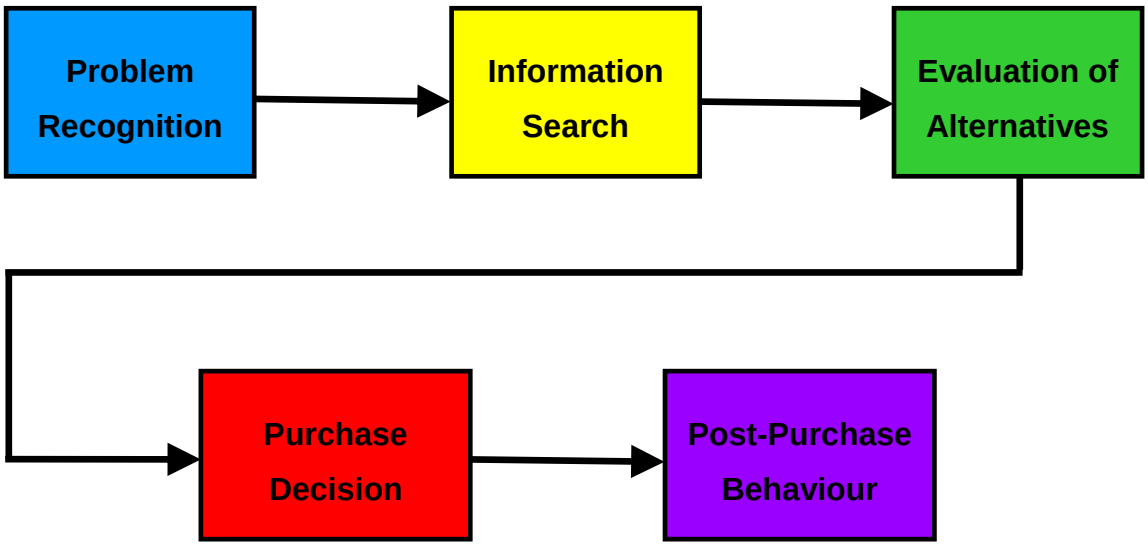


Figure 4: Consumer Decision Making Process (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Teo and Yeong 2003; Kotler and Keller 2006:191)

Representing a roadmap of consumers' minds, the consumer decision making process as shown in Figure 4 guides marketers in developing product mix, communication, and sales strategies (Blackwell et al. 2001). Each phase of the consumer decision making process, together with influencing factors, is discussed in this section.

Stage I – Problem Recognition

The decision making process begins when a disparity between a consumer's actual and desired state is recognised, i.e. a need arises, which may be triggered by internal or external stimuli (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Blackwell et al. 2001; Kotler and Keller 2006).

Abraham Maslow classified human needs using a five level hierarchy, as illustrated in Figure 5. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs people are said to strive to fulfil their needs in order of importance, starting at the basic

physiological level necessary for survival and once fulfilled being motivated to continue up through each level of need fulfilment, with safety needs next, then social needs, followed by esteem needs and finally self-actualisation needs (Statt 1997; Kotler and Keller 2006).

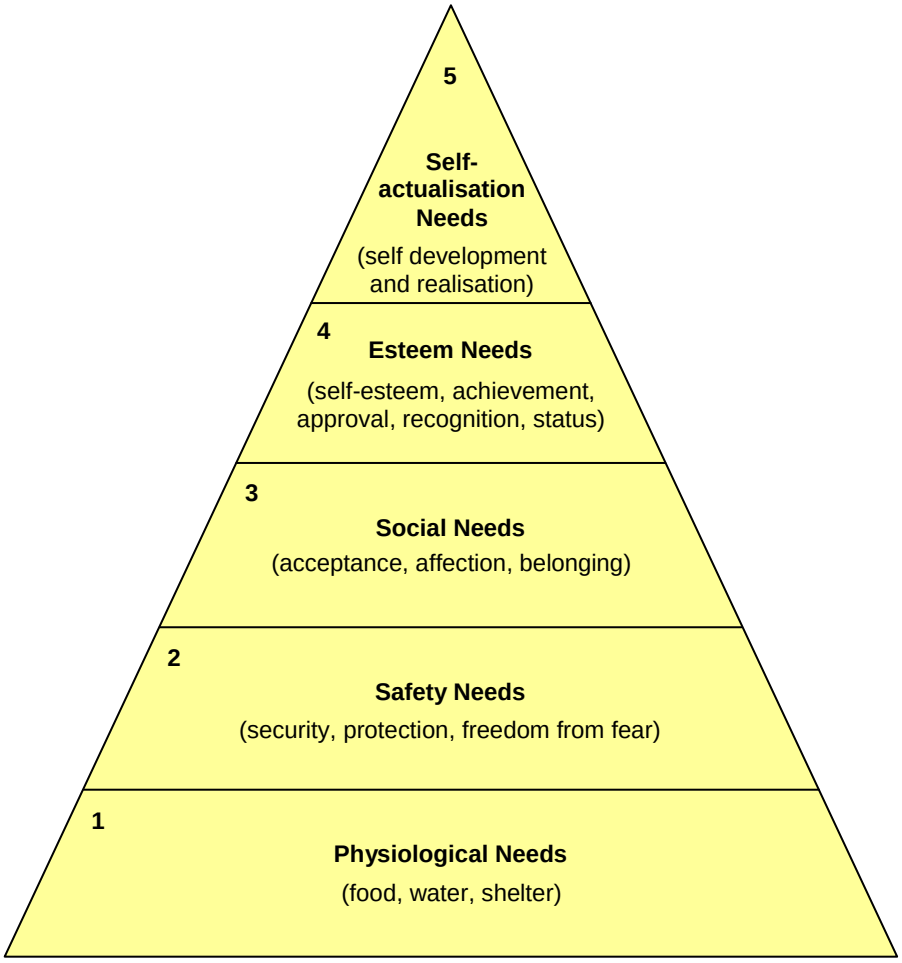


Figure 5: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Statt 1997:98) (Kotler and Keller 2006:185)

From a marketing perspective, Maslow's hierarchy of needs helps understand consumer motivation and indicates that needs are driven by the consumer. Search engine marketing therefore has a minimal impact on determining consumer needs, and as such the 'problem recognition' stage of the consumer decision making process was excluded as a focus for this research. In addition, the general consensus among the interview participants for this research was that a need already exists before searching on a search engine, and therefore this further verified that using a search engine does not determine a need for a product or service.

Stage II – Information Search

A consumer with an unmet need will be inclined to search for more information, where a state of heightened attention or active information search is entered (Kotler and Keller 2006). Active information search includes using a search engine to search for information on the Internet (Kotler and Keller 2006).

McGaughey and Mason (1998) acknowledge that low involvement products require less effort in information search, while high involvement products are likely to require more active information search. Similarly, Teo and Yeong (2003) refer to how information search effort is positively related to purchase involvement, time availability and attitude towards shopping. The degree of involvement directly relates to the degree of importance which consumers perceive products or services to be, such that increased importance drives increased search and involvement in the decision (Blackwell et al. 2001; Fill 2009). Blackwell et al. (2001) also observed that personal, product and situational factors determine the degree of involvement in consumer decision making.

As articulated by Lin and Wang (2008), since Internet users have a high perception of risk when using the Internet as a transaction platform, trustworthy sellers are sought when searching for information or purchasing products online. Eggert (2006) is of the opinion that information search functions as a risk reducer, and confirms that the Internet lessens the influence of intangibility on perceived risk due to the extensive amount of information it holds for consumers which in turn assists to better visualise and understand products. Blackwell et al. (2001) similarly state that information search benefits consumers by assisting in making better purchase decisions, where the increased perceived risk of a purchase decision and the increased price of a product increases consumer search. In terms of a website's integrity, the source's trustworthiness is said to determine credibility, where brand names and reputation play an important role in conveying trustworthiness (Teo and Yeong 2003; Eggert 2006).

As consumers gather information so they become aware of competing brands and their features (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Kotler and Keller 2006). As illustrated in Figure 6, Kotler and Keller (2006) show that of the total set of available brands a consumer will come to know only a subset of these, referred to as the awareness set, and only some brands will meet the consumer's initial buying criteria, which is the consideration set. As more information is gathered, only a few brands remain as strong contenders, resulting in the formulation of the choice set from which the consumer makes their final decision (Kotler and Keller 2006).

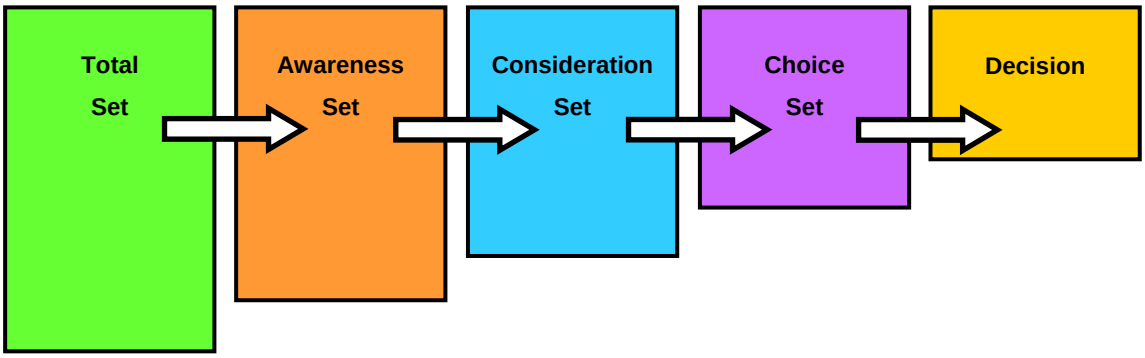


Figure 6: Successive Sets Involved in Consumer Decision Making (Kotler and Keller 2006:193)

The Internet simplifies information search in contrast to the increased time and effort required to search for information offline (Teo and Yeong 2003). The results of the study conducted by Özad and Kutoğlu (2010) indicate that with the facilitation of search engines the Internet is considered the easiest, fastest and best information provider, lowering the time as well as the cost required to find information. Su (2008) additionally identified the main advantage of Internet shopping compared to other channels as being the lower cost to consumers of searching for sellers and product-related information.

Since consumers use Internet search engines to assist in searching for information in an attempt to satisfy determined needs, search engine marketing will influence the 'information search' stage of the consumer decision making process, and this stage is therefore a core focus for this research.

Stage III – Evaluation of Alternatives

Information search generates a set of alternative product options to eliminate the consumer's need (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Teo and Yeong 2003). The consideration set as indicated in Figure 6 constitutes the alternatives considered during consumer decision making to make a choice (Blackwell et al. 2001). Consumers at this stage will therefore narrow the field of alternatives through comparing and contrasting, before finally resolving to purchase the selected product (Blackwell et al. 2001).

The Internet provides advanced capabilities to consumers when searching for desired products, comparing alternatives and retrieving product-related information (Eggert 2006). Search engines aid in consumer decision making, reducing the size of consumers' consideration sets whilst improving the quality of the consideration sets and ultimate purchase decision in an online shopping environment (Agarwal et al. 2011).

An attempt to increase knowledge about alternatives and identify product features, directly from product manufacturers or using other unbiased sources, enables the consumer to determine the likely consequences of purchasing from the considered set of alternative products (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Blackwell et al. 2001). Teo and Yeong (2003) also similarly mention that consumers examine both internal memory as well as external sources including the media, retailers, word-of-mouth communication with others, or neutral sources, in an attempt to reduce the perceived risk of making a purchase.

Choice evaluation for consumers is influenced by individual and environmental influences, and promotional activities can also encourage consideration (Blackwell et al. 2001). Consumers will also evaluate where to purchase the desired product (Blackwell et al. 2001), which would include selecting a vendor as well as evaluating whether to purchase online through a website or offline at a physical store. Blackwell et al. (2001) continue to explain that consumers will further evaluate alternatives based upon attributes such as price, quality, brand and service.

Evaluating available product choices to ultimately satisfy a consumer need is facilitated through the use of search engines, and as such search engine marketing will influence the 'evaluation of alternatives' stage of the consumer decision making process, and this stage is therefore a core focus for this research.

Stage IV – Purchase Decision

Following the evaluation of alternatives, consumers generally formulate product preferences and a possible purchase intention of the product perceived to be most desirable (McGaughey and Mason 1998). Marketing activities aimed at promoting a company's product may influence consumers at the purchase decision stage (Blackwell et al. 2001).

Several sub-decisions are involved in the purchase, which include choice of brand, selection of retailer, purchase timing and method of payment (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Blackwell et al. 2001). Blackwell et al. (2001) further iterate that during the purchase decision phase a retailer that matches consumer and purchase characteristics with store characteristics will be selected, and the consumer therefore also decides on the form of retailing, such as online or offline retail.

Kotler and Keller (2006) indicate that consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by personal characteristics. While some consumers may be comfortable utilising search engines to acquire information and subsequently purchase online, others may only be comfortable obtaining information from the search engines but not making purchases via the Internet, in which case search engines can be said to act more as advertising mediums (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Soopramanien, Fildes and Robertson 2007). The decision process is therefore shaped by individual differences, which form part of an individual's personality in terms of differing traits, values, beliefs and preferred behaviour patterns (Blackwell et al. 2001). Yu and Wu (2007) also express how the type of shopping chosen by consumers is affected mainly by merchandise features, shopping device attributes and consumer characteristics.

Fill (2009) describes involvement, stating that It relates to the degree of personal relevance and risk perceived by individuals in a particular purchase situation, and as such the purchasing situation affects the level of involvement. High involvement purchases are of high personal relevance, represent a high level of perceived risk, are higher priced items purchased less frequently, and consumers devote a substantial amount of time to gathering information and researching the intended purchase (Fill 2009). Minimal risk is associated with low involvement purchases, which are lower priced items that are purchased more frequently and require minimal information or support (Fill 2009).

Eggert (2006) mentions that the Internet is used only to collect product-related information for the majority of consumers, whereas it is preferred to actually purchase the product in the traditional way. Eggert (2006) deduces that the risks perceived by consumers when purchasing online are closely related to this type of consumer purchasing behaviour. Perceived risk can influence the purchase decision, and marketers should attempt to provide consumers with positive information when they search for it so as to diminish perceived risk and inspire greater confidence in purchase decisions (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Eggert 2006). Teo and Yeong (2003) and Soopramanien et al. (2007) also mention how the perceived risk and credibility associated with a purchase is a critical determinant of the willingness of consumers to purchase online, where risk is personal and related to individual consumers' perceptions of what they consider to be risky. Teo and Yeong (2003) further acknowledge that the individual consumers' perception of risks differ depending on the nature of the online product, and when purchasing tangible products online then pre-purchase trials or observations of others may form part of the decision process. Eggert (2006) concludes that consumers' perception of risk is increased by product intangibility.

A shortcoming of the Internet is the inability to touch the product and experience it before purchasing, when consumers are making purchase decisions (Blackwell et al. 2001). However, online shopping is advantageous in that is saves time and hassle, with convenience being a key benefit (Teo and Yeong 2003). As described by Kotler and Keller (2006), the marketplace today is

comprised of traditional consumers, who do not shop online, cyber-consumers, who mostly shop online, and hybrid consumers, who shop online and offline. Most consumers are hybrid, and therefore companies ideally require a presence both online and offline so as to cater to the hybrid consumer majority (Kotler and Keller 2006).

When making purchase decisions, consumers obtain assistance through the use of Internet search engines, and as such search engine marketing will influence the 'purchase decision' stage of the consumer decision making process, and this stage is therefore a core focus for this research.

Stage V – Post-purchase Behaviour

Subsequent to making a purchase, consumers experience either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which may affect future purchase decisions (McGaughey and Mason 1998; Blackwell et al. 2001). Due to their objectivity and greater accuracy, consumer comments, be they favourable or unfavourable, may act as a powerful influence on the purchase decisions of others (McGaughey and Mason 1998).

The impact of search engine marketing is likely to have a minimal effect on the 'post-purchase behaviour' stage of the consumer decision making process, and was excluded as a focus for this research. In addition, for bounding purposes the exclusion of this stage enabled a manageable research study within limited time constraints. Post-purchase behaviour would require a separate study, where the effect of future purchases or the impact of social media may be significant; however, those aspects are not the focus of this research study.

2.5. The influence of search engine marketing on the consumer decision making process

This section integrates the prior sections of the literature review to establish the influence of search engine marketing on the consumer decision making process. The research questions arise as a result of this integrated discussion.

The Internet is dramatically changing consumer behaviour, and a reason for this is that the Internet assists consumers to search in an easier and more efficient manner than has ever been possible before (Blackwell et al. 2001). Additionally, Fill (2009) is of the opinion that the Internet excels as part of the decision making process which established tools fail to address properly, namely the search for and retrieval of information pertinent to purchase behaviour.

As indicated by the literature and further affirmed Teo and Yeong (2003), the consumer decision making process applies in the virtual shopping environment context. Jansen et al. (2011) add that approximately 50% of business-to-consumer e-commerce purchases are preceded by a search on the Internet using a search engine, indicating the important role of search engines in online shopping and sales.

The literature discussed the necessity of search engine marketing as part of company marketing strategies so as to ensure long-term profitability and success. Search engine marketing essentially aims at encouraging Internet search engine users to click on prominent organic or sponsored links displayed in search engine results pages following a particular keyword search query, and as a result driving consumers to relevant seller websites where the intention is for the browser to become a buyer.

Although search engine marketing strategies for optimal consumer engagement were discussed in the literature, as well as the various influences at each core phase of the consumer decision making process, a specific framework indicating the decision process followed by consumers as a result of search engine marketing influences has not yet been established. The three research questions stated below are therefore formulated to eliminate this uncertainty and aim to establish this framework by providing a concise set of factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision.

Research Question 1: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *search for information*?

Research Question 2: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *evaluation of alternatives*?

Research Question 3: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *decision to purchase*?

2.6. Conclusion of Literature Review: Research Questions

The literature review began with a background discussion of the Internet and Internet marketing, indicating the Internet's origins and capabilities, discussing the growth in online retail and Internet usage in South Africa, and then introducing search engine marketing as the Internet marketing method of focus. A background overview of search engines and a more detailed discussion on search engine marketing then followed, continuing with an outline of the adaptation of marketing for search engines. Consumer behaviour was then introduced, and the core decision making process together with various influencing factors was discussed in more detail. The literature review culminated by integrating the reviewed literature, where the influence of search engine marketing on the consumer decision making process is established by answering the three research questions which were subsequently formulated.

Consumer behaviour analysis assists marketers in determining how to satisfy consumers and directly impact company revenues. The increasing use of the Internet, and more specifically search engines, to inform consumer purchasing decisions means that visibility on the Internet is critical (Green 2003).

As affirmed by Blackwell et al. (2001), the consumer decision making process model can be used to identify relationships between variables that affect consumer decision making. As consumers move through the stages of the consumer decision making process, marketers have the opportunity to influence behaviour through effective communication and marketing strategies that address each stage and the variables affecting each stage (Blackwell et al. 2001). Search engine marketing enables consumers to be reached when they have already begun the purchasing process (Kotler and Keller 2006; Stokes 2009). Search engine marketing therefore inherently holds incredible potential

as an influencer on consumer decision making, as the literature has clearly portrayed. However, since search engines are relatively new marketing channels and conclusive knowledge and understanding on related factors influencing the consumer decision making process does not currently exist, this research study aims at determining the influence of search engine marketing on consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision. The research questions were formulated as a result, in an attempt to discover these influencing factors.

2.6.1 Research Question 1:

What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *search for information*?

2.6.2 Research Question 2:

What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *evaluation of alternatives*?

2.6.3 Research Question 3:

What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *decision to purchase*?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section begins with an explanation of the mixed research methodology that was used for the study. For each of the qualitative and quantitative research studies, the research design, population and sample, research instrument, as well as the procedure for data collection, analysis and interpretation is provided. Limitations of the study together with validity and reliability issues conclude the research methodology section.

3.1 Research paradigm

The mixed methodological approach, which includes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, was selected as appropriate for this study. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) state that mixed method designs can provide a more complete picture of phenomena than either a qualitative or quantitative approach could do alone.

A sequential procedure for the mixed method was used, where “the researcher seeks to elaborate on or expand the findings of one method with another method” (Creswell 2003:16).

Zikmund (1997) describes exploratory research as the initial research conducted, where subsequent research is necessary in order to provide conclusive evidence. Exploratory research develops concepts and establishes priorities, and is generally used when the area being investigated is new, is vague or where important variables are not known (Cooper and Schindler 2003). “When little information exists on a topic, when variables are unknown, when a relevant theory base is inadequate or missing, a qualitative study can help define what is important” (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:135).

Limited and inconclusive information is currently known with regards to the factors related to search engine marketing that influence the consumer decision making process. The qualitative method was therefore used first, for exploratory research purposes and to gain an understanding of the important issues,

followed by a quantitative method using a large sample, to confirm the findings and provide more reliable insights about the population.

The rationale for utilising a two-phase, sequential mixed method for this research was to firstly explore participant views and develop themes, and subsequently utilise this information to develop and test underlying constructs so as to ultimately answer the research questions. A useful survey questionnaire could therefore be best developed only after preliminary exploration through interviews.

Figure 7 illustrates the methodology flow chart for the research.

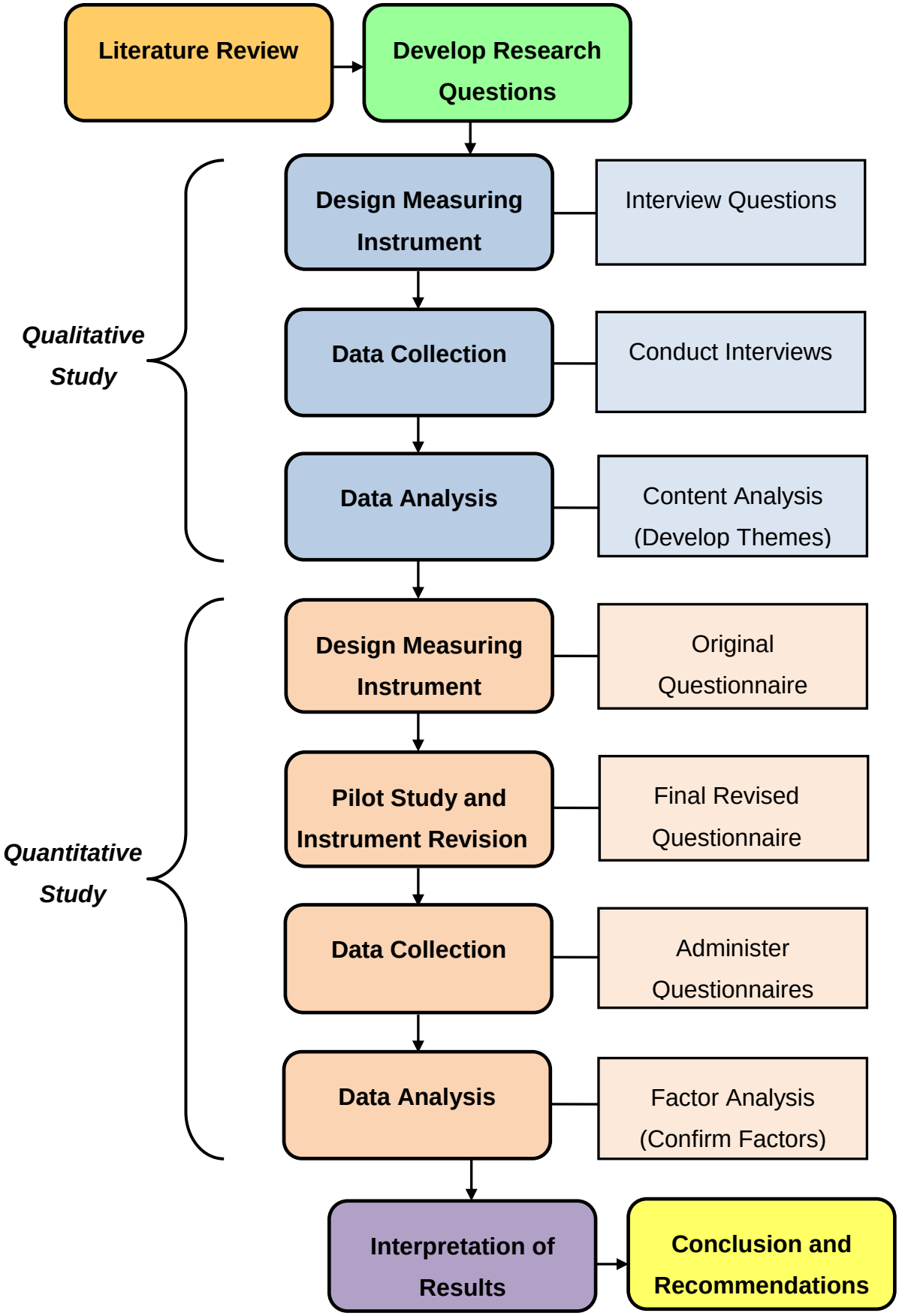


Figure 7: Methodology Flow Chart

3.2 Qualitative study

3.2.1 Research design

Face-to-face interviews were conducted for the qualitative portion of the mixed method. The interviews were exploratory, where open-ended questions were asked of the interviewees so as to discover themes.

The interviews enabled the exploration and understanding of how the consumer decision making process is influenced by search engine marketing, since knowledge in this regard was limited. Interviews yield useful information including facts, perspectives about the facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviours, standards for behaviour, and conscious reasons for actions or feelings (Leedy and Ormrod 2010), which is applicable to this research and was optimal for obtaining the required themes.

The themes formulated from the responses to the interview questions were backed-up by the quantitative study which followed.

Due to the researcher's presence, interviewee responses may be biased, which is a limitation to interviews (Cooper and Schindler 2003; Creswell 2003). Utilising the interview question guideline as indicated in Appendix A2 allowed the researcher more control over the line of questioning, and supplementing the interview by observing actual interviewee behaviour as each performed a search on a search engine as part of the interview, assisted in reducing the potential bias in responses.

3.2.2 Population and sample

3.2.2.1 Population

The population for the qualitative study is defined as any Internet user within the borders of South Africa that uses search engines.

3.2.2.2 Sample and sampling method

The sampling method used for the qualitative study was non-probability convenience sampling. Interviewees were selected based on the researcher's view of their potential contributions to the study, as well as their willingness to participate and their availability. The email sent to potential interviewees can be found in Appendix A1, which also reassured the simplicity of the interview.

As can be seen in Appendix A3, the sample for the qualitative study consisted of 10 Internet search engine users in South Africa, stratified equally in terms of gender, i.e. 5 male and 5 female interviewees, profiled across diverse age ranges and employment professions. Typical qualitative studies use small samples since greater insights can be gained when exploring a small sample in-depth as opposed to superficially investigating a larger sample (Schmitt and Klimoski 1991). Interviewing 10 people was considered sufficient for the qualitative portion of the mixed method research conducted.

3.2.3 The research instrument

Personal interviews using an interview schedule served as the research instrument for the qualitative study.

Probing, open-ended questions which ultimately aimed at establishing the influence of search engine marketing on the key steps in the consumer decision making process pertaining to this research, i.e. information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision, were asked in-person of 10 interviewees in order to obtain the required information.

The actual interview questions which were used are outlined in Appendix A2.

3.2.4 Procedure for data collection

For the qualitative portion of the research, potential interviewees were personally contacted via email, as per Appendix A1, so as to explain the purpose of the interview and establish their willingness to participate. Being Internet search engine users was the basic candidate criteria which the

researcher considered when identifying appropriate participants, who were selected from family, friend, work colleague and fellow student connection circles of the researcher. A convenient time and neutral location was set up to conduct the interview with the willing participants listed in Appendix A3.

When the actual face-to-face interviews took place one-on-one with participants, open-ended questions were asked using the interview question guideline presented in Appendix A2. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed verbatim as shown in Appendix A4, where interviewee response details are indicated.

3.2.5 Data analysis and interpretation

"A content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases" (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:144). The interview data obtained through the qualitative study was content analysed and interpreted, resulting in the development of themes as indicated in Appendix A5. The themes of greatest significance were then identified and utilised to create the survey questionnaire for the quantitative study.

Appendix A5 shows a theme per column, indicating the applicability of the theme to one or more of the interviewee numbers shown in the rows. The interview question number from which the theme originated is also indicated. A total percentage can also be seen per theme, which was used to establish the overall significance of each theme, i.e. the ratio of interviewee agreement to each theme formulated. The most significant common themes were then collated, grouped and summarised in the form of the questionnaire statements for the quantitative study.

3.3 Quantitative study

3.3.1 Research design

A survey was utilised for the quantitative portion of the mixed method. Zikmund (1997) describes a survey as a research technique used to collect data from a representative sample of individuals by means of a questionnaire. The survey research design served to numerically describe the trends, attitudes, or opinions of the population through studying a sample of that population, using a web-based questionnaire administered online as the form of data collection (Creswell 2003).

Surveys are advantageous in that they provide an accurate, speedy, cost effective and efficient method for obtaining information about a population (Zikmund 1997; Cooper and Schindler 2003).

The themes which resulted from the qualitative study were used to develop the questionnaire for the quantitative study. Underlying constructs were determined through the quantitative study. The survey results reinforced the understanding gained through the interviews and answered the research questions.

A disadvantage to using survey questionnaires is the generally low response rate (Schmitt and Klimoski 1991; Cooper and Schindler 2003; Leedy and Ormrod 2010). In addition to being appropriate to the population for this research, the survey was administered purely online via the Internet to improve the ease and simplicity of completing the survey, and together with the colour visuals used in the survey, the response rate was increased. In the email sent to potential questionnaire respondents shown in Appendix B1, personalisation was used and confidentiality was assured, which in turn also increased the response rate.

Respondents feel anonymous when completing a survey online (Cooper and Schindler 2003) and therefore the assured anonymity of respondents results in more truthful responses. In addition, Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe how conducting a survey online has advantages in that it is more cost-effective than

a mailed questionnaire for large sample sizes, and yields data which is comparable to that which is obtained through face-to-face contact.

3.3.2 Population and sample

3.3.2.1 Population

The population for the quantitative study is defined as any Internet user within the borders of South Africa that uses search engines.

3.3.2.2 Sample and sampling method

The sampling method used for the quantitative study was non-probability convenience sampling with snowballing. Potential questionnaire respondents were identified by the researcher and contacted via email requesting that they complete the questionnaire online and also forward the questionnaire link on to their own contacts that fit the respondent criteria stipulated, for them to complete as well. Appendix B1 contains the email sent to potential questionnaire respondents, which also reassured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

For the correct and meaningful application of factor analysis, the method used to analyse the quantitative study data, the ratio of questionnaire respondents to research statements is required to be at least 5:1 in order for the sample size to be valid. Since the questionnaire contained 25 statements covering different themes obtained from the interviews, as seen in Appendix B2, 125 respondents would have fulfilled the necessary requirement for the research to be significantly valid. However, because the final number of questionnaire respondents amounted to 201, which exceeds the required minimum by 76, the reliability of the study was increased.

The sample for the quantitative study therefore consisted of 201 Internet search engine users in South Africa. This fulfilled the researcher’s goal to obtain about 200 completed questionnaires for the quantitative study.

3.3.3 The research instrument

An electronically administered questionnaire served as the research instrument for the quantitative study.

The actual questionnaire used, which was constructed from the themes obtained through the interviews conducted in the qualitative study, is shown in Appendix B2. Both sections of the questionnaire and the questions within each section were presented in such a way so as to make them flow in a logical manner for the respondent. The first section enabled the development of an Internet search engine user profile based on demographic and behavioural information. In the second section respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to 25 statements, using a 7 point Likert attitude rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (rating of 1) on one end to strongly agree (rating of 7) on the other. Developed by Rensis Likert in the 1930's, Likert rating scales simplify and more easily quantify behaviours or attitudes (Leedy and Ormrod 2010). The statements in the questionnaire covered the 3 key steps in the consumer decision making process pertaining to this research, i.e. information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision, with the influence of search engine marketing integrated into the statements.

The outcome of the questionnaire aimed at reinforcing the results obtained in the qualitative study which was conducted first, while at the same time answering the 3 research questions.

3.3.4 Procedure for data collection

For the quantitative portion of the research, a pilot study was conducted with a total of 5 participants so as to identify any issues or misinterpretations which may have been present in the original questionnaire. Some minor questionnaire revisions were implemented based on the common feedback provided by the pilot study participants, following which the final revised questionnaire was deemed ready for mass distribution.

Potential questionnaire respondents were personally contacted via email, as per Appendix B1, explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and motivating participation. The potential respondents were selected from the researcher's email contacts and included family, friends, work colleagues, business associates, fellow students, as well as Facebook contacts. The email contained a link to the web based survey, for the participant to click on and easily complete online. The email also contained a request to forward the questionnaire link on to further potential participants that use Internet search engines in South Africa.

Survey Monkey, a commercial website for data collection, was used to create the online questionnaire as shown in Appendix B2. Survey Monkey provided a variety of templates and item types to choose from for the questionnaire design, and also tracked and recorded participant responses online.

There were 46 respondents that started the questionnaire but failed to complete it, and these were discarded. There were 4 respondents that indicated their frequency of search engine usage as 'never', and these were also to be discarded, however, in all these 4 cases they formed part of the same incomplete survey respondents which had been discarded already. Including these 46 respondents would have rendered inaccurate data analysis, which is why their exclusion was deemed best so as to ensure accurate results and conclusions.

Once submitted, respondents were thanked for their time and assistance in completing the questionnaire. The survey was closed once the required 201 complete responses were done, and data analysis could then begin. Any person clicking on the questionnaire link thereafter was advised that the survey had already closed, and they were no longer able to take part in the survey.

3.3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Descriptive pie charts were used to analyse and interpret the data collected for the demographic and behavioural profiles of the questionnaire respondents.

Factor analysis was used to analyse and interpret the questionnaire data for the quantitative study. The purpose of factor analysis is “to examine the correlations among a number of variables and identify clusters of highly interrelated variables that reflect underlying themes, or factors, within the data” (Leedy and Ormrod 2010:282).

This research used exploratory factor analysis, which helps identify hidden constructs which may or may not be apparent from direct analysis (HR-Statistics 2011). As explained by Cramer (2010), exploratory factor analysis determines the most likely factor structure for the relationships between variables.

The questionnaire respondents’ ratings on the 25 statements were factor analysed to determine the underlying factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers’ search for information, evaluation of alternatives and decision to purchase.

SAS JMP Version 9 was used to calculate the Eigenvalues before rotation and to run the factor analysis using the orthogonal varimax rotation method. The Eigenvalues were used to decide on the number of factors to rotate. Performing the factor analysis produced the rotated factor loadings, which are reported in Appendix B3.

The following criteria were applied in order to determine the factors for this research (HR-Statistics 2011):

- Eigenvalues > 1 (also known as the Kaiser Guttman rule)
- Cumulative percentage explained by the factors > 60%
- Significant decline in the scree plot

The questionnaire statements with the highest rotated factor loadings were identified and used to name each of the factors. The research questions were then answered based on the factor analysis results.

3.4 Limitations of the study

- It may not be possible to fully analyse the scope of search engine marketing within the consumer market due to the convenience sampling method used, and consequently findings may not be representative or generalisable to the population of Internet users within the borders of South Africa that use search engines.
- Questionnaire respondents may have lacked the necessary background knowledge, experience or capacity to fully understand the context of what was being asked, which may have resulted in the inability to complete the questionnaire as successfully as envisioned.
- The study was conducted from a user perspective only, and therefore excluded supplier input, i.e. search engine providers may have added valuable insights into the study if they were included.

3.5 Validity and reliability

A credible, accurate and meaningful research study requires both validity and reliability. Validity and reliability indicate the degree to which error may be present in measurements (Leedy and Ormrod 2010).

3.5.1 External validity

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe external validity as the extent to which research study results can be generalised across other contexts.

This research used a mixed methodology. The initial qualitative study was exploratory, and was therefore not generalisable to the population. However, the subsequent quantitative study provided more reliable insights into the population.

For the quantitative study, since convenience sampling was used and the population was not confined, this research does not attempt to generalise to the population but rather focuses on discussing the results based on the 201 questionnaire respondents.

3.5.2 Internal validity

Internal validity is the extent to which the design of a research study and the data it yields enables accurate conclusions to be drawn with regards to relationships within the data (Leedy and Ormrod 2010).

For the questionnaire, which formed part of the quantitative study, a pilot study was conducted with 5 individuals. The purpose of a pilot study is to ensure all questionnaire statements are well understood and to determine any issues with the questionnaire before mass distribution. The validity of this research was therefore increased by performing a pilot study, where necessary modifications to the questionnaire were made before starting the data collection process.

The quantitative study validated the data obtained in the initial qualitative study, therefore maximising the internal validity for the mixed method research conducted.

3.5.3 Reliability

Reliability is regarded as the extent to which similar research conducted in the future will result in similar outcomes (Leedy and Ormrod 2010).

The sample size for the quantitative study of this research exceeded the basic minimum requirements for factor analysis, i.e. 76 more questionnaires were completed than the required minimum of 125, based on 25 questionnaire statements. This increased the reliability of the research.

The pilot study conducted served to further increase reliability, since the common issues identified by the participants were used to revise the quantitative study questionnaire accordingly before it was mass distributed.

Conducted through item analysis, Cronbach’s alpha values, indicated in Appendix B4, were also calculated in the factors to test reliability.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summarised themes from the interviews that were conducted for the qualitative portion of this mixed method research. For the qualitative study, 10 people were interviewed face-to-face and probed with open-ended questions as indicated in Appendix A2. The interviewee responses as shown in Appendix A4 were content analysed to develop themes as shown in Appendix A5. The survey questionnaire for the quantitative study illustrated in Appendix B2 was then created using the themes of greatest significance, which are presented in this chapter.

4.2 Summary of the qualitative results

In order to ultimately answer the research questions, the themes which emerged as the most significant from the interviews conducted together with the resultant questionnaire statements used in the final questionnaire administered were summarised as shown in this section.

Each significant qualitative finding, i.e. summarised theme, was used to develop the question and statements for the questionnaire in the quantitative study, as indicated in the Tables that follow.

The summarised themes and questionnaire statements were categorised accordingly following completion of the qualitative study, beginning with the frequency of Internet usage and online purchasing (Table 1) followed by the key steps in the consumer decision making process, i.e. information search (Table 2), evaluation of alternatives (Table 3) and purchase decision (Table 5), which search engine marketing influences. As indicated, some of the themes and resultant questionnaire statements were found to potentially overlap across the key steps in the consumer decision making process (Table 4 and Table 6), and were therefore not rigidly categorised in isolation.

4.2.1 Frequency of Internet usage and online purchasing

Table 1: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Question for Frequency of Internet Usage and Online Purchasing

SUMMARISED THEME: Frequency of usage and purchasing
- The Internet is used regularly. **-** Online purchasing is done at varying frequencies, ranging from often to seldom. However, making online purchases tends to occur less regularly for most people as opposed to on a regular basis.
QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTION
Frequency of: Daily / Weekly / Every 2 Weeks / Monthly / Every 2 Months / Every 3-6 Months / Yearly / Never Internet Usage ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Search Engine Usage ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Online Purchasing ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

4.2.2 Information search

Table 2: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Statements for Information Search

SUMMARISED THEME: Efficient information search	**QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS**
- A primary purpose for using the Internet is to search for information. **-** Search engines are generally the starting point for information search.	**1**: When searching for information on the Internet, I use a search engine 80% of the time as opposed to other sources.
- Using search engines is a useful and efficient way to obtain information required, making the user aware of available websites and providing an in-depth scope of real-time information from a variety of global sources. **-** Using search engines saves time and provides immediate access to information whenever required. **-** Search engines are convenient to use. **-** Search engines are used mostly to look for information at no cost.	**2**: I use a search engine because it is an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information.

- Google is the search engine mostly used to search for information. **-** Google is the perceived to be the best and most well known search engine brand. **-** Google is considered to be user friendly and easy to use. **-** Google provides quality results that are relevant and finds what is required.	**3**: I use the search engine Google 90% of the time as opposed to other search engines because it is the most well known, is easy to use, and provides what I require.
- Search engines greatly assist in finding information online and enabling confidence that the correct decision is made for high involvement product purchases, since these are generally more expensive and require more information research compared to low involvement product purchases. **-** Purchasing high involvement products is most likely, where search engines have played a part in the purchase decision. **-** Applicable high involvement products where search engines are used for information research include: houses / properties, cars, electronic goods e.g. cameras, TV's, laptops	**17**: I use a search engine to search for information about High Involvement items more than Low Involvement items before making my purchase decision.

4.2.3 Evaluation of alternatives

Table 3: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Statements for Evaluation of Alternatives

SUMMARISED THEME: Product information	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS
- A search engine is often used for comparative purposes to identify the best available options, by gathering and comparing information including product, price and seller comparisons, after which a purchase decision is made.	**11**: A search engine assists me in comparing options before making my purchase decision.
- A search engine assists in finding the required information about a product, but before deciding to purchase it is preferred to also experience offline criteria including physically seeing, touching and feeling the product for added assurance.	**14**: Although search engine findings play a role in my decision to purchase, I also rely on other factors including tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) before making my final purchase decision.
- The type of product determines whether offline criteria are sought, before or after searching on a search engine, before making a purchase decision. **-** For high involvement products, which are more expensive and complex investment valuables, the	**19**: For High Involvement items, in addition to search engine findings I will seek offline criteria which includes tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) for added assurance before making

assurance of physically seeing, touching and feeling the item before making a purchase decision is preferred.	my purchase decision.

4.2.3.1 Information search and evaluation of alternatives

Table 4: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Statements for Information Search and Evaluation of Alternatives

SUMMARISED THEME: Relevance of search engine results	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS
- The title and description of each search engine result is always read. **-** The URL together with the title and description must be relevant to the search and describe the website correctly in order to get attention. **-** Keywords related to the search done are often looked for in search engine results to determine relevancy.	**4**: I will only click on search engine results that seem relevant after reading through the Title, URL and Description – looking out for related keywords and websites.
- The URL in each search engine result is generally looked at to find reliable sources and trusted websites. **-** A search engine result is more likely to be clicked on if the URL is for a trusted website belonging to a recognised company or brand.	**5**: I would be more likely to click on a search engine result for a known and trusted company/brand.
- When looking through a search engine results page, natural listings are generally looked at first and are most likely to be clicked on. **-** Natural listings are trusted more and believed to be more relevant, providing the required information without the search engine user being pushed to make a purchase. **-** Sponsored listings are found to be less relevant and more focused on pushing the search engine user to make a purchase rather than providing what is required. **-** Sponsored listings are generally overlooked and ignored, with those displayed on the right of the search engine results page being skipped more than those displayed on the top left which are therefore noticed more.	**6**: I click on Natural Listings 80% of the time as I find them to be more relevant and useful for providing required information compared to Sponsored Listings.
- Sponsored listings on a search engine results page would be looked at and definitely clicked on if relevant to the search performed.	**8**: I do look at and will click on Sponsored Listings if they are relevant to my search.
- Generally the relevant results on only the first search	**9**: I click on relevant results on only

engine results page, i.e. the first 10 results, are looked at and clicked on, and going beyond to the results pages that follow is rare unless what is specifically required was not found on the first page.	the 1st search engine results page 90% of the time, rarely looking beyond the 1st page.
- Although the primary focus is the first and secondary focus is the second, the third search engine results page, i.e. the first 30 results, is generally the absolute maximum which most will go up to when doing a single search. **-** The original search done on a search engine is refined and a new search is performed, i.e. the keywords are changed to be more specific, when the results from the original search are not satisfactory and more relevant results are required.	**10**: If I have not found what I am looking for by the 3rd search engine results page I will change my keywords and perform a new search.

4.2.4 Purchase decision

Table 5: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Statements for Purchase Decision

SUMMARISED THEME: Reasoning for online purchasing	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS
- Once the purchase decision is made, the type of product to be purchased determines whether the item is likely to be purchased online or offline at a physical store. **-** Low involvement products are generally more likely to be purchased online since they are less expensive and experiencing the tangibility is less required compared to high involvement items. **-** High involvement products are preferably purchased offline at a physical store since they are more expensive and experiencing the tangibility is required more compared to low involvement items. **-** Low involvement products typically purchased online include: CD's / music, books, software / applications	**20**: I am more likely to purchase Low Involvement items online, compared to High Involvement items which I mostly purchase offline.
- Once search engines have been used to sufficiently research online and the purchase decision is made, in certain cases depending on product availability an online purchase will be made if the item required is not available offline and it is impossible to physically see, touch and feel the item.	**22**: I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require is only available online.
- If an item found on a website via search engine searches has the benefit of costing less online compared to offline at a physical store, then the incentive and likelihood for purchasing online is	**23**: I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require costs less online compared to offline

increased.	at a physical store.
- Trust in a website found via a search on a search engine affects the decision to purchase online. **-** A credible website with security accreditations that is professionally developed increases the likelihood of purchasing online. **-** When purchasing from a trusted and reputable seller or brand the likelihood of purchasing online is increased. **-** Trust issues online are a reason for generally preferring to make purchases offline at a physical store. **-** Physically seeing, touching and feeling a product increases trust when making a purchase decision. **-** Mistrust in the online purchase process includes concern over security of personal and credit card details supplied online for payment, reliability of delivery, risk of items not meeting expectations due to misleading claims made online and the returns policy for online purchases.	**24**: I will only purchase online if the website found through my searches on a search engine is credible enough and I trust it.
- Purchasing online is advantageous for a number of reasons including being more convenient, immediate, easier and quicker with less hassle.	**25**: I find online purchasing to be convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving.

4.2.4.1 Evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision

Table 6: Summarised Theme and Questionnaire Statements for Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase Decision

SUMMARISED THEME: Purchase confidence	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS
- Sponsored listings are more useful search engine results for purchase intentions and are more likely to be clicked on when wanting to find items for sale to purchase, compared to natural listings which are more useful search engine results for providing information at no cost.	**7**: If I intend to make a purchase I am more likely to click on Sponsored Listings.
- Using a search engine to review other people's opinions and ratings about a product influences the purchase decision. **-** Search engine searches which lead to positive reviews and high ratings about a product increase confidence that making the purchase is the right decision.	**12**: Positive reviews, ratings and opinions about an item found through searches on a search engine influence my purchase decision and increase the likelihood of making the purchase.

- Using a search engine when gathering information influences and assists in making purchase decisions. **-** Using a search engine will be likely to result in a decision to make a purchase, since adequate search results serve to motivate and instil confidence that the best final purchase decision is made.	**13**: I am confident to base my purchase decision on search engine findings.
- Search engines definitely play a part in the purchase decision for less risky intangible services such as holiday travel and entertainment tickets. **-** Search engine findings alone are generally sufficient for making the purchase decision when it comes to services. **-** Services are generally researched online and are more likely to be purchased online, without having to go offline.	**15**: I am confident to base my purchase decision for services (which are intangible) on search engine findings and to make my purchase online e.g. holiday travel and entertainment tickets. **16**: I am confident to purchase a tangible item online without experiencing the tangibility (physically see, touch, feel).
- For low involvement products, which are less expensive and more basic lower value items, since the risk ratio is lower compared to high involvement items, basing the purchase decision on search findings alone is more likely.	**18**: For Low Involvement items, search engine findings are generally sufficient for me to make my purchase decision.
- Once the purchase decision is made, where search engines may assist in researching and deciding what to purchase, if possible it is mostly preferred to make the purchase offline at a physical store. **-** Most are still not too comfortable to purchase online and do not purchase online very often, with the inability to physically see, touch and feel the item online being a top reason for preferring offline purchasing. **-** The product is generally guaranteed immediately with no waiting for delivery, and the purchase transaction is done safely with no trust or security concerns when purchasing offline at a physical store. **-** Online purchasing tends to be done more for known basic items where not much can go wrong and there is minimal loss or concern if something does go wrong.	**21**: Although I use search engines to search for information and assist in making my final purchase decision, I mostly prefer to make my purchase offline at a physical store rather than online.

These summarised themes led to the development of the questionnaire used for the quantitative study, as indicated in Appendix B2, based on the resultant questionnaire question and statements for each summarised theme as indicated.

The quantitative study provides further insights, as shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the statistically analysed results from the survey questionnaires that were administered for the quantitative portion of this mixed method research. The chapter begins by describing the demographic and behavioural profiles of the questionnaire respondents. The factor analysis results are then presented, where the factors related to search engine marketing that influence the consumer decision making process are identified.

5.2 Demographic profile of questionnaire respondents

5.2.1 Gender profile

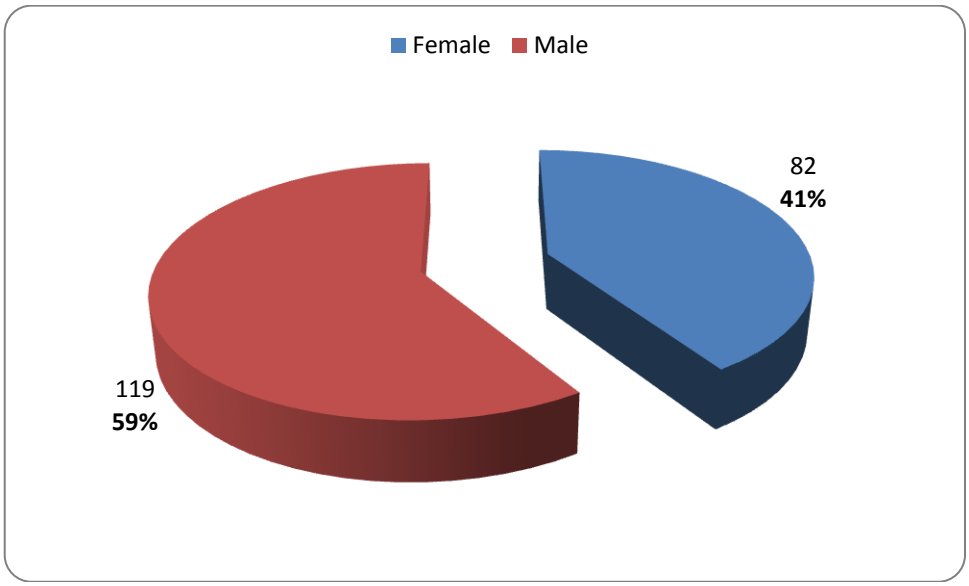


Figure 8: Gender Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

From the 201 questionnaire respondents, 119 were male and 82 were female. Therefore, considerably more males (59%) compared to females (41%) participated in the quantitative study, as can be seen in Figure 8.

5.2.2 Age profile

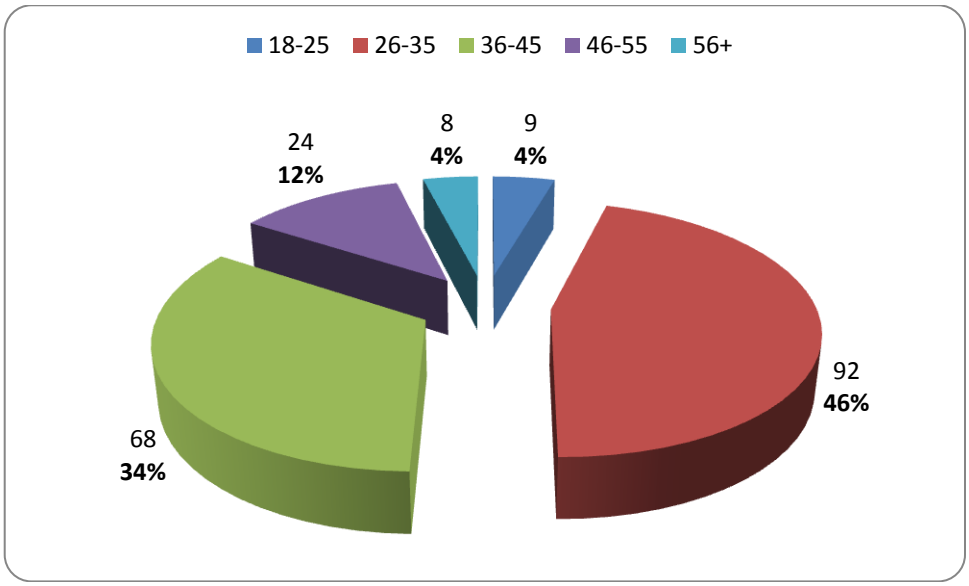


Figure 9: Age Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The age ranges of the 201 questionnaire respondents are indicated in Figure 9. There were 92 respondents aged between 26-35 and 68 respondents aged between 36-45, making up 46% and 34% respectively of the majority total. The 46-55 age range was comprised of 24 respondents, i.e. 12% of the total. The least number of respondents fell into the youngest and oldest age ranges, where just 4% (9 respondents) were aged between 18-25 and the remaining 4% (8 respondents) were 56 years or older.

5.2.3 Educational profile

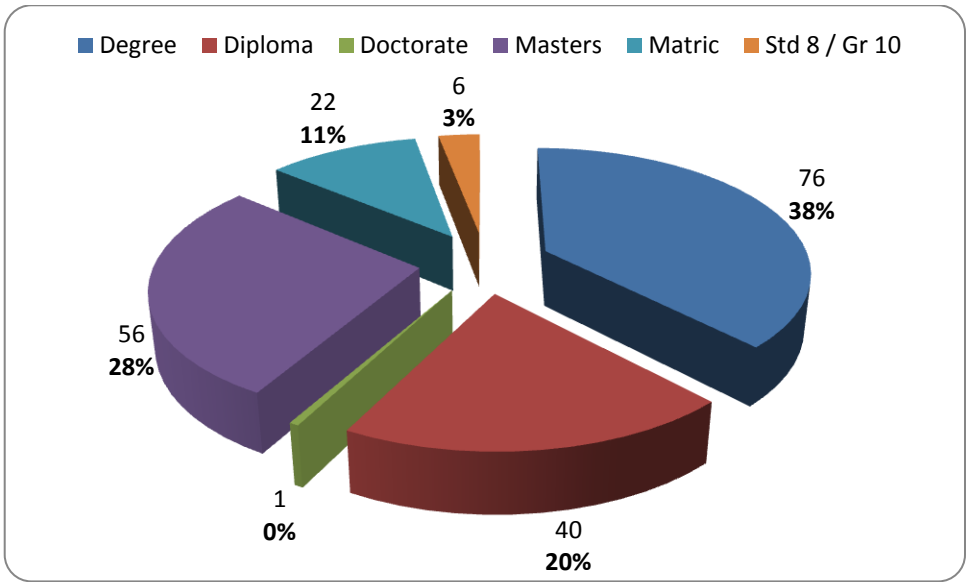


Figure 10: Educational Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

Figure 10 illustrates the split between the 201 questionnaire respondents in terms of their highest education level. Forming the majority, respondents with a degree amounted to 76 (38%), while 56 (28%) had obtained their masters, and 40 (20%) had a diploma. In the minority were 22 (11%) respondents with a matric qualification and 6 (3%) respondents at standard 8 / grade 10 level. Only 1 respondent had achieved a doctorate.

5.3 Behavioural profile of questionnaire respondents

5.3.1 Internet usage frequency

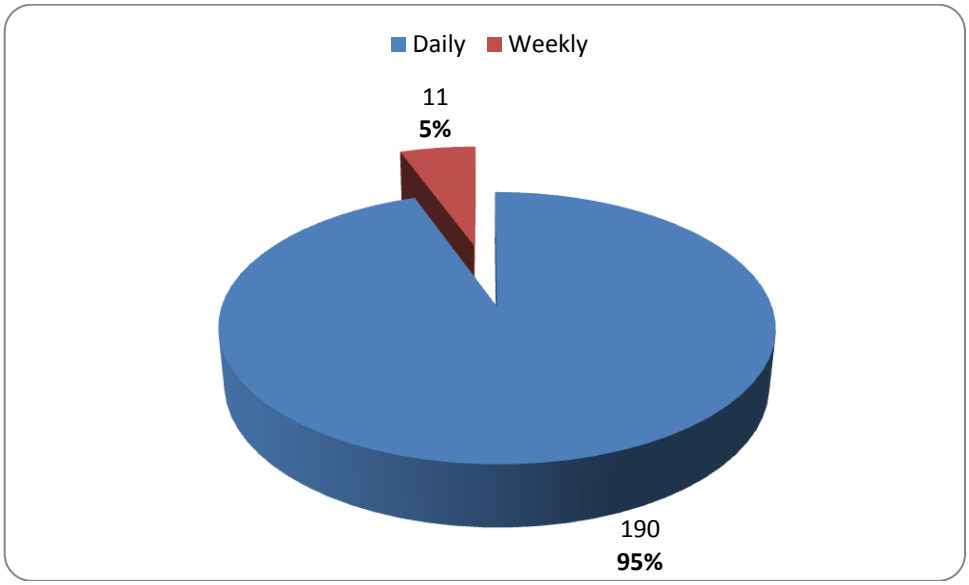


Figure 11: Internet Usage Frequency of Questionnaire Respondents

The 95% majority of questionnaire respondents, i.e. 190 of the surveyed sample of 201, use the Internet on a daily basis (heavy users). Only 5%, i.e. 11 respondents indicated that they use the Internet weekly (medium users). This frequency of Internet usage is shown in Figure 11.

5.3.2 Search engine usage frequency

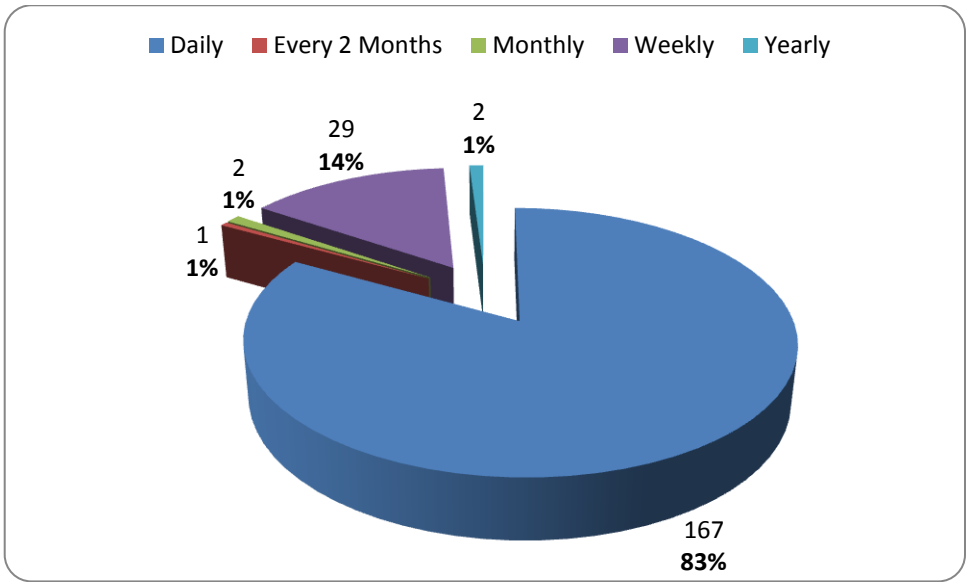


Figure 12: Search Engine Usage Frequency of Questionnaire Respondents

As is evident from Figure 12, 167 of the 201 questionnaire respondents stated that they use a search engine daily (heavy users), which forms the 83% majority. The 29 respondents that use a search engine weekly (medium users) accounted for 14% of the total. The frequency of search engine usage for the remaining respondents (light to extra users) was 1% each for monthly (2 respondents), every 2 months (1 respondent) and yearly (2 respondents).

5.3.3 Online purchasing frequency

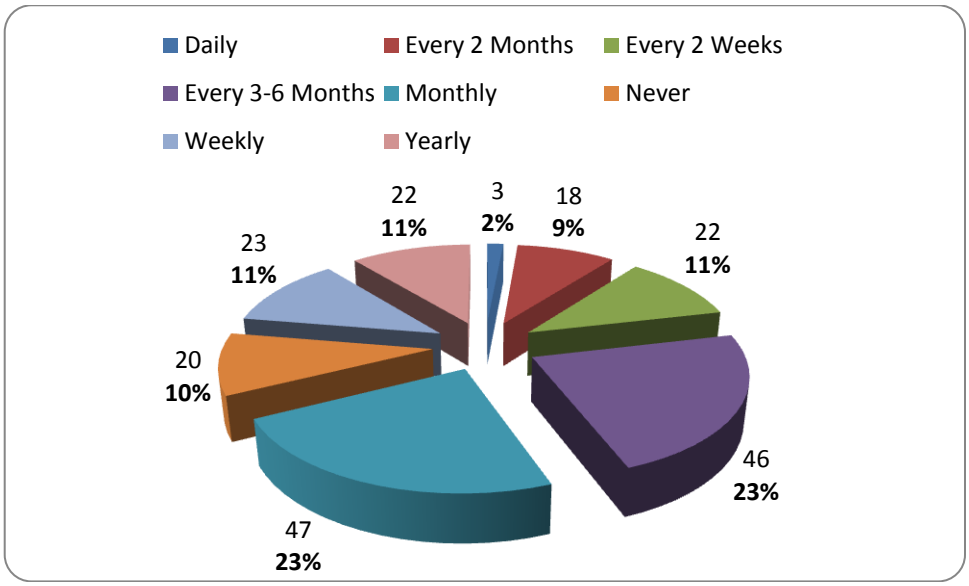


Figure 13: Online Purchasing Frequency of Questionnaire Respondents

With regards to the frequency of online purchases made, depicted in Figure 13, 23% (47) of the questionnaire respondents do so monthly and a further 23% (46) do so every 3-6 months. Each comprising 11% of the total, 23 respondents suggested that they purchase online weekly, 22 respondents every 2 weeks and another 22 respondents yearly. There were 20 (10%) respondents that never purchase online. Online purchasing occurs every 2 months for 18 (9%) respondents. Only 3 (2%) respondents make online purchases on a daily basis. The questionnaire respondents are therefore mostly light to extra light online purchasers, with considerably fewer heavy to medium online purchasers.

5.4 Factor analysis results

Factor analysis finds patterns among variables to discover if an underlying combination of the original variables (a factor) can summarise the original set. A factor is essentially the linear composite of all variables that best explains the correlation among variables. The exploratory factor analysis used for this research summarised the information contained in the 25 variables, i.e. 25

questionnaire statements, into a reduced number of 7 factors. The principal axis method was used to extract the factors, followed by orthogonal varimax rotation.

5.4.1 Eigenvalues, cumulative percentage and scree plot

An Eigenvalue is the amount of variance accounted for by a factor. Dividing the Eigenvalues by the number of variables yields the cumulative percentage, i.e. an estimate of the amount of total variance explained by a factor. A plot of the Eigenvalues, in descending order of magnitude, is a scree plot.

The number of factors for this research was determined by applying three criteria: Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, cumulative percentage greater than 60% and a significant decline in the scree plot (HR-Statistics 2011). Table 7 shows the Eigenvalues calculated before rotation using SAS JMP Version 9, and also indicates the percentages and cumulative percentages. Figure 14 illustrates the scree plot.

Table 7: Eigenvalues before Rotation

Number	Eigenvalue	Percent	Cum Percent
1	7.6447	30.579	30.579
2	2.2333	8.933	39.512
3	1.5236	6.095	45.607
4	1.3437	5.375	50.981
5	1.2583	5.033	56.015
6	1.0888	4.355	60.370
7	1.0545	4.218	64.588
8	0.9864	3.946	68.533
9	0.8223	3.289	71.823
10	0.7550	3.020	74.843
11	0.7388	2.955	77.798
12	0.6279	2.512	80.310
13	0.5961	2.384	82.694
14	0.5138	2.055	84.749
15	0.4898	1.959	86.708
16	0.4681	1.872	88.580
17	0.4334	1.734	90.314
18	0.3875	1.550	91.864
19	0.3556	1.423	93.287
20	0.3326	1.331	94.617
21	0.3080	1.232	95.849
22	0.2972	1.189	97.038
23	0.2634	1.054	98.092
24	0.2529	1.012	99.104
25	0.2241	0.896	100.000

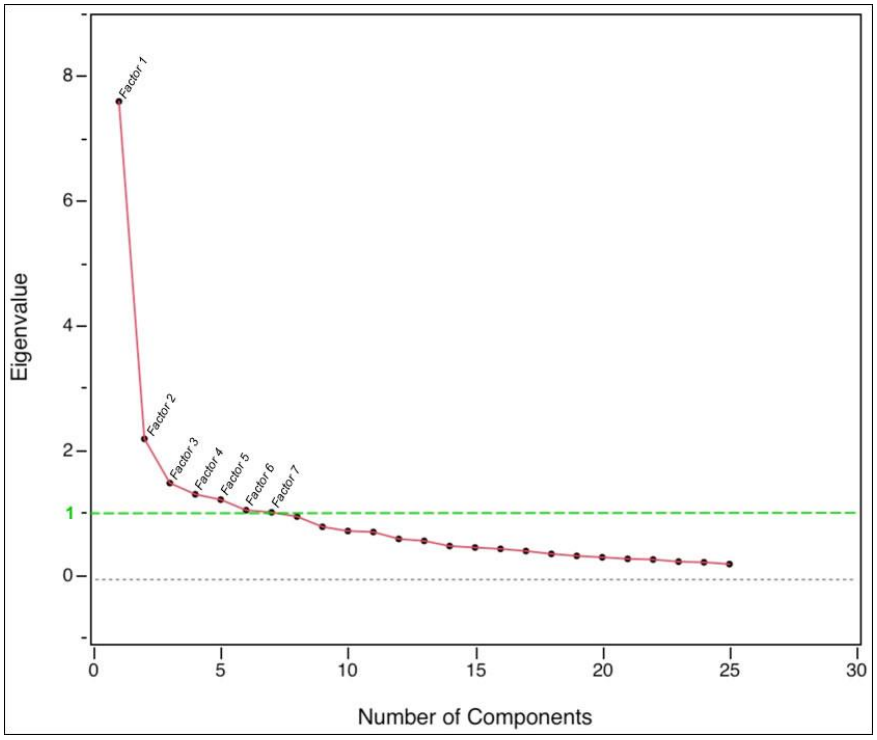


Figure 14: Scree Plot

As is clear from Table 7, the first 7 factors exhibited Eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The output in Table 7 also indicates that 65% cumulative variance is explained by the first 7 factors. Results of the scree test also suggested that only the first 7 factors were meaningful, i.e. the plot of the Eigenvalues of the factors illustrated in Figure 14 declines significantly after factor 7.

Only the first 7 factors explained most of the variance in the variables and these 7 factors were confirmed by the scree plot, therefore 7 factors were retained for rotation using the orthogonal varimax method to make their meaning clearer.

5.4.2 Factor loadings

A factor loading measures the importance of a variable in measuring each factor. Factor loadings were used to decide which factor a variable belonged to, and for interpreting and labelling the factors.

The factor loadings were produced after the extraction and rotation of the factors using SAS JMP Version 9, as reported in Table 8. Appendix B3 shows the actual statistical output of the factor loadings.

Table 8: Factor Loadings after Orthogonal Varimax Rotation

VARIABLES	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	FACTORS						
		Search criteria	Purchase criteria	Evaluation criteria	High and low involvement	Sponsored listings	Purchasing offline	Type of product
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
V1	When searching for information on the Internet, I use a search engine 80% of the time as opposed to other sources.	**0.73**	0.28	0.12	0.13	0.06	-0.01	-0.09
V2	I use a search engine because it is an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information.	**0.80**	0.17	0.12	0.14	0.02	0.02	-0.08
V3	I use the search engine Google 90% of the time as opposed to other search engines because it is the most well known, is easy to use, and provides what I require.	**0.80**	0.13	0.14	0.04	0.08	0.03	-0.02
V4	I will only click on search engine results that seem relevant after reading through the Title, URL and Description – looking out for related keywords and websites.	**0.63**	0.16	0.08	0.09	0.01	0.12	0.12
V5	I would be more likely to click on a search engine result for a known and trusted company/brand.	**0.44**	0.10	0.11	0.10	-0.02	0.07	0.10
V6	I click on Natural Listings 80% of the time as I find them to be more relevant and useful for providing required information compared to Sponsored Listings.	**0.42**	-0.06	0.20	0.13	-0.19	0.28	0.27
V9	I click on relevant results on only the 1st search engine results page 90% of the time, rarely looking beyond the 1st page.	**0.40**	-0.00	0.09	0.27	0.06	0.10	0.05
V10	If I have not found what I am looking for by the 3rd search engine results page I will change my keywords and perform a new search.	**0.53**	0.15	0.24	0.12	0.01	-0.03	-0.06
V22	I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require is only available online.	0.23	**0.68**	0.06	0.11	0.08	0.19	0.03

V23	I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require costs less online compared to offline at a physical store.	0.18	**0.70**	0.15	0.15	0.11	-0.04	0.14
V24	I will only purchase online if the website found through my searches on a search engine is credible enough and I trust it.	0.38	**0.43**	0.28	0.16	0.09	0.09	-0.16
V25	I find online purchasing to be convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving.	0.36	**0.45**	0.14	0.19	0.20	-0.25	0.13
V11	A search engine assists me in comparing options before making my purchase decision.	0.26	0.14	**0.76**	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.05
V12	Positive reviews, ratings and opinions about an item found through searches on a search engine influence my purchase decision and increase the likelihood of making the purchase.	0.25	0.15	**0.55**	0.28	0.16	0.10	0.04
V13	I am confident to base my purchase decision on search engine findings.	0.17	0.09	**0.52**	0.31	0.21	-0.10	0.32
V15	I am confident to base my purchase decision for services (which are intangible) on search engine findings and to make my purchase online e.g. holiday travel and entertainment tickets.	0.25	0.30	**0.41**	0.25	0.11	0.02	0.22
V18	For Low Involvement items, search engine findings are generally sufficient for me to make my purchase decision.	0.20	0.24	0.26	**0.74**	0.08	-0.06	0.22
V19	For High Involvement items, in addition to search engine findings I will seek offline criteria which includes tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) for added assurance before making my purchase decision.	0.19	0.34	0.32	**0.60**	-0.01	0.13	-0.10
V20	I am more likely to purchase Low Involvement items online, compared to High Involvement items which I mostly purchase offline.	0.33	0.14	0.04	**0.53**	0.22	0.20	0.04
V7	If I intend to make a purchase I am more likely to click on Sponsored Listings.	-0.06	0.09	0.17	0.06	**0.46**	0.19	0.25
V8	I do look at and will click on Sponsored Listings if they are relevant to my search.	0.09	0.11	0.10	0.10	**0.86**	-0.00	0.03
V21	Although I use search engines to search for information and assist in making my final purchase decision, I mostly prefer to make my purchase offline at a physical store rather than online.	0.13	0.04	0.04	0.08	0.12	**0.88**	-0.08
V16	I am confident to purchase a tangible item online without experiencing the tangibility (physically see, touch, feel).	0.01	0.22	0.14	0.14	0.25	-0.10	**0.59**

Table 8 presents the factor loadings after orthogonal varimax rotation for the 7 extracted factors, where the loading of a variable indicates the extent to which it 'loads' onto a factor. When a variable's loading is high for a single factor, then the variable best represents or is best represented by that factor. In interpreting the rotated factor pattern, a value near 1.00 indicated that a variable loaded highly on a specific factor and a loading of 0.40 or greater was considered as meaningful (Hair, Tatham, Anderson and Black 2005). As depicted in Table 8, the individual questionnaire statements were allocated to the factors according to the factor loadings of each variable.

As Table 8 indicates, the 7 varimax rotated factors were each named based on the variables, i.e. questionnaire statements, which contributed to each factor. Eight variables were found to load on the first factor labelled "search criteria", four variables loaded on the second factor labelled "purchase criteria", four variables loaded on the third factor labelled "evaluation criteria", three variables loaded on the fourth factor labelled "high and low involvement", two variables loaded on the fifth factor labelled "sponsored listings", one variable loaded on the sixth factor labelled "purchasing offline" and one variable loaded on the seventh factor labelled "type of product".

The named factors were consistent with the meaning of the combination of the variables, i.e. questionnaire statements, of which each factor was comprised, as described below.

Factor 1: Search criteria

The eight statements that loaded onto factor 1 relate to 'information search'. Variables 1, 2 and 3 loaded highest on this factor, with statements concerning usage benefits of a search engine for information search. Variables 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 contain statements relating to usage principles for information search using a search engine. Factor 1 was therefore labelled "search criteria".

Factor 2: Purchase criteria

The four statements that loaded onto factor 2 relate to ‘purchase decision’. Factor 2 was labelled “purchase criteria” since variables 22, 23, 24 and 25 contain statements focused around reasons for deciding to purchase online.

Factor 3: Evaluation criteria

The four statements that loaded onto factor 3 relate to ‘alternatives evaluation’. The statements for the variables making up this factor, i.e. variables 11, 12, 13 and 15, are associated with comparative considerations when evaluating search engine findings. The label “evaluation criteria” was considered appropriate for factor 3.

Factor 4: High and low involvement

The three statements that loaded onto factor 4 consider the purchasing situation related to high and low involvement items. Factor 4 is comprised of variables 18, 19 and 20 and was aptly labelled “high and low involvement”.

Factor 5: Sponsored listings

The two statements that loaded onto factor 5 concern sponsored listings as a marketing influencer. The label “sponsored listings” was therefore applied to Factor 5, with variables 7 and 8 making up this factor.

Factor 6: Purchasing offline

The statement that loaded onto factor 6 relates to buyer characteristics which affect purchase preferences, such that purchasing offline is preferred. Factor 6, comprised of variable 21, was labelled “purchasing offline” accordingly.

Factor 7: Type of product

The statement that loaded onto factor 7 is concerned with the purchasing situation with regards to the type of product. The label “type of product” was therefore deemed appropriate for Factor 7, which is comprised of variable 16.

Table 9 displays the factor loadings for the variables that did not load onto any of the 7 factors, together with their respective questionnaire statements.

Table 9: Variables that Did Not Load Onto Any Factors

VARIABLES	QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS	FACTORS						
		Search criteria	Purchase criteria	Evaluation criteria	High and low involvement	Sponsored listings	Purchasing offline	Type of product
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
V14	Although search engine findings play a role in my decision to purchase, I also rely on other factors including tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) before making my final purchase decision.	0.20	0.25	0.31	0.11	0.05	0.29	-0.27
V17	I use a search engine to search for information about High Involvement items more than Low Involvement items before making my purchase decision.	0.10	0.27	0.16	0.22	-0.02	-0.03	0.13

As can be seen in Table 9, variables 14 and 15 did not load onto any of the 7 factors. Since the factor loadings for these variables were all similarly low, it was concluded that variables 14 and 15 were ambiguous with respect to the factors identified and were not of significant importance in comparison to those variables which loaded onto the factors.

5.5 Reliability: Item analysis and factor scores

Item analysis was conducted to assess the reliability of the factors in the questionnaire via Cronbach's alpha values, which are summarised in Table 10. Also shown in Table 10 are the means, i.e. factor scores calculated for each factor in the study.

Table 10: Cronbach's Alphas and Means for the Study's Factors

FACTORS	VARIABLES (QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENT NUMBERS)	CRONBACH ALPHA	MEAN
1: Search criteria	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10	**0.81**	**6.15**
2: Purchase criteria	22, 23, 24, 25	**0.77**	**5.72**
3: Evaluation criteria	11, 12, 13, 15	**0.78**	**5.38**
4: High and low involvement	18, 19, 20	**0.78**	**5.54**
5: Sponsored listings	7, 8	**0.61**	**4.36**
6: Purchasing offline	21	**n/a**	**n/a**
7: Type of product	16	**n/a**	**n/a**

5.5.1 Cronbach's alphas

Cronbach's alpha values were used to evaluate the reliability in the questionnaire responses. A reliable Cronbach alpha value validates that the individual variables of a factor measured the same factor consistently.

As Table 10 indicates, the estimate of internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.80 for factor 1, with a value of 0.81, therefore indicating good reliability (Hair et al. 2005). Reliability estimates were 0.77, 0.78, 0.78, and 0.61 for factors 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively, indicating acceptable reliability as these Cronbach alpha values ranged between 0.60 and 0.80 (Hair et al. 2005).

Since a Cronbach alpha value cannot be calculated for a single variable, it is not applicable (n/a) for factors 6 and 7 where only one questionnaire statement made up each of these factors. Although factors 6 and 7 are less reliable than the other factors, they are still presented for completeness.

Appendix B4 provides the actual statistical output for the item analysis, which includes more detail related to Cronbach's alpha values for the factors.

5.5.2. Means

A mean is a measure of central tendency, i.e. the arithmetic average of the scores within the data set. Factor scores were calculated by taking the average of the variables that loaded onto that factor for each questionnaire participant.

As shown in Appendix B2, the second section of the questionnaire requested that respondents indicate their level of agreement to 25 statements, using a 7 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (rating of 1) on one end to strongly agree (rating of 7) on the other. A mean score towards a rating of 1 in turn indicates strong disagreement, while a mean score towards a rating of 7 indicates strong agreement.

As indicated in Table 10, calculated means were 6.15, 5.72, 5.38, 5.54, and 4.36 for factors 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively, indicating a greater tendency towards agreement as opposed to disagreement. Factors 6 and 7 did not produce means, rendering them not applicable (n/a), since only one questionnaire statement made up each of these factors. Factors 6 and 7 are still presented for completeness, despite these factors being less reliable than the others.

Although calculating means increases reliability of the factors, means are also slightly misleading. The questionnaire respondents were required to select a discrete number (a rating of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7), which has a finite number of possible values and therefore no possibility of decimal values, yet calculated means show decimal values. Factor analysis is more powerful than means, and is where the emphasis lies for this research.

Appendix B5 provides the actual statistical output of factor scores, reporting the means and additional details for the factors.

5.6 Summary of the quantitative results

The results of the demographic profiling suggest that Internet users within the borders of South Africa that use search engines:

- Could be either male or female, although the likelihood of being male is slightly higher compared to being female
- Are most likely to be aged between 26 and 45 years
- Are most likely to have obtained a tertiary qualification

The results of the behavioural profiling suggest that Internet users within the borders of South Africa that use search engines:

- Are mostly heavy Internet users, i.e. use the Internet on a daily basis
- Are mostly heavy search engine users, i.e. use a search engine on a daily basis
- Are mostly light to extra light online purchasers, with considerably fewer heavy to medium online purchasers, i.e. purchase online at varying frequencies, mostly ranging from daily to every 3-6 months

The results of the factor analysis identified 7 underlying factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and decision to purchase:

1. Search criteria
2. Purchase criteria
3. Evaluation criteria
4. High and low involvement
5. Sponsored listings
6. Purchasing offline
7. Type of product

The next chapter discusses the results and answers the research questions.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on discussing the findings of the research study in relation to the literature reviewed and the research questions.

Discussions pertaining to each of the three research questions begin the chapter, where the related factors and their linkages to the literature are explained. The additional contingency factors influencing the decision making process are then discussed, where each factor and its linkage to the literature is explained. A brief synopsis of the pair of questionnaire statements that did not form part of the factor loadings then follows. The chapter culminates with a discussion of the overall linkage between the research questions, the factors and the literature, where an integrated and adapted consumer behaviour model is introduced. A final conclusion to the chapter is then drawn.

6.2 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *search for information*?

6.2.1 Discussion of Factor 1

Factor 1, labelled "search criteria", relates to the search for information (Research Question 1) and, as indicated below by the statements that loaded onto the factor, recognises the following:

*Usage Benefits (*of a search engine for information search)

V1: A search engine is used a high majority of the time as the preferred medium to search for information on the Internet.

V2: A search engine is used to search for information on the Internet because it is an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information.

V3: Google is used a very high majority of the time as the preferred search engine to search for information on the Internet because it is the most well known, is easy to use and provides what is required.

*Usage Principles (*for information search using a search engine)

When performing a search for information on the Internet using a search engine, and searching for the required information on the search engine results page(s):

V4: A search engine result with a relevant Title, URL and Description, containing related keywords and for related websites, is important in order for the searcher to click on that particular search engine result.

V5: A search engine result for a known and trusted company or brand increases the likelihood of the searcher clicking on that particular search engine result.

V6: The searcher will click on natural search engine results a high majority of the time since they are considered more relevant and useful for providing the required information compared to sponsored search engine results.

V9: The searcher will click on relevant search engine results that appear on only the first search engine results page a very high majority of the time, rarely searching beyond the first page.

V10: The searcher will change the search terms and perform a new search if the required information has not yet been found after reaching the third search engine results page as a maximum.

The deduction is that information search is facilitated by using Internet search engines, namely the well known, easy to use and relevant Google search engine, since search engines are an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information. A natural search engine result with a

relevant Title, URL and Description for a known and trusted company or brand ideally appearing on the first or maximum the third search engine results page is most likely to be clicked during the information search phase of the consumer decision making process.

6.2.2 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 1

Green (2003), Raisinghani (2005), Fill (2009) and Stokes (2009) all stated that most Internet users rely on search engines to reach required websites. Kumar et al. (2005) also stated that search engines are the primary tool used by consumers for information search on the Internet. The results of this research found that search engines are used for information search most of the time by Internet users and consumers. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to search engines being the preferred medium to search for information and find what is required on the Internet.

Blackwell et al. (2001) and Shugan (2004) established that Internet search engines are an efficient means for consumers to find required information. Teo and Yeong (2003) as well as Laudon and Laudon (2004) indicated that search engines are a convenient form of information search. Kumar et al. (2005) described how search engines improve efficiency and reduce search cost by being free of charge, convenient and relevant. Darrow and Ferrera (2009) were of the opinion that increased search engine popularity is attributed to search engines being free to use. Su (2008) too identified the low cost of searching for information as the main advantage of Internet shopping. Özad and Kutoğlu (2010) concluded that search engines improve the ease and speed of information search while lowering the time and cost required for information search. Teo and Yeong (2003) additionally found that Internet search engines reduce the effort and time required for information search compared to when searching offline. The results of this research found that consumers use search engines because they are an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to search engines being advantageous for consumer

information search in a number of ways including efficiency, convenience, being free to use and saving time.

As Cusumano (2005) mentioned, Google was the first search engine used by many and maintains a leading position with its advanced search technology. Hwai-Hui et al. (2006) also described that Google obtains user confidence in its objective organic results since there is no human intervention or manipulation. The results of this research found that Google is the preferred search engine which consumers use most of the time for information search since it is regarded as the most well known search engine, is easy to use and provides what is required. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to Google being considered as the search engine of choice and providing the required objective information which consumers search for.

The results of this research found that a relevant Title, URL and Description with related keywords and websites in search engine results will ensure consumers actually follow that listing. This is a new finding since literature in this regard was not available for comparison, and it can therefore be concluded that relevancy in the copy and URL of search engine results is of importance for optimal consumer interaction with these results when searching for information.

Lin and Wang (2008) indicated that consumers seek trustworthy sellers when searching for information online, and brand mentions in search results correlate with increased conversions. Teo and Yeong (2003) and Eggert (2006) also suggested the importance of brand names and reputation in conveying trustworthiness, a determinant of credibility. Additionally, McGaughey and Mason (1998) as well as Kotler and Keller (2006) acknowledged that consumers become aware of competing brands as they gather information, forming part of the awareness set from which the final purchase decision is eventually made. The results of this research found that consumers are more likely to follow a search engine result for a known and trusted company or brand. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to the increased likelihood of consumers following known and trusted company or brand listings in search engine results when searching for information.

Sen (2005) concluded that consumers trust natural listings more than sponsored listings and as such are more likely to click on natural listings. Jansen et al. (2007) also found that consumers prefer natural listings, consider them as more relevant and view them first most of the time. Hwai-Hui et al. (2006) further declared that consumer confidence in Google's natural listings are as a result of the objectivity of the information provided. The results of this research found that consumers consider natural listings to be more relevant and useful for providing the required information compared to sponsored listings and as such consumers are more likely to click on natural listings. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to natural listings being preferred and clicked on more predominantly by consumers compared to sponsored listings during information search.

Armstrong et al. (2009) said that consumer search behaviour and choice is affected by prominence in search results. Thompson (2004) reported that a very high majority of users do not look past the second search engine results page, while Stokes (2009) reported that users are unlikely to look beyond the third search engine results page. Additionally, Su (2008) recognised that consumers will perform further searches on search engines with differing keywords when the required information is not found. The results of this research found that consumers will mostly focus on and click those relevant search engine results appearing on the first up to the third search engine results page as a maximum, changing the keywords and performing a new search if the required information has not yet been found by that stage. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to consumer behaviour when performing search engine searches in that attention is prioritised towards those search engine results displayed most prominently in search engines, where the majority of consumers only consider the results displaying up to the third search engine results page as a maximum, and new searches with different keywords are performed if the information being searched for is still not found by that point, which ultimately affects consumer choice.

6.3 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *evaluation of alternatives*?

6.3.1 Discussion of Factor 3

Factor 3, labelled "evaluation criteria", relates to the evaluation of alternatives (Research Question 2) and, as indicated below by the statements that loaded onto the factor, recognises the following:

Subsequent to the search for information using Internet search engines, and before making the purchase decision, comparative considerations when evaluating search engine findings are identified:

V11: A search engine is used to assist in comparing options.

V12: Search engine findings containing positive reviews, ratings and opinions about an item influence and increase the likelihood of making the decision to purchase.

V13: Search engine findings are considered sufficient in order to confidently decide to make purchases in general.

V15: Search engine findings are considered sufficient in order to confidently decide to make purchases for intangible services such as holiday travel and entertainment tickets, and to actually make the purchase online.

The deduction is that during the evaluation of alternatives phase of the consumer decision making process which occurs after searching for information using Internet search engines and prior to making the decision to purchase, comparing options is facilitated by search engines, where positive reviews, ratings and opinions about an item influence the purchase decision and increase the likelihood of deciding to make the purchase. In addition, when confidently deciding to make purchases in general as well as purchases for services, which will also be purchased online, the search engine findings are considered sufficient.

6.3.2 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 3

Eggert (2006) described how the Internet enables alternative comparisons and the retrieval of product information for searching consumers. Agarwal et al. (2011) indicated how search engines assist in reducing the size of consumer consideration sets, and improve their quality and that of the ultimate purchase decision. The results of this research found that search engines assist consumers in option comparisons prior to purchase decisions being made. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to Internet search engines facilitating the evaluation and comparison of alternative options being considered before consumers make their purchase decisions.

As affirmed by McGaughey and Mason (1998) and Blackwell et al. (2001), consumers attempt to increase their knowledge about their considered set of alternatives by obtaining input from unbiased sources. McGaughey and Mason (1998) further indicated that the objective and accurate nature of positive or negative consumer comments act as convincing influencers on others' purchase decisions. Teo and Yeong (2003) similarly stated that consumers reduce the perceived risk of making a purchase by examining external neutral sources. The results of this research found that positive reviews, ratings and opinions about items discovered through search engine searches influence and resultantly increase the likelihood of making the purchase. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to the fact that comments, reviews, ratings and opinions from impartial external sources located through searches on search engines are obtained by consumers and will influence purchase decisions.

Green (2003) indicated that using search engines informs consumer purchase decisions. Teo and Yeong (2003) described how the nature of online products affect consumers' risk perception. Eggert (2006) concluded that product intangibility increases consumers' perception of risk. The results of this research found that search engine findings are sufficient to ensure consumer confidence when making purchases in general as well as for services, which are intangible, and consumers are also confident to purchase services online. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to the fact that search

engine findings do inform general consumer purchase decisions. However, the literature mentioned the perceived risk of product intangibility, whereas services were not accounted for. The research findings show that consumers are confident to base their purchase decisions for intangible services, such as holiday travel and entertainment, on search engine findings alone, and consumers are also confident to purchase services online. These are therefore new findings.

6.4 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 3

Research Question 3: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *decision to purchase*?

6.4.1 Discussion of Factor 2

Factor 2, labelled "purchase criteria" relates to the decision to purchase (Research Question 3) and, as indicated below by the statements that loaded onto the factor, recognises the following:

After searching for information and evaluating alternatives using Internet search engines, various reasons for deciding to make a purchase online are identified:

V22: A decision to purchase online from a website found will be made if the required item is only available online.

V23: A decision to purchase online from a website found will be made if the required item costs less online compared to offline at a physical store.

V24: A decision to purchase online will only be made if the website found is credible and trustworthy.

V25: Online purchasing is considered to be convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving.

The deduction is that online purchasing is considered as being convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving, and, following information search and

alternative evaluation using Internet search engines and onto the purchase decision phase of the consumer decision making process, a decision to purchase online from a website found is most likely to occur when item availability is only online, item cost is lower online, and the website is credible and trustworthy.

6.4.2 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 2

McGaughey and Mason (1998) and Soopramanien et al. (2007) noted that consumers differ, where some are comfortable to use search engines for acquiring information as well as making the purchase online. The results of this research found that after using search engines to search for information and evaluate alternatives, a decision to purchase online from a website found will occur in a number of cases, namely when the item is only available online, the cost is lower online, and the website is credible and trustworthy. A discussion of these cases follows.

The results of this research found that consumers would purchase online from websites located through searches performed on a search engine if the required item was only available online. This is a new finding since literature in this regard was not available for comparison. It can therefore be concluded that item availability affects a consumer's decision to make an online purchase, and if a search engine search led to a website selling the desired item which was available online only then the consumer would purchase it online.

Jie et al. (2006) concluded that consumers consider price and quality when making purchase decisions. Blackwell et al. (2001) in the general context and Goldstuck (2011) in the online South African context identified competitive prices as a determinant for retail success. The results of this research found that if the cost of a required item is less online compared to offline at a physical store then it will be decided to make the purchase online. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to price being a factor in making purchase decisions, and the research findings further indicate that online purchases are welcomed by consumers if the price is right.

Lin and Wang (2008) noted that trustworthy sellers are sought by consumers when purchasing products online due to the high perception of risk associated with Internet transactions. Teo and Yeong (2003) and Soopramanien et al. (2007) also indicated that consumers' willingness to purchase online is determined by the perceived risk and credibility associated with the purchase. Teo and Yeong (2003) and Eggert (2006) additionally mentioned that the source's trustworthiness determines credibility in terms of a website's integrity. The results of this research found that consumers will only purchase online if the website located through searches on a search engine is credible enough and the consumer trusts it. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to consumers seeking credible and trustworthy websites to purchase from, as a prerequisite to deciding to purchase online.

Teo and Yeong (2003) indicated convenience as a key advantage of online shopping, with the benefits of saving time and hassle. Yu and Wu (2007) and Su (2008) also recognised convenience as the primary advantage of online retail, including the speed and ease of shopping. In addition, Goldstuck (2011) identified the speed of fulfilment as one of the main success factors for online retail in South Africa. The results of this research found that consumers regard online purchasing as being advantageous in that it is convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to online purchasing being considered as beneficial to consumers in terms of convenience, speediness and saving time, as well as simplicity and reduced hassle.

6.5 Contingency factors influencing the consumer decision making process

This research study identified four additional factors which were significant but not part of the decision making process, however, they act as important contingency factors influencing the consumer decision making process.

6.5.1 Discussion of Factor 4

Factor 4, labelled “high and low involvement”, is a contingency factor influencing the decision making process, and the statements that loaded onto the factor are indicated as follows:

V18: Search engine findings are considered to be generally sufficient in order to decide to make purchases for low involvement items.

V19: Offline criteria including tangibility, i.e. physically see, touch and feel, are sought in addition to search engine findings, for added assurance before deciding to make purchases for high involvement items.

V20: Low involvement items are more likely to be purchased online and high involvement items are mostly purchased offline.

The deduction is that the decision making process is influenced by the purchasing situation related to high and low involvement items. For low involvement items, search engine findings are considered sufficient to make the purchase decision, and these items are likely to be purchased online. For high involvement items, search engine findings as well as offline criteria, including tangibility for added assurance, are required to make the purchase decision, and these items are mostly purchased offline. Therefore for both high and low involvement items, search engines are used during the information search and evaluation of alternatives phases of the consumer decision making process. However, when making the purchase decision for high involvement items search engine findings alone are insufficient, and are therefore exclusively considered only for low involvement items during the purchase decision phase of the consumer decision making process.

6.5.2 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 4

Blackwell et al. (2001) identified personal, product and situational factors as determinants of the degree of involvement in consumer decision making. Fill (2009) also noted that the purchasing situation affects the level of involvement, since involvement relates to the degree of personal relevance and risk

perceived by consumers in purchase situations. McGaughey and Mason (1998) indicated that the amount of active information search and effort required by consumers is increased for high involvement products compared to the less information search effort required for low involvement products. Teo and Yeong (2003) also explained how purchase involvement, time availability and shopping attitude positively relate to information search effort. Blackwell et al. (2001) and Fill (2009) further showed that the more important products and services are perceived to be the more information search is conducted by consumers. The results of this research found that for low involvement items consumers consider search engine findings as sufficient for making the purchase decision, while for high involvement items consumers seek additional offline criteria including tangibility in addition to search engine findings before making the purchase decision.

The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to the purchasing situation affecting high and low involvement product purchases, where information about both high and low involvement products is searched for using search engines although high involvement items require increased information search compared to low involvement items. Since literature in this regard was not available for comparison, a new finding was that purchase decisions for high involvement products require not just information gathered from online search engine results but also from offline criteria including tangibility, whereas purchase decisions for low involvement products are made as a result of search engine results alone.

The results of this research found that consumers are more likely to purchase low involvement products online and high involvement products offline. This is a new finding since literature in this regard was not available for comparison. It can therefore be concluded that consumers favour the Internet as the purchase channel for low involvement products, while physical stores are favoured for high involvement product purchases.

6.5.3 Discussion of Factor 5

Factor 5, labelled “sponsored listings”, is a contingency factor influencing the decision making process, and the statements that loaded onto the factor are indicated as follows:

V7: When intending to make a purchase, the likelihood of clicking on sponsored listings is increased.

V8: If relevant to the search performed, sponsored listings will be observed and clicked on.

The deduction is that the decision making process is influenced by marketing through sponsored listings, i.e. paid adverts, on search engines. During the information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision phases of the decision making process, consumers will observe and click on relevant sponsored listings found in search engine results pages, and there is an increased likelihood of a sponsored listing being clicked on when a purchase intention exists.

6.5.4 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 5

Blackwell et al. (2001) indicated that marketing activities to promote a product may influence consumers when they are deciding to make a purchase. Agarwal et al. (2011) described how sponsored listings are a unique form of advertising since they match stated consumer information needs and occur close to consumer purchase decisions. Agarwal et al. (2011) further explained that the keywords used by consumers in search engine queries might reflect underlying purchase intents, where low purchase intents reflect broad search patterns and high purchase intents reflect more targeted product searches. The results of this research found that consumers are more likely to click on sponsored listings if they intend to make a purchase. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to sponsored listings as a marketing promotions activity influencing purchasing decisions. However, although the literature mentioned that sponsored listings are closely matched to consumer needs and

occur close to consumer purchase decisions, and that search keywords used by consumers may reflect underlying purchase intents, literature with regards to following sponsored listings based upon purchase intents was not available for comparison. A new finding is therefore that consumers with purchase intentions who search on search engines will be more likely to follow sponsored listings.

Jansen et al. (2007) stated that consumers do appreciate sponsored listings if they are relevant, and about a third of consumers searching on a search engine interact with sponsored listings. The results of this research found that consumers do look at and will click on sponsored listings if relevant to the search performed on a search engine. The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to consumers observing and subsequently following sponsored search engine listings that are relevant to consumers' search requirements.

6.5.5 Discussion of Factor 6

Factor 6, labelled "purchasing offline", is a contingency factor influencing the decision making process, and the statement that loaded onto the factor is indicated as follows:

V21: Search engines are used to search for information and assist in making the final purchase decision, however, it is mostly preferred to make the purchase offline at a physical store rather than online.

The deduction is that the decision making process is influenced by the characteristics of the consumer, which affect purchase preferences. Consumers use search engines during the information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision phases of the decision making process, however, once the purchase decision is made then consumers mostly prefer to make the actual purchase offline at a physical store rather than online. A consumer could therefore be quoted saying: "I feel more confident to purchase offline".

* The contribution from factor 6 is limited, due to this factor being comprised of a single variable.

6.5.6 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 6

McGaughey and Mason (1998) and Soopramanien et al. (2007) noted that consumers differ, where some are comfortable to use search engines for acquiring information but not purchasing online, in which case search engines act more as advertising mediums. Blackwell et al. (2001) mentioned how individual differences, which form part of an individual's personality including preferred behaviour patterns, influence consumers' decision process, including deciding on online or offline retail forms. Yu and Wu (2007) also stated that consumer characteristics affect the type of shopping chosen by consumers. Kotler and Keller (2006) further expressed that personal characteristics affect consumer purchase decisions, with traditional consumers not shopping online while cyber-consumers mostly shop online and hybrid consumers shop online and offline. Teo and Yeong (2003) and Soopramanien et al. (2007) discussed how the perceived risk of a purchase, where risk is personal and related to individual consumers' perceptions of what they consider to be risky, is a determinant of the willingness of consumers to purchase online. Eggert (2006) also said that consumers' perceived risks when purchasing online relates to the fact that the majority of consumers use the Internet to collect information about products but it is preferred to actually make the product purchase in the traditional way. The results of this research found that although consumers use search engines to search for information and evaluate alternatives to assist in the final purchase decision, they mostly prefer to make the purchase offline.

The literature and the research findings therefore hold true with regards to individual characteristics, forming part of a consumer's personality including preferred behaviour patterns, having an influencing effect on decision making. Therefore, after using a search engine to assist in searching for information, evaluating alternatives and making the purchase decision, the preference of consumers is to purchase offline at a physical store rather than online through a website, which may be attributed to consumers' perceived risk of Internet purchasing.

6.5.7 Discussion of Factor 7

Factor 7, labelled “type of product”, is a contingency factor influencing the decision making process, and the statement that loaded onto the factor is indicated as follows:

V16: There is confidence in purchasing a tangible item online without experiencing the tangibility, i.e. physically seeing, touching and feeling.

The deduction is that the decision making process is influenced by the purchasing situation regarding the type of product. Search engines are used during the information search, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision phases of the decision making process, and following the decision to purchase a tangible product, consumers are confident to make the purchase online without experiencing the tangibility.

* The contribution from factor 7 is limited, due to this factor being comprised of a single variable. This factor probably refers to low involvement tangible items which are likely to be purchased online e.g. CD’s or books, due to the fact that experiencing the tangibility is not required. If this factor was referring to high involvement items then it is unlikely that it would have emerged as a factor of considerable importance.

6.5.8 Linkage to the Literature of Factor 7

Blackwell et al. (2001) described the inability to touch and experience a product before purchasing it as a shortcoming of the Internet. Teo and Yeong (2003) indicated that consumers’ perception of risks differ according the nature of the online product, where tangible product purchases may require pre-purchase trials or observations of others as part of the decision process. Although Eggert (2006) stated that consumers’ perception of risk is increased by product intangibility, it was further explained that the influence of intangibility on perceived risk is reduced by the Internet, since an extensive amount of information is held by the Internet which consumers can search for using search engines, and this enables better visualisation and understanding of products.

The results of this research found that consumers are confident to purchase tangible items online without experiencing the tangibility.

Although the literature identifies intangibility as a shortcoming of the Internet, and consumers' perceived risk is increased by product intangibility, the literature and the research findings hold true in terms of the perceived risk of product intangibility being reduced with the extensive product information search facilitated by the Internet, since this can be translated to consumer confidence with regards to tangible products available on the Internet. However, since literature in this regard was not available for comparison, a new finding was that consumers are confident to actually make an online purchase for a tangible product, without having physically seen, touched or felt the product.

6.6 Questionnaire statements not part of factor loadings

Questionnaire statement for V14: "Although search engine findings play a role in my decision to purchase, I also rely on other factors including tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) before making my final purchase decision."

Since this variable did not load onto any factor, it was concluded that variable 14 was not of importance for further consideration and the contents of this questionnaire statement were overridden by more important factors identified in the study.

Questionnaire statement for V17: "I use a search engine to search for information about High Involvement items more than Low Involvement items before making my purchase decision."

Since this variable did not load onto any factor, it can be inferred that a search engine is used to search for information about both high and low involvement items, and there was no evidence to support that either low or high involvement items were comparatively searched for more or less than the other. It was concluded that variable 17 was not of importance in the study.

6.7 Overall linkage between the Research Questions, the Factors and the Literature

Figure 15 illustrates how the factors identified in this research study tie in with the literature reviewed. Kotler and Keller's (2006:184) model of consumer behaviour was integrated with Hawkins and Mothersbaugh's (2010:471) behaviour model which included situational influences, to form the adapted model shown in Figure 15 which indicates the important elements for consideration that the factors identified for this study apply to.

Factor 1, search criteria, is directly related to research question 1: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *search for information*?

Factor 3, evaluation criteria, is directly related to research question 2: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *evaluation of alternatives*?

Factor 2, purchase criteria, is directly related to research question 3: What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *decision to purchase*?

Factor 4 (high and low involvement), Factor 5 (sponsored listings), Factor 6 (purchasing offline) and Factor 7 (type of product) are contingency factors. These contingency factors, which are related to search engine marketing, do not form part of the consumer decision making process, however, they do have an influence on it.

As explained in this chapter and is clear in Figure 15, this research study demonstrates a definite overall linkage between the research questions, the factors and the literature. The purchase situation related to "high and low involvement products" (factor 4) and the "type of product" (factor 7), simultaneously with the marketing promotions influence of "sponsored listings" (factor 5), enter consumers' consciousness, and the preferred behaviour pattern of "purchasing offline" (factor 6) which is related to personality traits as part of consumer characteristics, results in consumer decision making processes. The

key influencing factors related to search engine marketing for information search are identified in “search criteria” (factor 1). The key influencing factors related to search engine marketing for the evaluation of alternatives are identified in “evaluation criteria” (factor 3). The key influencing factors related to search engine marketing for the purchase decision are identified in “purchase criteria” (factor 2).

The results of this research study showed application to existing literature while also demonstrating new findings. The research findings can therefore be said to have contributed to the knowledge base, which was limited and lacking, with regards to the factors related to search engine marketing that influence the consumer decision making process of South African consumers.

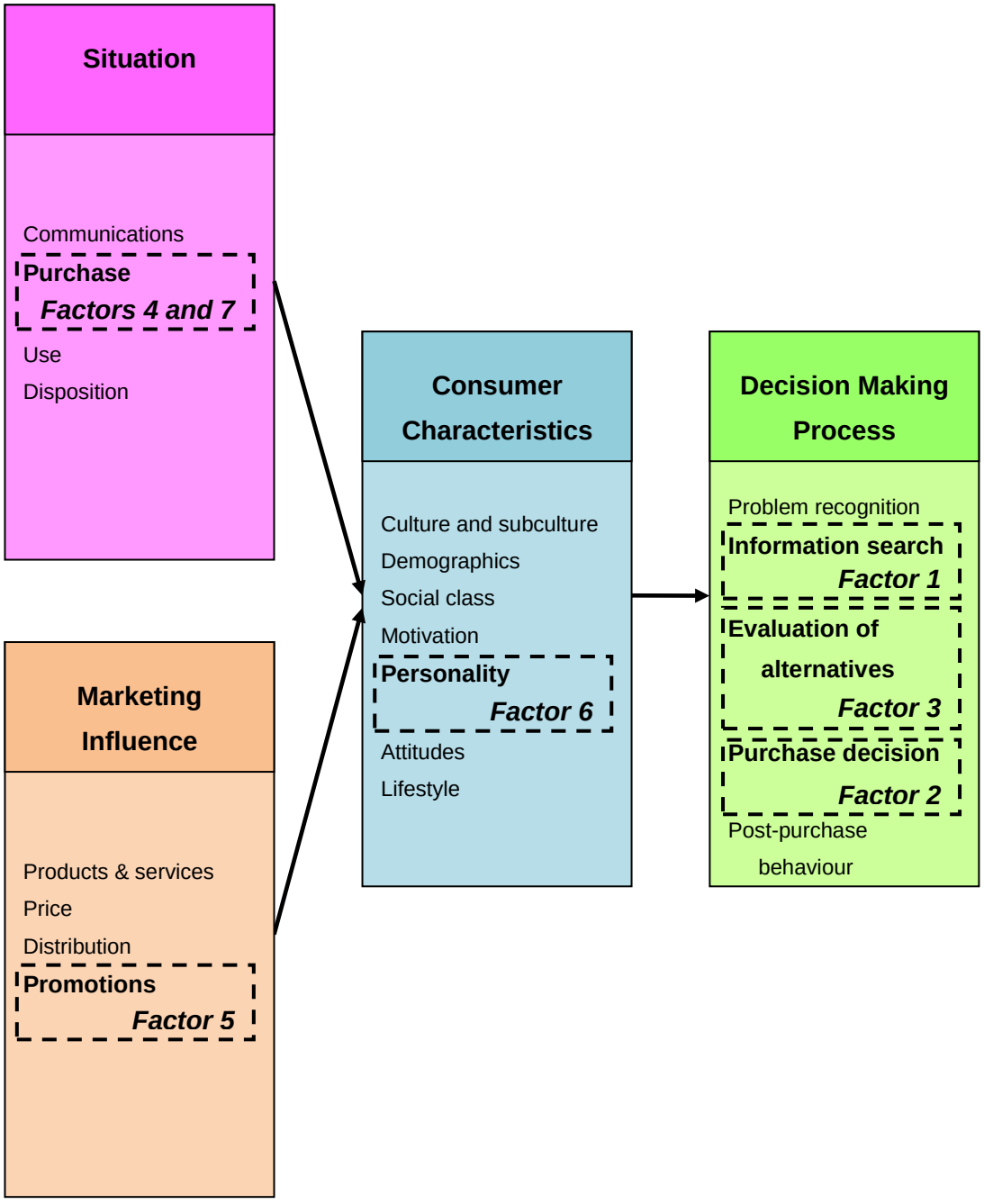


Figure 15: Integrated Consumer Behaviour Model with the Study's Factors

Source: Adapted from *Model of Consumer Behaviour* (Kotler and Keller 2006:184) and *The Situation Interacts with the Marketing Activity and the Individual to Determine Behaviour* (Hawkins and Mothersbaugh 2010:471) with input from this research study

6.8 Conclusion

A number of the research findings were found to hold true to the literature reviewed. Various established factors which applied for traditional marketing in terms of influencing consumer behaviour and the decision process were also found to apply for search engine marketing. However, some new findings were also discovered in terms of key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives, and decision to purchase.

The research questions arose from the literature. The research findings were then linked back to the literature, as discussed in this chapter. An integrated consumer behaviour model with the study's factors culminated the chapter, where an overall linkage between the research questions, the factors and the literature was established, ultimately answering the research questions and further explaining the additional influencing contingency factors.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by summarising the research findings and presenting the derived conclusions of the study, where the research questions are answered and the contingency factor influences are indicated. Recommendations to marketing managers of South African companies with regards to the implementation of success-driven search engine marketing strategies are then provided, based on the research findings. Suggestions for further research are then proposed, exploring related topics that could potentially be researched which may serve to expand on the findings of this research study.

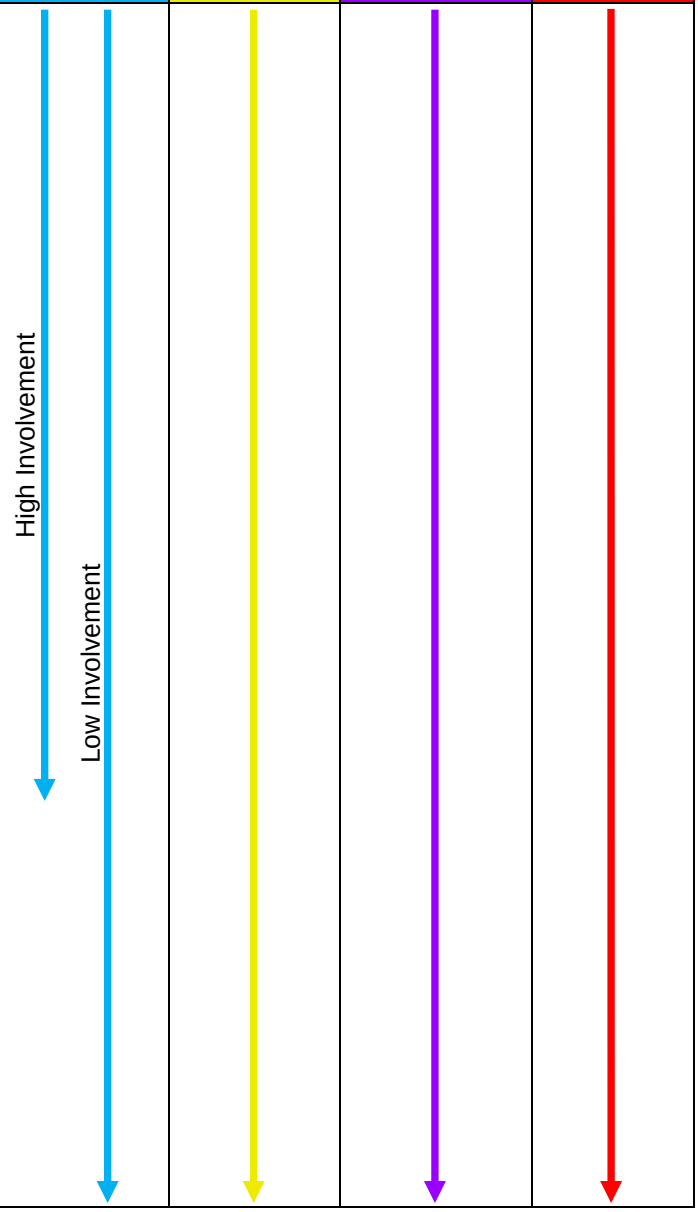
7.2 Conclusions of the study

The purpose of this research study was to determine the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence South African consumers' decision making process, specifically the search for information, evaluation of alternatives and decision to purchase.

A qualitative study was conducted first to explore and understand the important issues, followed by a quantitative study to confirm the findings and provide insights about the population.

Table 11 depicts the conclusions of the study, showing the factors that answered the research questions as well as the influencing contingency factors, which this section elaborates upon further.

Table 11: Conclusions of the Study

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	FACTORS	CONTINGENCY FACTORS			
		Purchasing Situation	Marketing Influencer	Consumer Characteristic	Purchasing Situation
		Factor 4 High and low involvement	**Factor 5** Sponsored listings	**Factor 6** Purchasing offline	**Factor 7** Type of product
1. What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' ***search for information***?	**Factor 1** Search criteria				
2. What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' ***evaluation of alternatives***?	**Factor 3** Evaluation criteria				
3. What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' ***purchase decision***?	**Factor 2** Purchase criteria				

7.2.1 Answers to the Research Questions

The research findings were used to answer the research questions and produce conclusions of the study, as summarised below.

Research Question 1
What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *search for information*?

The answer to the first research question was provided by the "search criteria" factor identified.

Search engines are the primary source utilised by consumers when searching for information on the Internet. Consumers use search engines for information search since they believe them to be beneficial in a number of ways including efficiency, convenience and being free to use, as well as saving time. Google is primarily used as the search engine of choice, since it is regarded by consumers as the most well known, is easy to use and adequately fulfils information search requirements.

When searching for information using Internet search engines, consumers are more likely to follow links displayed in the search engine results based on a number of usage principles. Consumers only click on a search engine result that contains a relevant Title, URL and Description with related keywords and websites. Consumers are more likely to click on search engine results for known and trusted companies or brands. Consumers click on natural listings most of the time since these are regarded as more relevant and useful for providing required information compared to sponsored listings. Consumers focus and click on relevant results on the first search engine results page primarily, but may continue up to the third search engine results page as a maximum, and if the information required has still not been found then a new search is performed using different keywords.

Research Question 2

What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *evaluation of alternatives*?

The answer to the second research question was provided by the "evaluation criteria" factor identified.

Consumers agree that search engines facilitate the comparison of options, i.e. the evaluation of alternatives, following information search and prior to making a purchase decision. Reviews, ratings and opinions discovered about an item through searches on a search engine influence a consumer's purchase decision, increasing the likelihood of making the purchase when positive. Consumers are confident to base purchase decisions on search engine findings for general product purchases and when purchasing intangible services, such as holiday travel and entertainment tickets, which are also confidently purchased online.

Research Question 3

What are the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence consumers' *decision to purchase*?

The answer to the third research question was provided by the "purchase criteria" factor identified.

Consumers consider online purchasing to be convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving. After searching for information and evaluating alternatives using search engines, consumers decide to purchase online from websites discovered through the search engine searches for a number of reasons. Consumers purchase online if the item required is only available online, if the item required costs less online compared to offline at a physical store, and if the discovered website is considered credible and trustworthy enough.

7.2.2 Contingency factor influences

A number of contingency factors were also identified in this research study. These contingency factors relate to search engine marketing but do not form part of the consumer decision making process, however, they were found to influence it.

These additional research findings for contingency factor influences produced further conclusions, as indicated below.

High and low involvement

The consumer decision making process is influenced by the purchasing situation related to high and low involvement items.

For low involvement items, consumers generally consider search engine findings as sufficient in order to make purchase decisions. Search engines therefore facilitate and influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decisions for low involvement items. Consumers are also more likely to purchase low involvement items online.

For high involvement items, consumers will consider search engine findings but will also seek offline criteria including tangibility, i.e. physically seeing, touching and feeling the items, for added assurance before making purchase decisions. Search engines therefore only facilitate and influence consumers' search for information and evaluation of alternatives for high involvement items, since purchase decisions require the consideration of additional criteria. Consumers also mostly purchase high involvement items offline.

Sponsored listings

The consumer decision making process is influenced by marketing through sponsored listings, i.e. paid adverts, on search engines.

Consumers observe and click on sponsored listings in search engine results pages if they are relevant to the searches performed. Consumers are also more likely to click on sponsored listings when intending to make purchases. Sponsored listings, the paid for component of search engine marketing, therefore influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decisions.

Purchasing offline

The consumer decision making process is influenced by the characteristics of the consumer, which affect purchase preferences.

Consumers mostly prefer to make purchases offline at a physical store rather than online, although search engines are used for information search and alternatives evaluation to assist in making final purchase decisions. Search engines therefore facilitate and influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision, but once the purchase decision is made then it is mostly preferred to purchase offline.

Type of product

The consumer decision making process is influenced by the purchasing situation regarding the type of product.

Consumers are confident to purchase tangible items online without experiencing the tangibility, i.e. physically seeing, touching and feeling the item. Search engines therefore facilitate and influence consumers' search for information, evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision, and once the purchase decision for a tangible product is made then consumers are confident to purchase online.

7.3 Recommendations

As suggested in Chapter 1, in this age of technological advancement where consumers are increasingly using Internet search engines as the starting point to locate information as well as products and services, it is critical for marketers aiming for success into the future to adapt to this changing marketing environment. The study's findings of the key factors related to search engine marketing that influence the consumer decision making process were used to provide recommendations to marketing managers accordingly, which are presented in this section.

The most important overall recommendation to marketing managers of companies in South Africa is that search engine marketing campaigns as part of the marketing mix are indeed necessary in this electronic age. The growth of Internet users and online retail in South Africa further indicates the importance of marketing via Internet search engines to ultimately influence the final purchase decisions of consumers. Companies aiming to obtain competitive advantage and long-term profitability should therefore integrate search engine marketing strategies into existing marketing strategies to ensure success.

Since search engine marketing strategies are comprised of both search engine optimisation and paid advertising, and Google is the search engine of choice used by consumers, marketing managers should focus on ensuring that companies are found on Google's search engine results pages in both the natural listings and sponsored listings, so as to attract consumers at the exact moment of relevance, i.e. when they are searching for what the company offers.

Consumers are more likely to follow natural listings compared to sponsored listings, and as such marketing managers should ensure that sufficient company budgets are allocated towards performing search engine optimisation. A high search engine ranking can be achieved through effective search engine optimisation techniques, which include writing relevant keyword-rich content and securing links from relevant third party websites, and this is an important consideration for marketing managers since consumers generally direct attention towards search engine results displayed on the first search engine

results page, up to the third page as a maximum. Company websites should therefore be optimised to ideally display within Google's first 30 natural search engine results for targeted keywords relating to the company's offerings so as to achieve optimal success with regards to natural listings.

The value of purchasing sponsored listings should not be overlooked by marketing managers, since consumers will observe and follow these links if relevant to their searches. Marketing managers should therefore ensure that companies invest in paid advertising on Google, i.e. Google AdWords, which will be particularly effective when these sponsored listings are clicked on by consumers with a purchase intention. Sponsored listings have the added advantage of enabling both new and established companies alike to immediately obtain a guaranteed presence on all search engine results pages for chosen keywords, whereas search engine optimisation is a long-term process which still does not guarantee placement in the natural listings on search engine results pages.

Sponsored listings are excellent transaction engines for companies focused on selling low involvement products, and marketing managers for these types of companies should therefore take full advantage. For high involvement products search engines are used more for the purpose of acquiring information, yet marketing managers for companies selling high involvement products should still budget for sponsored listings as they will be beneficial in influencing the consumer's final purchase decision.

Although company websites should ideally display on search engine results pages for related keywords in both natural and sponsored listings, a recommended search engine marketing strategy for marketing managers working within a stringent marketing budget is to use the Google AdWords keyword suggestion tool to determine the competition for the most relevant keywords related to the company's particular product or service offering. For highly competitive keywords where ranking highly in natural listings is unlikely in the short-term, the focus should be on paid adverts so as to immediately be found in Google's sponsored listings for those keywords. For less competitive keywords where ranking highly in natural listings is more likely in the short-term,

the focus should be on search engine optimisation so as to appear in Google's natural listings for those keywords. In addition, since consumers may conduct multiple searches with differing keywords when the required information is not found within the first three search engine results pages, if a company's website is optimised to appear in the natural listings for those less competitive yet relevant keywords then it is more likely to be found by consumers.

The relevance of search engine results is of utmost importance to consumers, drawing attention towards favourable information that encourages product purchases. Since a search engine result with a relevant Title, Description and URL is more likely to be clicked on, marketing managers should carefully consider the copy used on websites which will filter into the company's natural listings as well as the ad copy used in sponsored listings, to ensure it is completely relevant and describes the company's offerings accurately.

Marketing managers need to be inventive and original in their marketing campaigns to attract attention and convert interest into sales, leading potential consumers to their company websites as opposed to those of competitors. Obtaining additional website traffic may be augmented by highlighting a special offer or price reduction in the marketing message for natural and sponsored listings, which will essentially act as a purchase trigger to encourage consumer purchasing.

Since consumers are more likely to click on a search engine result for a known and trusted company or brand, and make online purchases from credible and trustworthy websites only, developing adequate search engine marketing campaigns is especially recommended to marketing managers of established brands. However, it is still also beneficial for marketing managers of lesser known companies or brands to ensure that they too have a search engine presence. Besides acting as a means for creating brand awareness and exposure, consumers are also more likely to eventually click on a company's organic or sponsored listing if they keep seeing it come up in search engine results pages for multiple searches conducted on a topic related to the company's offerings.

Marketing managers should ensure that online purchasing is facilitated through company websites, since consumers are confident to make online purchases in a number of cases. Websites that would benefit most with increased online sales include trustworthy websites, websites for items available exclusively online, websites where the price online is lower compared to offline, and websites for tangible products. However, the personal purchasing preferences of consumers influence the final purchase decision such that generally it is preferred to make purchases offline at a physical store, which implies that companies should also have an offline presence. It is therefore recommended that companies ideally have both an online and offline presence, regardless of whether the company is more online or offline oriented, and consumer purchases should be facilitated both online and offline, so as to effectively result in increased sales.

The extensive amount of information available on the Internet increases the number of alternatives evaluated by consumers. Marketing managers can stimulate future sales for the company by encouraging past customers to share their positive product experiences with others. Facilitating positive consumer reviews, ratings and opinions about products on company websites is therefore recommended, since this objective feedback may be highly considered when appearing in future search engine results pages, which will ultimately influence potential future customers in a positive manner.

7.4 Suggestions for further research

Several avenues for conducting further research are suggested, as identified and discussed in this section.

A longitudinal research study to examine consumer decision processes related to search engine marketing could be conducted, where repeated observations of the same variables would enable the assessment of the effects or changes over a period of time, which would enhance the richness of the findings.

The investigation of the influence of search engine marketing on the consumer decision making process can be extended to cover the same issue from the

point of view of search engine providers such as Google, Yahoo! and Bing, so as to obtain a more holistic perspective.

A comprehensive comparative analysis can be carried out based on the website traffic received by search engines to measure the extent to which consumers follow sponsored listing links versus organic listing links.

A formal study to understand how search engines can be effectively used as a promotional tool to stimulate problem recognition could be carried out, to establish whether search engines may in fact create consumer needs through awareness and interest whilst consumers are browsing the Internet according to particular areas of interest.

Post-purchase behaviour could be researched, particularly in respect to whether having used a search engine for information search, evaluation of alternatives and the purchase decision aids consumers in future decision making and repeat purchases. This could relate to websites purchased from previously, where a satisfactory or dissatisfactory experience with a particular website or product brand may affect future consumer purchase decisions.

The impact of social media on the consumer decision making process could be examined. More specifically, a comparison between the impacts of social network adverts, which are targeted according to an individual's profile, versus that of sponsored listings, which are generic to all search engine users, could be performed.

A research study exploring the differences in consumer behaviour and decision making for differing product categories could be conducted. The differences when consumer purchasing applies to specific product types such as fast moving goods, capital items including houses and cars, travel services and entertainment could be determined.

The usage of Internet marketing channels including search engine marketing by companies could be investigated, to determine the extent to which this relatively new marketing channel is utilised and the reasons for use or non-use in a competitive online environment.

An in-depth study of online retail and purchasing could be executed, to determine consumer perceptions and to discover how company websites can adapt accordingly so as to encourage increased online sales. Identification of key drivers to using online versus offline sources during the consumer decision making process could be examined, confirming the benefits and determining influencers for consumer usage of electronic versus traditional mediums.

The impact on consumer behaviour and decision making after an intervention could be studied, to investigate how an intervention activity such as an empowering educational program affects behaviour.

A study of the relative strengths and weaknesses of applicability of the decision model in the context of the Internet shopping environment could be carried out to assess how models can be adapted in an age of technological change.

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APPENDIX A

Qualitative Study

1) Email Sent to Potential Interviewees

Email Subject:

Interview for my MBA Research

Email Content:

Hi (person name)

I hope you are well!

As you know, I'm in the process of completing my MBA Research Report, and I'm busy interviewing individuals for this purpose, and I was wondering if I could interview you?

My research topic is: The Influence of Search Engine Marketing on the Consumer Decision Making Process in South Africa

Please let me know a suitable date and time for us to meet. We'll need to find a quiet place as I'll be recording our conversation, just to make it easier for me to transcribe all the information.

It's not difficult and no preparation is required for the interview – I just want to get your feedback on questions I will ask, and I believe you meet the basic candidate criteria in that you use the Internet and search engines ☺

Many thanks in advance!

~ Delia

2) Interview Questions

Guideline for the interview questions asked:

1.1. Do you use the Internet regularly?

1.2. For what primary purpose do you use the Internet?

2.1. Where or how do you search for information?

2.2. Have you ever used a search engine to search for information?

3. Which search engines do you use, and why?
   E.g. Google, Yahoo!, Bing, or others

4. *Request that the interviewee does an online search on a search engine and observe their behaviour, i.e. where they look, where they click, etc.*
   4.1. When doing a search, have you noticed both sponsored and natural search engine results?
   4.2. Would you mostly click on sponsored or natural search engine results? *Explain and demonstrate if the interviewee is not sure of the difference*
   4.3. On which (first, second, third, etc.) and how many search engine results do you click, and why?
   4.4. Up to which page on the search results would you continue to before either quitting or doing a new search?

5. Why do you use search engines, i.e. what are the advantages of using search engines to you?

6. Has using a search engine ever determined a need for a product or service?

7. Has using a search engine ever resulted in a decision to make a purchase?
8. Do you seek offline criteria, before or after searching on a search engine, before making a decision to purchase?

9. What types of products are you most likely to purchase, high-involvement or low-involvement products, where search engines have played a part in the purchase decision?

   Explain the difference between high-involvement and low-involvement products. Involvement refers to how much time, thought, energy, and other resources people devote to the purchase process. High-involvement products are more expensive and require a considerable amount of time and effort in searching for them e.g. house, car, jewellery, travel, TV. Low-involvement products are purchased more frequently with minimal thought and effort e.g. magazine, movie, food, pen.

10. Once your decision to purchase has been made, do you purchase online or offline at a physical store?

11.
    11.1. When last did you purchase something online?
    11.2. How often do you make online purchases?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add, which may be relevant?

3) Interview Participants

Details of the interview participants:

INTERVIEWEE NUMBER	GENDER	AGE RANGE	EMPLOYMENT POSITION
1	Female	26-35	Financial Manager (IT Company)
2	Male	26-35	Owner (Manufacturing Business)
3	Female	36-45	Owner and Graphic Designer (Media and Design Business)
4	Male	26-35	Marketing Supervisor (Electronics Company)
5	Male	46-55	Director (Consulting Engineers Company)
6	Female	26-35	CRM Coordinator (Telecommunications Company)
7	Female	36-45	Project Manager (IT Company)
8	Male	46-55	Owner (Printing Business)
9	Male	36-45	Head of Compliance Group (Equipment Supply Company)
10	Female	26-35	Product Manager (Pharmaceutical Company)

4) Interviewee Responses (Indicatory Examples)

Due to the length of the detail documented for the interviewee responses, only indicatory examples are shown below to demonstrate the approach used, i.e. only a random selection of interview questions and responses is shown in this appendix, not the complete detail originally documented and utilised for the research conducted.

Interview question responses per interview participant:

Note: *The abbreviation* **"I #"** *represents the* **"Interviewee Number"**

Interview Question 2.1.

Where or how do you search for information?

I #	ANSWER
1	• Google
2	• Google primarily • Sometimes uses offline sources to search for information – e.g. for holidays might look at newspaper travel section and go directly to a website if he has the website address
3	• Google primarily • Sometimes uses Google.co.uk if require the search to be more English/Europe centric (region specific) • Occasionally might use Yahoo! • Have been occasions when wanted to look for Portuguese specific items and used http://www.aeiou.pt and http://www.sapo.pt which act as Portuguese search engines – not too familiar with them, but have used them when for example wanted to buy Portuguese books online
4	• Google • Depending on the topic searched for and what websites Google lists in its results, e.g. if searching for property in South Africa then Google will bring up results including http://www.property24.com, a website may then remain top of mind in future but it all originated from an initial Google search
5	• Google, nearly 100% of the time • Google Earth – since he works at an engineering company, he uses this tool a lot to obtain information, and it's becoming an increasingly sophisticated tool
6	• Google, the starting point

7	• Depends on what information • Google – if she wants to search for information on a certain topic • Facebook – if it's events or things that are happening, keeps up-to-date with a lot of information
8	• Google
9	• Depends on what he is looking for • Google – if he is looking for something general that he doesn't have an idea about and doesn't know of websites that offer it • Bookmarked websites – if he is looking for something specific then he has a few websites that he bookmarks and uses often e.g. for his hobby "stock markets" he would use one of the online platforms such as https://securities.standardbank.co.za/ost/ (Standard Bank Online Share Trading) or http://www.sharenet.co.za/ and go directly to the websites • When searching for information it is not about where the information comes from, it can be online or offline, but rather what is important to him is the easiest way to source / access the information at the time it is required – he keeps the Yellow Pages beneath his home telephone so it is always accessible and he uses it often, especially if his computer is off, and particularly for generic products or services where not much research is required and time is a factor, e.g. he has found tree fellers and plumbers through the Yellow Pages because it was the easiest place to look at the time he required the services, but if his computer had been on at the time he would've probably looked online through a Google search
10	• Google always

Interview Question 5.

Why do you use search engines, i.e. what are the advantages of using search engines to you?

I #	ANSWER
1	• Awareness of available websites – don't get access to or don't hear about many websites, although now it is becoming more common e.g. hear on radio or on TV get told "go to www…..", but for most things she's not actually aware there is a website for it, so search engines work perfectly for that • Variety – get different information from various sources • Convenience • Usefulness – mainly for information gathering • Updating your knowledge, including work-related issues – e.g. as an accountant she searches for accounting related information and saves the documents she finds so she can read them, it furthers her education • Topic of conversation at the dinner table "guess what I saw today on Google" • Doesn't think so much time saving because you're looking for something and you don't really know if there actually is a website in that regard
2	• Scope of information available • Immediate access to information – comes up instantly / speedily, go immediately and directly to a company's website, at your workstation or wherever, whereas e.g. a hard copy of the yellow pages is not always accessible • Search engines are more international and give more information than e.g. a hard copy of the yellow pages which could be used for local purposes, however,

	with the yellow pages he would have to be a lot more specific and would need to know exactly what he's looking for • Convenience • Saves time • Uses search engines both for obtaining information and also with the intention of ultimately making a purchase • Would generally use search engines for anything you can get offline as well, to research more online
3	• Convenience – finding what required whenever required • Access to primarily images, and also content in terms of research material • Anything from a definition at your fingertips through to researching the background of a person • In her work she often does some copywriting and editing so will need to rephrase something, where search engines will assist • Time saving – works from home, doesn't have to get into her car and go buy books or look in a library, at a moment's access using search engines to assist she can draw relevant pictures • Now as the years go by there is just so much more that is online, and search engines assist in finding what is available on the Internet – she has learnt of things that she would never have if wasn't exposed to the Internet, where search engines act as means to find what is available on the Internet • Sharing online – don't have to physically meet up with people to share, and search engines assist
4	• Convenience – easy, just type in 1 or 2 words and search engine filters the websites in the results • Easily accessible – the information is available at your fingertips, and if it's not the correct information wanted you can just close it • Time saving
5	• Convenience – starting point for information search, if there were no search engines he doesn't know where he would start looking for information, search engines are the greatest thing he has ever seen on a computer • Efficiency of information retrieval – find the information you want quickly, immediately, easily; the first time he used Google many years ago he couldn't believe it because before he used to have to go into libraries to try to find information, with a search engine you just type in the words and it finds the information for you • Gives you an opportunity to see who is on the market for a particular thing e.g. if you're looking for a product, sometimes you only know of supplier A but there might be supplier B and supplier C which you don't know about – search engines broaden your scope of understanding what's out there, by just simply typing in some keywords and doing a search
6	• Information gathering • Getting information from various different sources – reliability and trust issues come into play since you gain trust in a certain thing if it receives positive reviews and you see it mentioned enough, i.e. if you see certain information on only a single source, even if it is a reliable source, it doesn't always necessarily turn out to be true, so if you know the information is coming from various different sources and there is consistency in the facts then generally there is truth to it; having different variations of information, perspectives, and opinions helps because obviously the topic has been studied or the product / service has been experienced by the individuals providing the information; it gives you something to work from, then you can analyse the information to make your own assumptions • Convenient • Time saving – immediate / speedy / quick access to information; easier than having to go through all the different websites that you would otherwise have to go through, which may include websites that you know offhand; gathering information in other ways would be painful and would take more time, whereas by using search engines the information is at your fingertips

	• Universal – search engines are not limited to one place, and with the global network that makes them more accessible • Finding websites through a search engine – this sometimes helps when e.g. you know a company name but not the website URL, so you would do a search on a search engine to find it
7	• Quickest way to find information – can't really think of any other way that is an aggregate of all the different websites where you'd be able to find what you're looking for • Good way to compare things • Time saving • Convenient • User friendly / easy-to-use • Using a search engine is the first step in finding a website and acts as a doorway in getting to a website • When you do a search and continue to further refine your search you always find something – you can "Google anything" when you need information or have a problem and you know that there will always be an answer or solution, and if you happen to not find what you want then an opportunity to create something in that regard arises
8	• Quick and easy – using a search engine is a lot quicker and easier than e.g. phoning a whole lot of people and asking them questions such as "what cricket bat should I buy?" • Immediate and always available – a search engine is just right there and you get what you want at the click of a button; usually searches on a search engine in-between his daily activities when he gets a chance e.g. when he is on a tea break • Convenient – using a search engine is a simple way to buy a gift or search for whatever you want e.g. in search for the bamix blender which he required, he wasn't willing to travel around Johannesburg from store to store searching for it; he doesn't even mind paying a bit more for the required item if it's convenient for him to just search for it on a search engine, find a seller, buy it, and get it delivered to his door; he also finds it convenient to use a search engine to search for various recipes whenever required
9	• Easiest way to access information – search engines have simplified finding information • Doing research – he researches everything online, i.e. he always starts with Google • Doesn't have to keep a whole lot of bookmarks – just uses a search engine to find what he needs • Speed and convenience – sometimes he even finds that it is easier to search for a website on Google and go to it from there, rather than remembering the URL and typing it directly into a web browser • Gets all the most up-to-date information – when using a search engine he can see how old the information is which is important to him especially when he is looking for time-sensitive information e.g. share trades and company information • Spell check and definitions – often he verifies the spelling of words and searches for the meaning of words using a search engine, he finds using a search engine as a spell check is sometimes better and more up-to-date than the spell check in Microsoft Word's dictionary • Every time he does a search something new pops up and he discovers new things, which he finds to be the joy of using a search engine, and he actually enjoys that part of it – he likes to scan the regular websites he has determined as per his customised iGoogle homepage, and then he also likes to find what is new and keep up-to-date with current happenings through search engine searches • Life without search engines would be very difficult, frustrating, and time-wasting – he remembers the time before search engines, in the early days of search he used Netscape 1 on a floppy boot disk which was extremely slow and user-unfriendly, then the first few proper search engines emerged including AltaVista,

	WebCrawler and Lycos which were really great, after which Google came along and it is just so much greater • The only drawback he believes Google to have is that when he's searching for something obscure he doesn't find it fast enough since it appears in much later pages and the information is often difficult to locate – this is due to the way Google's algorithm works, i.e. what people like most ranks at the top, however, when doing an obscure search he knows this is the case so instead of starting at the 1st search engine results page he might just start at a page much further on and work back towards earlier pages to find the required information
10	• Variety and depth of information – ability to find any information that is available on the Internet through a search engine • Real-time information – the history / timeline of information can be determined on a search engine, i.e. whether the information is recent, when it was posted, etc. • Immediate – access to information without having to wait • Convenience – ability to find relevant information whenever required

Interview Question 7.

Has using a search engine ever resulted in a decision to make a purchase?

I #	ANSWER
1	• Yes, definitely
2	• Yes – if he found what he wanted, he would buy
3	• Not as much, takes her longer, doesn't have the money to just buy spontaneously, but in the long-run it might motivate her – she might be aware of something and it might take her weeks or months to make the decision to buy, but she might land up buying it because of that initial search/awareness • She has developed various wish lists, e.g. for books and toys – she has looked for one thing but landed up adding another to the wish list, which came about as a result of initial search engine searches and the awareness created which finally led to the decision to purchase
4	• Search engines definitely play a part in getting the right information and the decision-making to make a purchase • If the product is available in a South African store, he would prefer to go and physically see the product first – then no, he would only make the decision to purchase once he had gone to a store and physically seen the product, and the purchase would be made at the store and not online • If the product required is only available online and not offline in a South African store and he can't see it first, or it is a service which he can't physically see – then yes, the research done using a search engine would result in him deciding to make a purchase; if he has a need for the product or service and online is the only way he can get it with no way to physically view it, then he would buy it online, so long as he has enough information obtained from the search engine searches to be able to convince him, then hopefully the information he's got from doing the search online will make him confident enough to make the decision to buy • Summary: Would rather physically see the product before deciding to purchase, but if there's no way of seeing the product or if it's a service then he

	would rely on the results from the search engine to make the decision to purchase
5	• Yes it has • An example is when he bought a heart rate monitor for his bike – he knew that these heart rate monitors existed, and found them to be rather fancy and interesting, he even knew the model he was interested in, but using a search engine to do some further research gave him a lot more information, and made him aware of better pricing, he found that in the USA it was very cheap, so he made the decision to purchase and bought it from the USA supplier the search engine had directed him to – he wouldn't have known if he hadn't done a search on a search engine • Search engine searches also often lead you to discussion forums and other websites where you can read reviews from various people about a particular product e.g. there exists a website for cameras specifically, where all the cameras that have been released have been tested, and the website gives you an opinion on and rates each camera, which he finds very interesting – there has been an occasion where he was looking to purchase a particular camera that was rated only 2 stars, and he had thought it was good, so seeing such a low rating online put him off purchasing it, whereas if his search engine research showed that what he was looking for was in fact highly rated and had good reviews then it would make him confident that he was doing the right thing and making the right decision in purchasing it; if he had received an offline brochure for that same camera it would obviously not mention the negatives, whereas through Internet searches on search engines you are given the opportunity to get other people's opinions, which he believes to be quite useful
6	• If she wants to buy something online she generally knows exactly where to go to buy it – so search engines don't always help in the purchase decision e.g. she would mostly buy tickets online, and she would know exactly where to go to purchase them due to limited sales in limited areas; sometimes she also buys CD's online and would know where to go to buy them as well • In the sense of using search engines to help compare all the different products / services available, then research done using search engines to gather required information definitely assists in confirming that she wants to buy the product and ultimately making the purchase decision e.g. if she wants to buy a new cell phone then she would use a search engine to do research and simplify her decision making, i.e. side-by-side comparisons of various features, vendors, reviews, etc., however, once her purchase decision has been made she would buy the cell phone offline at a physical store
7	• Overall yes the use of a search engine would play a role in her decision to purchase • When looking to buy a particular item she would probably know more or less which shops that she would want to go to – she would use a search engine to find the website URL's of the shops, and then go to the websites and have a look at what they have, she would want to compare prices and determine at which shops she could get the best prices for the item required, but she prefers going to shops physically and seeing the item before making the decision to purchase • If she wanted to buy a specialised item that was not available in an offline store then yes it would definitely count in the company's favour if she found them online, but she would have to trust the website itself to purchase from it – what plays a role in her evaluation and trusting of a website found via a search engine includes: professionalism, the way it looks, if it works, correct spelling, etc.; it is very important how a product is displayed on a website, and if she was impressed enough with the website it would affect her decision as to whether or not she would make the decision to purchase from it • Commends companies for actually having an online presence, just the fact that they're there and that they've made the effort to display their business, especially in South Africa – this in itself already influences her in that she wants

	to support those websites and purchase from them, and that is also a reason why when she does a search on a search engine she looks at the organic listings first because she knows sponsored listings are paid for and she wants to save those companies money by rather clicking the "free" natural listings, i.e. she wants to support them rather than cost them money • Believes there is a huge gap in terms of the use of search engines resulting in purchase decisions – e.g. she searched "Design Quarter couch" and Coricraft came up which is perfect as the shop is in Design Quarter and sells couches, but there are quite a few other shops in Design Quarter that sell couches including Boardman's yet the search engine displayed only the one result that was actually relevant to her; although it may be a substantial amount of work the major retail stores serving home renovation needs such as Dions, Game, Makro, Loads of Living, and stores in Design Quarter could display all their products online; a gap exists in that websites for many shops often do not display in both natural and sponsored search engine results; a gap in terms of comparing items and checking stock availability online also exists e.g. if she wants to buy a couch it would be ideal if she could go to the different shop websites and look at available options, materials used such as leather, dimension measurements, etc. and do online comparisons as opposed to having to get into her car and drive the whole Saturday going from one shop to the other looking at couches and trying to find what she wants; ideally she would want to do searches on a search engine and use the information she finds online to eliminate the shops that do not have what she wants, so ultimately she would only need to physically go to perhaps two shops which look potentially viable for what she wants
8	• No, using a search engine does not result in a decision to make a purchase – he has made the decision to purchase before using a search engine; he knows what he wants and will use a search engine to help him decide on the best option for what he wants e.g. he has determined that he wants to buy a cricket bat and he then uses a search engine to gather information and find out which cricket bat to buy; he wants to buy the best one and find the best place to buy it from; if he doesn't find it online through searching on a search engine he will go to a physical store such as Sportsman's Warehouse and buy a cricket bat there • Will never make a decision to buy something other than his original intention as a result of using a search engine, i.e. using a search engine doesn't influence his purchase decision – e.g. if he is looking to buy a cricket bat and then adverts to buy a volley ball or hockey stick also come up during his research, it would never happen that he would buy a volley ball or hockey stick in addition to a cricket bat since he only intends to buy a cricket bat, and if anything else is flashed in front of him it's just an irritation that he will switch off since his need and decision to purchase is already determined
9	• Yes, using a search engine has often resulted in a decision to purchase • Normally he uses a search engine to find out more information about something he is interested in, which may then result in a purchase decision • In certain cases he will firstly go directly to a website he knows to find out primary information and then afterwards go to a search engine to find out further information, before deciding to make a purchase – e.g. when looking to buy a new laptop he firstly goes directly to http://www.cnet.com/, he will not look on a search engine first because he will just find loads of websites selling laptops and most of them will be useless, so he therefore firstly reads the reviews on http://www.cnet.com/ and makes judgments based on that, and then he will go to a search engine to look for more information about the preferred laptops determined, do price comparisons, look at detailed specifications, etc. and identify which websites within South Africa or within reason he can visit, after which he makes the final purchase decision
10	• Yes, using a search engine has definitely resulted in a purchase decision – a need would be determined, she would then use a search engine to search for information, and this would ultimately help her decide that she wants to make the purchase

5) Interview Themes for Questionnaire (Indicatory Examples)

Due to the length of the detail documented for the interview themes used to develop the questionnaire, only indicatory examples are shown below to demonstrate the approach used, i.e. only a random selection of the formulated themes is shown in this appendix, not the complete detail originally documented and utilised for the research conducted.

Themes formulated from the interview participant responses:

Note: *The abbreviation* **"I #"** *represents the* **"Interviewee Number"** *and* **"Q #"** *represents the* **"Interview Question Number"** *which the theme originated from*

Q #	1.2	3
	Theme 2	**Theme 24**
	A ***primary purpose*** for using the ***Internet***: ***Research / Searching / Looking for Information*** - for Work or Personal purposes	A ***reason*** for using the search engine ***Google***: ***quality and relevancy of the results / finding what is required***
I #		
1	√	
2	√	
3	√	√
4	√	√
5	√	√
6	√	√
7	√	
8	√	√
9	√	√
10	√	√
	10/10	7/10
	100%	**70%**

Q #	4	4.1
	Theme 46	**Theme 62**
	Always look at the URL of each search engine result - for one or more of the reasons: determine ***relevancy***; look for ***related keywords***; ensure URL is ***area specific*** e.g. ".co.za"; avoid opening ***duplicate websites***; look for ***trusted websites***	***Sponsored listings / paid adverts*** are ***more useful*** search engine results for ***purchase intentions*** (items for sale; pushing for a sale)
I #		
1		√
2		
3	√	
4	√	
5	√	√
6		
7	√	
8	√	
9	√	√
10		√
	6/10	4/10
	60%	**40%**

Q #	4.1	4.2
	Theme 68	**Theme 78**
	Generally ***start looking*** at the ***first natural / organic listing***	Would ***click on sponsored listings / paid adverts*** if ***relevant*** to the search done
I #		
1	√	√
2		√
3	√	√
4	√	√
5	√	√
6	√	√
7	√	√
8		√
9	√	√
10	√	√
	8/10	10/10
	80%	**100%**

Q #	4.3 & 4.4	4.3 & 4.4
	Theme 87	**Theme 96**
	Generally ***look mainly at and focus on the 1st search engine results page***, i.e. the first 10 results, but ***if searching for more information on something specific / haven't found what looking for on the 1st page*** then ***may go beyond to the 2nd and maximum 3rd page***, i.e. up to the first 30 results only	Find that the ***relevance*** of the search engine results generally ***reduces with each additional search engine results page*** number continued through
I #		
1		
2	√	√
3		
4	√	
5	√	√
6		√
7		√
8	√	√
9		
10		√
	4/10	6/10
	40%	**60%**

Q #	5	6
	Theme 109	**Theme 122**
	Advantage of / ***reason*** for using ***search engines***: ***Saves time*** - ***immediate / instant / quick access to information whenever required***, i.e. "relevant information is available at your fingertips" (a hard copy of the Yellow Pages is not always accessible)	Using a ***search engine*** has ***not determined a need for a product or service***
I #		
1		
2	√	√
3	√	
4	√	√
5	√	√
6	√	√
7	√	√
8	√	√
9	√	
10	√	√
	9/10	7/10
	90%	**70%**

Q #	7	8
	Theme 128	**Theme 142**
	Using a ***search engine*** has ***resulted in a decision to make a purchase*** - search engine searches ***play a role in and motivate the final decision*** to make a purchase by assisting in ***researching***, finding the right ***information / comparisons / pricing / vendors***, and ***convincing / confirming / making confident*** that the ***correct and best purchase decision*** is made	For an ***expensive / high investment / high value / complex item***, would prefer the assurance of experiencing the ***tangibility***, i.e. physically see / touch / feel the item before deciding to purchase it - would therefore ***seek offline criteria***, before or after searching on a ***search engine***, before making a ***decision to purchase*** e.g. house, car, camera
I #		
1	√	
2	√	√
3	√	√
4	√	
5	√	
6	√	√
7	√	
8		√
9	√	√
10	√	√
	9/10 **90%**	6/10 **60%**

Q #	8	9
	Theme 152	**Theme 167**
	Reviews / opinions from others about an item, ***found online via search engine searches or offline*** e.g. in a magazine or at a physical store, ***play a role in the decision as to whether to purchase*** the item or not	***CD's / music*** - an example of ***low-involvement*** products, where ***search engines*** have ***played a part*** in the ***purchase decision***
I #		
1	√	√
2		
3		√
4	√	√
5	√	
6	√	√
7		
8	√	√
9		√
10		√
	5/10 **50%**	7/10 **70%**

Q #	10	10
	Theme 178	**Theme 180**
	Online purchasing: do not purchase many items online / items purchased online are basic / do not often purchase online / still very wary of purchasing online / still not too comfortable transacting online a lot	Once the ***purchase decision*** is made, ***generally if possible more likely / mostly prefer to purchase offline*** at a physical store (traditional buyer) - may ***research online using search engines*** to assist in deciding what to purchase offline
I #		
1		√
2	√	√
3	√	√
4	√	√
5	√	√
6		√
7	√	√
8	√	√
9		
10		√
	6/10	9/10
	60%	**90%**

Q #	9 & 10	10
	Theme 191	**Theme 224**
	General holidays / travel (travel arrangements, flight tickets, hotels / accommodation, car rentals, etc.) - research online and have ***purchased online*** before / would purchase online without going offline to a travel agency	A ***reason*** for ***purchasing online***: ***convenient, less hassle, time-saving, no queues, immediate, quick, easy, simple, real-time, accurate, traceable, door-to-door delivery*** - don't even mind paying a premium if required for these advantages of purchasing online
I #		
1		
2	√	√
3	√	√
4		√
5	√	
6		
7		√
8	√	√
9		√
10	√	√
	5/10	7/10
	50%	**70%**

APPENDIX B

Quantitative Study

1) Email Sent to Potential Questionnaire Respondents

Email Subject:

Questionnaire for MBA Research

Email Content:

Hi (person name)

I'm in the process of completing my MBA Research Report titled 'The Influence of Search Engine Marketing on the Consumer Decision Making Process in South Africa'.

Please could you assist by completing a brief Questionnaire – simply click on the following link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MBA2012

Please also forward the link to any contacts you have who use the Internet and Search Engines in South Africa, for them to complete the Questionnaire as well.

Participation in this Questionnaire is confidential and anonymous – no personal contact information is requested. The information you provide will be used purely for academic research purposes.

Many thanks in advance!

Kind Regards

Delia De Abreu

MBA Student
Wits Business School
University of the Witwatersrand

2) Questionnaire

Please indicate the following:

Gender:

◯ Male
◯ Female

Age:

◯ 18-25 ◯ 26-35 ◯ 36-45 ◯ 46-55 ◯ 56+

Highest Education Level:

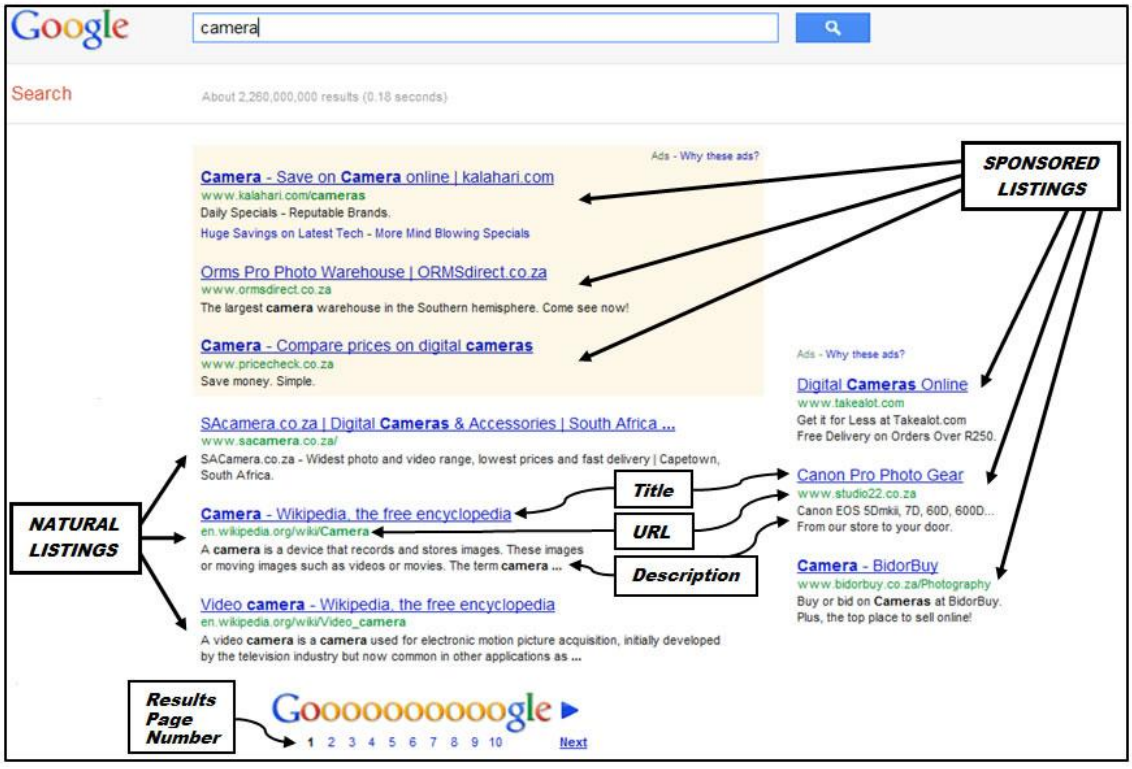
◯ Std 8 / Gr 10 ◯ Matric ◯ Diploma ◯ Degree ◯ Masters ◯ Doctorate

Frequency of:

	Daily	Weekly	Every 2 Weeks	Monthly	Every 2 Months	Every 3-6 Months	Yearly	Never
Internet Usage	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Search Engine Usage	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Online Purchasing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Please refer to the information shown in A) and B) below for clarity on the terminology used in some of the statements which follow.

A) Typical Search Engine Results Page on Google



B) High and Low Involvement

Items purchased could require either high or low involvement from the buyer as follows:

High Involvement *– higher value items; more time, thought and effort devoted to the purchase process; items purchased less frequently; e.g. house, car, camera*

Low Involvement *– lower value items; less time, thought and effort devoted to the purchase process; items purchased more frequently; e.g. CD/music, software/applications, book*

Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements, using a 7 point scale:

- **A rating of 1 will indicate that you Strongly Disagree with the statement**
- **A rating of 7 will indicate that you Strongly Agree with the statement**

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly Agree
When searching for information on the Internet, I use a search engine 80% of the time as opposed to other sources.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use a search engine because it is an efficient, time-saving, convenient and no cost way to search for information.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use the search engine Google 90% of the time as opposed to other search engines because it is the most well known, is easy to use, and provides what I require.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will only click on search engine results that seem relevant after reading through the Title, URL and Description – looking out for related keywords and websites.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would be more likely to click on a search engine result for a known and trusted company/brand.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I click on Natural Listings 80% of the time as I find them to be more relevant and useful for providing required information compared to Sponsored Listings.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I intend to make a purchase I am more likely to click on Sponsored Listings.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do look at and will click on Sponsored Listings if they are relevant to my search.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I click on relevant results on only the 1st search engine results page 90% of the time, rarely looking beyond the 1st page.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I have not found what I am looking for by the 3rd search engine results page I will change my keywords and perform a new search.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A search engine assists me in comparing options before making my purchase decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Positive reviews, ratings and opinions about an item found through searches on a search engine influence my purchase decision and increase the likelihood of making the purchase.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident to base my purchase decision on search engine findings.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Although search engine findings play a role in my decision to purchase, I also rely on other factors including tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) before making my final purchase decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident to base my purchase decision for services (which are intangible) on search engine findings and to make my purchase online e.g. holiday travel and entertainment tickets.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident to purchase a tangible item online without experiencing the tangibility (physically see, touch, feel).	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I use a search engine to search for information about High Involvement items more than Low Involvement items, before making my purchase decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
For Low Involvement items, search engine findings are generally sufficient for me to make my purchase decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
For High Involvement items, in addition to search engine findings I will seek offline criteria which includes tangibility (physically see, touch, feel) for added assurance before making my purchase decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to purchase Low Involvement items online, compared to High Involvement items which I mostly purchase offline.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Although I use search engines to search for information and assist in making my final purchase decision, I mostly prefer to make my purchase offline at a physical store rather than online.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require is only available online.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will purchase online from a website found through my searches on a search engine if the item I require costs less online compared to offline at a physical store.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will only purchase online if the website found through my searches on a search engine is credible enough and I trust it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find online purchasing to be convenient, quick, easy, less hassle and time-saving.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3) Rotated Factor Loadings

Rotated Factor Loading

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
V1	0.731226	0.284640	0.121417	0.129322	0.063803	-0.014612	-0.085702
V2	0.801482	0.174917	0.121107	0.138493	0.017077	0.017090	-0.075463
V3	0.800482	0.129807	0.136003	0.042448	0.077229	0.026243	-0.020086
V4	0.629174	0.163667	0.077170	0.086504	0.006416	0.118504	0.118454
V5	0.438053	0.103867	0.113210	0.101608	-0.018910	0.069129	0.097795
V6	0.420615	-0.056937	0.201876	0.131631	-0.190347	0.284828	0.265439
V7	-0.060264	0.093376	0.174164	0.059848	0.462003	0.189486	0.245259
V8	0.089084	0.106648	0.097955	0.096543	0.859030	-0.002229	0.028062
V9	0.395320	-0.001208	0.089964	0.265589	0.057651	0.097054	0.050239
V10	0.527470	0.149603	0.235037	0.122512	0.008038	-0.026028	-0.056193
V11	0.257109	0.144253	0.757293	0.060995	0.071942	0.065038	0.051322
V12	0.246329	0.153941	0.551867	0.279375	0.158175	0.098092	0.039365
V13	0.165660	0.094296	0.521767	0.306323	0.212668	-0.100948	0.318431
V14	0.197258	0.246583	0.307899	0.110087	0.046833	0.287415	-0.267177
V15	0.253761	0.298523	0.413952	0.250812	0.113460	0.020931	0.224964
V16	0.012799	0.220067	0.139386	0.136610	0.248235	-0.100354	0.589712
V17	0.103589	0.274877	0.163653	0.215313	-0.021290	-0.026925	0.131454
V18	0.200715	0.238349	0.255528	0.743515	0.078597	-0.058834	0.221911
V19	0.190606	0.343840	0.318999	0.599331	-0.011443	0.128501	-0.097798
V20	0.330074	0.137194	0.039970	0.534375	0.216350	0.203305	0.043403
V21	0.134343	0.042728	0.041190	0.080211	0.120569	0.880603	-0.075981
V22	0.226546	0.677030	0.061504	0.112075	0.083316	0.186345	0.031500
V23	0.176769	0.704711	0.145094	0.147716	0.111222	-0.040011	0.142711
V24	0.380765	0.428490	0.275078	0.163805	0.089782	0.089436	-0.156693
V25	0.364773	0.451690	0.140877	0.190615	0.201020	-0.246005	0.129403

4) Item Analysis with Cronbach's Alpha Values for the Factors

Factor 1: Search Criteria

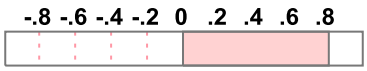
Multivariate

Correlations

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V9	V10
V1	1.0000	0.6908	0.6832	0.4805	0.3275	0.2598	0.2787	0.5047
V2	0.6908	1.0000	0.6859	0.5261	0.3869	0.4005	0.3451	0.4993
V3	0.6832	0.6859	1.0000	0.5259	0.3873	0.3040	0.3667	0.4444
V4	0.4805	0.5261	0.5259	1.0000	0.3820	0.3940	0.2933	0.4191
V5	0.3275	0.3869	0.3873	0.3820	1.0000	0.3299	0.2895	0.2351
V6	0.2598	0.4005	0.3040	0.3940	0.3299	1.0000	0.2148	0.2090
V9	0.2787	0.3451	0.3667	0.2933	0.2895	0.2148	1.0000	0.3935
V10	0.5047	0.4993	0.4444	0.4191	0.2351	0.2090	0.3935	1.0000

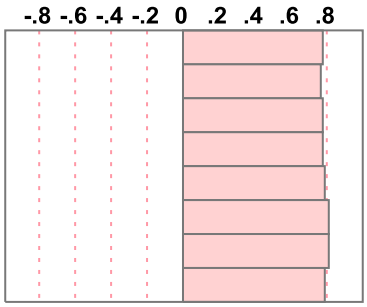
Cronbach's α

	α
Entire set	0.8115



Excluded

Col	α
V1	0.7814
V2	0.7726
V3	0.7777
V4	0.7783
V5	0.7988
V6	0.8120
V9	0.8153
V10	0.7886



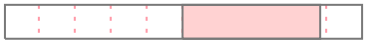
Factor 2: Purchase Criteria

Multivariate

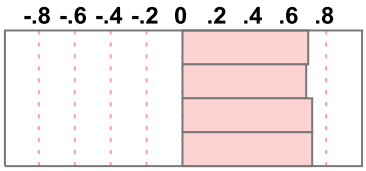
Correlations

	V22	V23	V24	V25
V22	1.0000	0.5455	0.4441	0.3998
V23	0.5455	1.0000	0.4111	0.4696
V24	0.4441	0.4111	1.0000	0.4523
V25	0.3998	0.4696	0.4523	1.0000

Cronbach's α

	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
Entire set	0.7669	

Excluded

Col	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
V22	0.7025	
V23	0.6877	
V24	0.7282	
V25	0.7233	

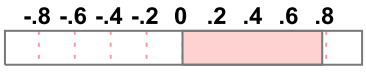
Factor 3: Evaluation Criteria

Multivariate

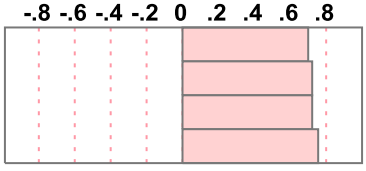
Correlations

	V11	V12	V13	V15
V11	1.0000	0.5215	0.4950	0.4919
V12	0.5215	1.0000	0.5088	0.3989
V13	0.4950	0.5088	1.0000	0.4333
V15	0.4919	0.3989	0.4333	1.0000

Cronbach's α

	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
Entire set	0.7834	

Excluded

Col	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
V11	0.7076	
V12	0.7296	
V13	0.7276	
V15	0.7561	

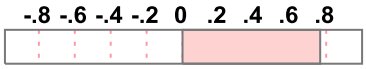
Factor 4: High and Low Involvement

Multivariate

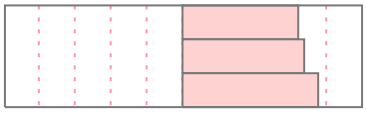
Correlations

	V18	V19	V20
V18	1.0000	0.6127	0.5190
V19	0.6127	1.0000	0.4833
V20	0.5190	0.4833	1.0000

Cronbach's α

	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
Entire set	0.7762	

Excluded

Col	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
V18	0.6502	
V19	0.6829	
V20	0.7594	

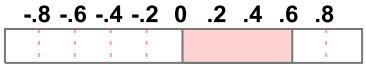
Factor 5: Sponsored Listings

Multivariate

Correlations

	V7	V8
V7	1.0000	0.4404
V8	0.4404	1.0000

Cronbach's α

	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
Entire set	0.6093	

Excluded

Col	α	-.8 -.6 -.4 -.2 0 .2 .4 .6 .8
V7	.	
V8	.	

Factor 6: Purchasing Offline

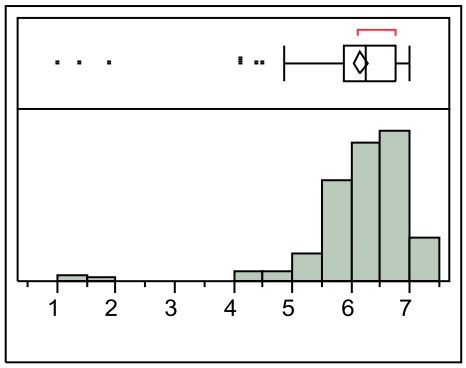
V21 – *Cannot calculate Cronbach alpha for a single variable*

Factor 7: Type of Product

V16 – *Cannot calculate Cronbach alpha for a single variable*

5) Factor Scores with Means

Score: Search Criteria (Factor 1)



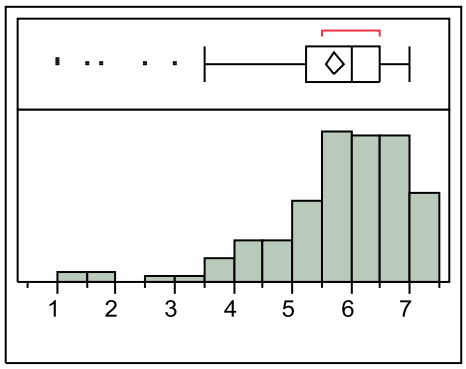
Quantiles

100.0%	maximum	7
99.5%		7
97.5%		7
90.0%		6.875
75.0%	quartile	6.75
50.0%	median	6.25
25.0%	quartile	5.875
10.0%		5.4
2.5%		4.1375
0.5%		1.00375
0.0%	minimum	1

Moments

Mean	6.1523632
Std Dev	0.8240699
Std Err Mean	0.0581254
Upper 95% Mean	6.2669805
Lower 95% Mean	6.0377459
N	201

Score: Purchase Criteria (Factor 2)



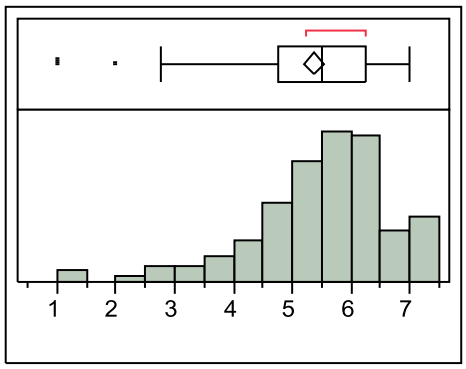
Quantiles

100.0%	maximum	7
99.5%		7
97.5%		7
90.0%		7
75.0%	quartile	6.5
50.0%	median	6
25.0%	quartile	5.25
10.0%		4.25
2.5%		2.525
0.5%		1
0.0%	minimum	1

Moments

Mean	5.721393
Std Dev	1.1113573
Std Err Mean	0.0783891
Upper 95% Mean	5.8759682
Lower 95% Mean	5.5668179
N	201

Score: Evaluation Criteria (Factor 3)



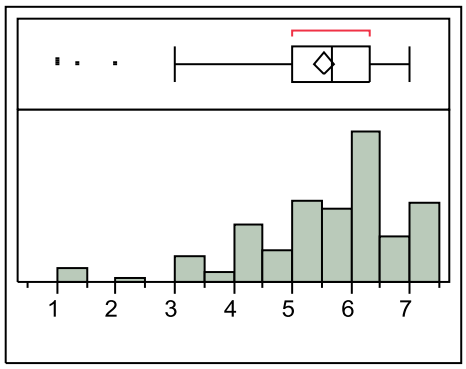
Quantiles

100.0%	maximum	7
99.5%		7
97.5%		7
90.0%		6.75
75.0%	quartile	6.25
50.0%	median	5.5
25.0%	quartile	4.75
10.0%		4
2.5%		2.75
0.5%		1
0.0%	minimum	1

Moments

Mean	5.3756219
Std Dev	1.153019
Std Err Mean	0.0813277
Upper 95% Mean	5.5359916
Lower 95% Mean	5.2152521
N	201

Score: High and Low Involvement (Factor 4)



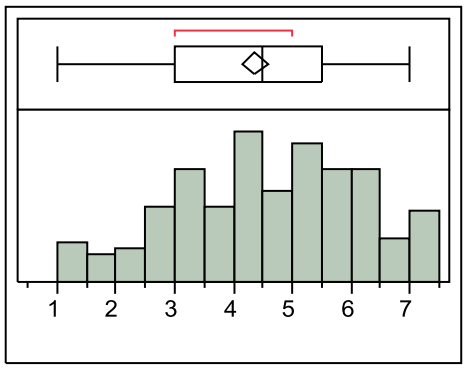
Quantiles

100.0%	maximum	7
99.5%		7
97.5%		7
90.0%		7
75.0%	quartile	6.33333
50.0%	median	5.66667
25.0%	quartile	5
10.0%		4
2.5%		2.05
0.5%		1
0.0%	minimum	1

Moments

Mean	5.5389718
Std Dev	1.2264453
Std Err Mean	0.0865068
Upper 95% Mean	5.7095542
Lower 95% Mean	5.3683894
N	201

Score: Sponsored Listings (Factor 5)



Quantiles

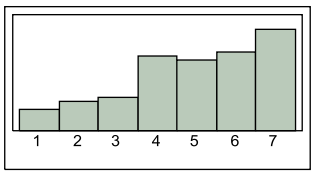
100.0%	maximum	7
99.5%		7
97.5%		7
90.0%		6.5
75.0%	quartile	5.5
50.0%	median	4.5
25.0%	quartile	3
10.0%		2.5
2.5%		1
0.5%		1
0.0%	minimum	1

Moments

Mean	4.3606965
Std Dev	1.5436961
Std Err Mean	0.1088839
Upper 95% Mean	4.5754043
Lower 95% Mean	4.1459887
N	201

Score: Purchasing Offline (Factor 6)

No Mean – factor comprised of a single questionnaire statement

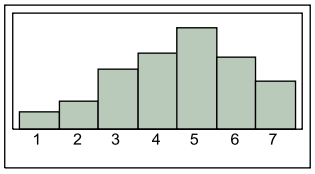


Frequencies

Level	Count	Prob
1	10	0.04975
2	14	0.06965
3	16	0.07960
4	37	0.18408
5	35	0.17413
6	39	0.19403
7	50	0.24876
Total	201	1.00000

Score: Type of Product (Factor 7)

No Mean – factor comprised of a single questionnaire statement



Frequencies

Level	Count	Prob
1	8	0.03980
2	14	0.06965
3	30	0.14925
4	38	0.18905
5	51	0.25373
6	36	0.17910
7	24	0.11940
Total	201	1.00000