An overview of how Search Engine Advertising contributes to the Customer Journey

Analysis of in-depth interviews with digital marketing experts based on the EBM model

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Introduction: The topic of the Thesis work and its overview

In 1989, Sir Tim Berners-Lee wrote an academic paper called „Information management: a proposal”. This document is viewed as the first step to the creation of ‘browsers’ and with it, the first step towards the mass application of the Internet. After a period of improvement, by 1996, Internet Explorer 3.0 was sold together with the Windows 95 operation systems in a bundle enabling the Web to reach more people. With the rise of the Internet, users could reach tremendous amount of data in seconds’ time. They could type in the domain of the website they wanted to reach and either follow links from there or type in a different URL. However, soon a need for searchable directories were realized and many companies started to come up with such systems, e.g. Yahoo (Clarke, 2014). These were later named search engines and they helped users structure the online data. These programs are aiming to provide the most relevant results from the gigantic repository of information (the Internet) and list the pages according to their relevance to the user’s query (Keane, O’Brien & Smyth, 2008). In 1996, came the turning point, when Larry Page and Sergey Brin created their first search engine, Black Rub, as part of a university project. In 1997, this was renamed Google and one year later the company Google Inc. was established (Vise, 2005). With its focus on technological innovation it soon overpowered the other competitors by convincing the consumers, that Google was the gateway to the Internet (Clarke, 2014). Proving that this system works, are the more than 3 billion daily searches users make on the search engine (Marvin, 2015).

Having realized the opportunity, that this gigantic number of queries holds, Google launched its digital marketing platform called Google Ads (previously Google Adwords) in 2000 with only 350 advertisers registered to the service (Marvin, 2015). Back then, search ads were clearly separated from organic results by eye-grabbing labels, different backgrounds (e.g. green, pink, purple or yellow) and appearing mainly on the right side. These search advertisements have undergone a massive change since then. Ads are now harder to distinguish from organic results and have many special features and extensions (e.g. site links) as to reach users and their trust more easily and, thus achieve higher click-through ratio (Docherty, 2017). (See the exact outlook of a search advertisement in the Appendix). These transformations resulted in well over 1 million Google Ads users in 2015, whom together were spending tens of billions dollars in the marketing-platform (Marvin, 2015). By 2016, the global ad-expenditure for paid search ads were 47.57 billion USD (eMarketer, 2016).
And what this quick and comprehensive improvement of search engines really meant to consumers? In Hungary 67 percent of consumers conduct any form of online research prior to purchase (Google, 2015a), out of which 47 percent did this with the help of search engines (Google, 2015d). These statistics all point to the growing importance of Internet search and how it changed the mentality of consumers. That is why I decided to investigate this topic. The above highlighted characteristics all point to the fact, that users are searching for product information and business must utilize these searches to divert the users to their website. Marketers now have a wide variety of tools assisting them to guide consumers to their product, when they are searching for a solution to their problem. The industry also realized the opportunity this trend holds. The proof of this is the 30.9 billion HUF ad-spend of search engine marketing in Hungary (IAB Hungary & PWC, 2018). However, not a lot of research has been done, that only focused on search engine advertising within consumer behavior, even though there are various techniques how campaigns of the sort can be fitted to specific marketing goals. This thesis work, thus, interconnects the consumer behavior models to search engine advertising. The title of the thesis work is as follows: ’An overview of how Search Engine Advertising contributes to the Customer Journey: Analysis of in-depth interviews with digital marketing experts based on the EBM model’. The thesis shows how marketing professionals of the field can use this form of digital marketing to influence the consumers in various parts of the customer journey.

To attain an extensive understanding of the above-mentioned interconnectedness this paper is seeking the answer to the following questions:

- How the growing ease of Internet access affected the customer journey?
- Can Search Engine Advertising be utilized to affect consumers at every level of the journey to purchase?
- How can Search Engine Advertising campaigns be custom-tailored to target a certain phase of the customer journey?

In the theoretical overview, firstly I am investigating the classical customer journey first introducing the EKB model and then the EBM model, which later will be used as a base of my research. Next, I am broadening these models by taking into consideration the shifts caused by the technological advancements, that made it crucial for academia to recognize an upgraded, modern customer journey model. The consumer behavior is investigated in the online world. I am also elaborating on the definition, description, aims and strategies of firstly digital marketing, then of search engine
advertising in academia. As a last step, I list existing academia, that contemplates the connection of the consumer behavior models and search engine advertising.

In the research methodology section, the methods used to investigate the questions in practice are analyzed. Both the secondary research and the primary research technique is described. The steps taken, and the environment chosen to conduct this research is detailed.

Next, based on the methodology elaborated previously the research findings are presented. The interconnection of search advertising and the consumer behavior will be analyzed with the help of secondary research and primary research. My secondary research first focuses on the digital trends in Hungary; going through first the Internet penetration of the citizens, then their preferred search engine, thirdly analyzing their purchase behavior and lastly, the size of the digital marketing industry in Hungary. Furthermore, to underline the theoretical overview by professional perspectives I conducted in-depth interviews with marketers from various businesses (raging both in size and in industry). With this my goal was to get insight into how search engine advertising can assist, when focusing on consumers in different phases of the customer journey and how marketers of different fields are taking advantage of it. The interview focuses on the changing consumer behavior and the EBM model and how this can and should be connected to search engine advertising. A special focus is given to how marketers can custom-tailor their campaigns to target consumers at different parts of the customer journey.

Lastly, the conclusion and the managerial implications of the paper is detailed to provide insight into further research areas and a roadmap for marketers to follow, when utilizing search engine advertising.

Because this thesis contains a lot of technical words related to SEA, a definition set and explanatory graphics were created in the Appendix. Should the reader have difficulty understanding a specific technical detail, the Appendix part should be read.

1. Theoretical overview

1.1 The Consumer Behavior

The consumer is a core element of the field of marketing. The definition of marketing even highlights the key relationship between them and businesses as it recognizes, that companies have to create value for consumers and build strong and lasting relationships with them in order to capture value from customers in return
The behavior and general attributes of consumer groups are crucial for companies and marketers to understand, as they are one of the most vital elements for a business to succeed long-term. Therefore, numerous studies and researches have been conducted to gain valuable insights into consumer behavior. In this paper the concept meant under consumer behavior will be as follows: “Consumer behaviors refer to the decision-making process before and after involving, receiving, consuming and dealing with products and services” (Li & Wang, 2014). In the upcoming paragraphs, thus, the consumer behavior (i.e. decision-making process, customer journey) and possible influences on it will be detailed. These behaviors will be discussed along the steps of the various consumer decision models.

The first attribute of consumer behavior to recognize is, that it has stages and set patterns. According to Karimi, Papamichail & Holland (2015) “a purchase decision is the behavioral pattern of a consumer who determines and follows a decision process comprising various stages in order to reach a choice”. However, their paper is not the only one, that recognizes the stages involved in the consumer behavior. Other works in consumer behavior theory say that for decisions dealing with more alternative outcomes, a person is more probable to apply a decision method that has more than one phase. Thus, phased models were theorized in this field, as they reduce the variability of the outcome sets of consumers across the various possible purchase situations (Koklic & Vida, 2011).

There are several phased models, that aim to comprehensively define all the aspects of the buying situation. One of these is the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) model, which was created in 1973. It rethought the five stages of problem-solving and implemented it into the field of consumer attitude. The result was the linear model of the purchase decision, whose stages are as follows: problem recognition, search, alternative evaluation, purchase, choice and outcomes (Darley, Blankson & Luethge, 2010).

The Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (EBM) model built on the concepts of the EKB model with the goal of more generally simulating in theory the consumer's decision-making mechanism in a wider spectrum of purchase situations. The EBM model’s main assumption is a rational consumer. It, thus, incorporates information processing, comparison of unrelated alternatives and both positive and negative post-purchase outcomes, which may not be directly contemplated in other standards of consumer
behavior (Theo & Yeong, 2003). This is the reason this model was chosen as a base of analysis in this paper.

The five stages of this model, taking the previously mentioned factors into consideration, became: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase and after-purchase evaluation (Theo & Yeong, 2003).

*Figure 1: The consecutive phases of the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model*

![Diagram](image)

*Own editing based on the work of Theo & Yeong, 2003.*

### 1.1.1 Need recognition

The first step of the EBM model is the need recognition. A certain need is stimulated here, that can either be a real need or a desire to buy a good or a service (Merwe, Kempen, Breedt & Beer, 2010). The consumer realizes an imbalance between the actual and desired levels of reality, that may be sufficiently extensive to initiate the search for information (Theo & Yeong, 2003).

### 1.1.2 Information search

Next, the information search is carried out by the consumer. In this step the consumer conducts research about the initial set of alternatives, that can satisfy the realized need (Theo & Yeong, 2003). The degree of search and type of information sought depends on various factors according to academia. Karimi et al (2015) found, that individual behavior patterns influence this stage: time spent on research and the number of criteria and alternatives created depends on the whether one is a maximizer (looking for the best possible outcome) or a satisficer (satisfied with a good enough alternative). Frank Selnes (1999), on the other hand, researched the knowledge
prospective buyers possess before purchase. He found, that consumers more knowledgeable about products in general look for more information prior to the decision.

1.1.3 Alternative evaluation

The third stage of the model is the alternative evaluation. A series of alternatives are created from the previous step of the information search. These are paired with a set of criteria, that are stored in the consumer’s memory (Theo & Yeong, 2003). According to the literature four main factors influence the classic alternative selection: price-consciousness, quality-consciousness, brand-consciousness and brand loyalty (Kumar, Vohra & Dangi, 2017). Price consciousness is articulated as the degree to which one focuses solely on lower prices when debating between the purchase alternatives (Mukherji, 2017). Quality consciousness is the consumer’s desire for quality of the product or service. Consumers, who possess a higher level of quality consciousness are likely to have an increased utility for quality goods and services than others (Rao & Bergen, 1992). The last two factors are in connection to the product’s brand, which is, defined in Chakraborty’s study (2017) as “the perceptible sign of the organization and its products to the human senses, through which the customer is able to differentiate an organization and its products from others”. Brand consciousness follows from this. It shows the degree to which one utilizes brands as an important information provider to the purchase decisions. Highly brand-conscious individuals are likely to regard brands as social values and as symbols of social status and prestige (Zhang & Nelson, 2016). Lastly, brand loyalty is a conventional marketing definition that concentrates on establishing and maintaining a long-term consumer-brand relationship. Oliver (1999) articulated it as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior”.

1.1.4 Purchase

Fourthly, the purchase is conducted. This stage intakes all the interactions during the time of the acquisition between the customer and the business and its environment. It covers the actions of choice, ordering and money exchange. Purchase confidence, information, alternative overload and choice satisfaction are important to consider here, as they might influence the consumer to finish the previous stage and either carry out or stall the purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).
1.1.5 After-purchase evaluation

At last, after-purchase evaluation is analyzed. This phase encompasses the actual use of the product, post-purchase involvement and service requests (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Post-purchase behavior is also the step in the customer journey, where after consuming the product or service, the customer evaluates its performance. According to the literature there are three types of evaluation outcomes: neutral emotions, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Neutral feelings are experienced, when the product or service matches our previously attributed perceived value of the product. Satisfaction is achieved if the product or service exceeds the expectations attributed to it before consumption and dissatisfaction is the outcome if the opposite holds: expectactions are not met. These outcomes determine whether the customer will repurchase the product or service. However, these after-purchase emotions are not only influencing the brand perception of the consumer, but also the emotions connected to the purchase point and the recommendations (its quality and quantity) as well (Kumar et al, 2017). Thus, the importance of post-purchase emotions cannot be understated. Several studies have researched and shown, that the customer satisfaction impacts not only consumer behavior but the performance of the business as well. Therefore, measuring the level of satisfaction regarding the product has become a standard best practice for marketers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

1.2. Consumer behavior in the online world

The development of the Internet and various other information technology channels meant changes in the lives of consumers. The generational evolution of life perspectives took effect, that meant, that values, lifestyles and attitudes shifted. A study conducted in 2014 has shown that there exists a relationship between the increased utility of the Internet and the changing values and lifestyles mentioned above (Diaz, Gómez & Molina, 2017).

Moreover, the advancement of the information technologies has affected not only the values, but consumer behavior as well (Diaz et al, 2017). Whereas early consumer research theory suggests utilizing a linear customer journey model, scholars nowadays advocate for a circular, cyclical model. McKinsey found, that while the linear funnel does provide benefits (e.g. identifying the strong points of the brand in comparison to competitors, understanding the bottleneck stages that might defer the consumer), it fails to incorporate the increasingly well-informed consumers and the vast
variety of alternatives and digital channels, that are open to them due to today’s technology (Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik, 2009). Karimi et al (2015) argue, that consumers are characterized nowadays with high adaptivity in responding to tasks along the decision process, thus conducting a purchase online is a flexible and dynamic decision system. This flexibility in academia has been articulated as “the ability to adapt the process flow on demand through adding, skipping, or sequence reordering of process steps” (Karimi et al, 2015). Boncheck & France (2014) also advocates for a circular model, as consumers of today do not enter the decision process at the top level and follow along until they reach the end. The opposite is true: they move along a continuous series of touchpoints in no predetermined sequence.

Despite the complexity, that the today’s consumer’s decision flexibility provides, academia stresses how crucial it is for marketers to have a model, that covers the new type of customer journey. Lemon & Verhoef (2016) argue, that “it is important to identify critical touch points (“moments of truth”) throughout the customer journey that have the most significant influence on key customer outcomes.” Consequently, a new model was proposed in the paper of Karimi et al (2015), that takes into account the changed values, lifestyles and purchase behaviors of consumers and builds on the classic consumer behavior theory (Theo & Yeong, 2003), while incorporating the new and accepted concepts of academia as well (Karimi et al, 2015). This model referred to as the online consumer behavior (or customer journey) from now on is displayed below.

*Figure 2: Consumer purchase decision-making framework in the online world (Karimi et al, 2015)*
1.2.1 Need/Want recognition

The initial step, the need recognition, is expanded by browsing or surfing (Weinberg, 2001). Consumers now can browse the Internet and due to a certain trigger jump to the purchase phase without going through the stages in between. The paper of Boncheck & France (2014) provides the example of how the consumer can switch from need recognition to purchase with a click on a social media post or by simply putting an offered good to the cart seen in an e-commerce site’s review section. This requires also a shift from conventional advertising campaigns as they relied on “memory” to sustain the desire of consumers, up till the point of purchase. Now with the Web people browse the sea of information about various subjects and, if a product caught their eye, they can buy it online immediately. Moreover, should the consumer choose to purchase offline, information about the nearest shop, where the product is sold, is reachable on the Internet as well (Kono, 2009).

1.2.2 Formulation of decision problem

Next step is the problem formulation. Here the consumer considers an initial set of alternatives (i.e. brands). McKinsey’s research found, that the number of brands competing for consideration was decreased due to the disintegration of media touchpoint and the rapid growth in the number of options when considering a need or a want. Furthermore, brand awareness gained a unique importance, as brands in this stage have three times more chance to be purchased, than others (Court et al, 2009). The previously mentioned brand loyalty and brand consciousness, thus, play an important role in this stage now, not just in the alternative evaluation.

1.2.3 Search and decision making

Third step, the information search, was probably the most affected by the increased penetration of the Internet. The broad base of knowledge provided by the various Internet platforms influence the products and services by significantly impacting the purchasing decision of users (Wirtz & Nitzsche, 2012). Upon coming across on a media platform or hearing from a friend about an interesting good or service, the consumer of today promptly starts to browse the Web for information about the subject of interest. This online information search has become easier than ever before, as there are ample of detailed information about the specific products and services (Kono, 2009). Moreover, the Internet and the social media sites provide
information to consumers in real time (Diaz et al., 2017). This resulted in a globally active consumer in the purchase process. He must do research in hopes to find ‘the one’ (Töröcsik, 2006). The work of Cetină, Munthiu & Rădulescu (2012) articulated this shift in mindset as follows: “actions performed by consumers on the Internet trigger new behavioral dimensions to compare products or services as their new status of online consumers are endless”. Thus, the new consumer needs to be well-informed. He is characterized by extreme information-channel-usage (Töröcsik, 2006). Both formal (e.g. online browsing) and informal channels (e.g. asking the opinion of their peers) are utilized increasingly by consumers, when they are conducting their research (Boncheck & France, 2014).

The ease of the information research also gained more significance by this above highlighted shift. There is a positive correlation between the ease of search and overall purchase attitude (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Consumers need to be able to relatively easily reach online information about the brand’s quality to decrease their overall search costs (Tseng, 2015). Furthermore, the new consumer’s willingness to spend is influenced by the amount of information available about the products; he will buy more than planned beforehand, if the arguments and descriptions of the products are ample and satisfactory (Töröcsik, 2006). If this attribute is utilized sufficiently, it can provide a major competitive advantage to businesses. It can reshape and re-prioritize the previous set of factors of the alternative evaluation (price-, quality-, brand consciousness and brand loyalty).

The level of research done still depends on the factors discussed in the classic consumer behavior, but their effects are heightened. Maximisers, for example, research and browse more extensively, while satisficers apply a selective approach to information especially using online channels (Karimi et al., 2015).

The last factor highlighted at the information search stage is the concept of the research shopper. Lemon & Verhoef (2016) defined this “as a customer who searches in one channel and purchases in another”. This phenomenon was also mentioned in the work of Lobschat, Osinga & Reinartz (2017) by describing the tendency of consumers to seek information online intensively and later conduct the purchase offline. Moreover, consumers nowadays often look for product attributes in the store while simultaneously, researching various additional information (e.g. offers and prices of competitors) online on their smartphones (Verhoef, Kannan & Inmann, 2015). Lemon & Verhoef (2016) further detailed this topic by identifying two separate cases of research shopping:
“showrooming” (research offline - in the shop, purchase online) and “webrooming” (research online, purchase in the shop). These research consumer identities both approach information search differently than their one-channel-purchase counterparts, and thus, should not be ignored by marketers.

1.2.4 Appraise

In the next phase of the model, in the appraise (i.e. alternative evaluation), consumers add or subtract choices of brands as they ponder what they want. It is important to note, that in the linear type of models, the consumers start out with an initial set of alternatives that is reduced systematically until only one remains. In the new model this no longer holds: what was lost for brands with lower levels of brand-awareness, can be gained back in this phase, as the number of alternatives in the active alternative evaluation stage tends to expand rather than be reduced due to the extensive research of the consumer (Court et al, 2009). Furthermore, it is also important to highlight, that the utilization of this phase is also affected by the actions of other consumers making the post-purchase emotions and the reviews left, because of the quality of these emotions critical for companies to monitor (Guzzo, Ferri & Grifoni, 2016).

1.2.5 Purchase

The fourth phase is the purchase itself. New channels became available with the Internet for consumers to conduct their shopping. E-commerce provides comfort, accessibility, efficiency and value to both retailers and customers (Richard & Habibi, 2016). A key factor here, that influences e-commerce purchase is trust (Guzzo et al, 2016). According to Tseng (2015) trust is a critical success factor, as consumers are more likely to choose vendors possessing a superior reputation. Therefore, this is what the new challenge for companies is. The new consumer is in a constant state of losing trust (both in their personal life and as consumers). However, consumers can be persuaded by the availability of high-quality information, as the previous paragraphs showed. Thus, businesses have to provide sufficient amount of information about the product (e.g. about its quality and terms) to achieve this trust and do whatever it takes to keep it (Töröcsik, 2006).

1.2.6 Post-purchase behavior
Lastly, the changes to post-purchase behavior is analyzed. This stage is gaining more significance as users can share their recommendations on a larger variety of platforms nowadays, reaching more of their fellow consumers. People are placing more emphasis on reviews and trusting comments and blogs of actual users more. Companies can no longer aim to leave their customers in a state of satisfied post purchase emotions like before. More value is contributed in this phase by actual customers to the businesses as their reviews can have a more wide-spread positive effect on other consumers in earlier stages of the customer journey (Kono, 2009). The aim is now, therefore, to not only make customers loyal to the firm, but to make them active loyalists. Active loyalists are those, whom unlike their passive counterparts, do not succumb to the immense variety of products and companies or to simple laziness, but rather they stick to the brand and become advocates for it (Court et al, 2009).

1.3. Digital marketing

Businesses should recognize the highly interactive nature of the touch points along the customer journey and take advantage of the opportunity it provides to engage with their customers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The Internet is viewed by well-established businesses as a potential platform for positively affecting consumers’ perceptions and behaviors, as well as reforming the way they are communicating with the market about their products and services (Eccleston & Griseri, 2008). The accelerated development of the information technologies and their effect on societal characteristics have created the opportunity and the need for a new form of marketing, digital marketing, to emerge. The definition of this type of direct marketing is articulating the precisely selected targeting of individuals and consumer groups with the aim of obtaining valuable and lasting customer relationships through online solutions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It is, thus, viewed as a communication channel inside the marketing process, that is most frequently characterized by its measurable performance and targetable audiences (Bányai & Novák, 2011).

Digital marketing provides various advantages to its users. It is a relatively low-cost and speedy alternative way to reach modern consumers. Companies can benefit from the flexibility of this marketing method, thus responding to the new, flexible online consumer behavior. They can custom-tailor their marketing messages in a timely manner and develop prompt personal engagements and offers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The company McKinsey argues, that based on their qualitative and quantitative
research, this customizability of digital marketing is gaining more and more importance. A generic push-advertisement with an ordinary, broad message is no longer sufficient to incentivize purchase. A decision-stage specific “pull-message” must be created, that addresses a weakness, for example at the need/want recognition phase or at the appraisal phase (Court et al, 2009).

Moreover, companies can achieve higher customer satisfaction and increased brand-loyalty, if they recognize the advantages provided by this marketing solution not only for their own company, but also for the consumers. The realization of the benefit for consumers is crucial, as consumers can also have advertising shown to them that is in line with their personal preferences, creating a well-functioning symbiosis. (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). According to academia, a company’s reputation in the online world, its online technological capabilities and its brand community have a major influence on consumers’ buying intention (Tseng, 2015) and digital marketing helps or contributes to all these three core competencies.

Companies can take advantage of the various tools and attributes offered by digital marketing to best fit their strategy in alignment with other marketing efforts. However, there is no definite blueprint to how digital marketing can be implemented into one’s business operations. In the following paragraph the most important questions will be highlighted, that marketers need to consider creating a digital roadmap to achieve their business goals.

In his book, eMarketing, Rob Stokes (2013) mentions five main points to form an effective digital marketing strategy. First, the context of the business must be examined. The book offers various tools to help this process, e.g. PESTEL analysis or Porter’s five forces. Next, the value proposition must be established. Every business must understand what they can offer, that creates a unique value to consumers. The Internet provides multiple opportunities for value creation, e.g. with online brand communities, but businesses must realize what is valuable among the options to its customers and what is not. The third point is the objectives. Businesses must look at this from four separate perspectives: goals, tactics, key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets. Goals need to be set up, that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. Tactics differ from these. They are the different digital tools the company is planning to utilize in their strategy execution. With the strategy becoming more complex tactics may evolve and shift, but the goal has to remain constant. To measure these evolving tactics, KPIs are set up to measure the effectiveness of these chosen
options. They are needed for marketers to know, when a previously determined target or milestone has been achieved. An example to the point of the objectives is as follows: a firm’s goal might be to grow its revenue coming from eCommerce channels by 10 percent in six months. It may wish to employ a Facebook brand page as a digital tactic. KPIs assigned could be the comments and the post reactions on the brand page and targets could be to have at least fifty reactions to the posted content weekly. Finally, continuous execution and optimization is needed (Stokes, 2013).

Next, the digital marketing tool of search engine advertising will be presented and examined within the strategy blueprint highlighted above and then in relation with consumer behavior.

1.4 Search engine advertising

Search engine advertising (SEA) (also known as a type of pay-per-click advertising, keyword advertising or sponsored/paid search) was defined in the work of Jansen & Liu (2013) as “a form of online advertising where companies promote their products and services on search engine results pages.” Search engine advertising is a type of paid media activity within digital marketing, that the consumer initiates (Srinivasan, Rutz & Pauwels, 2016). Paid search is a beneficial touch-point between the company and the consumer, as it can generate traffic to the company’s website and create leads, that are a deeper source of engagement (Bill, 2009). Search engine advertising is regarded as a key step in not only generating traffic to the webpages of companies and online shops, (Klapdor et al, 2014) but also in moving along the customer journey by indirectly affecting the consumer (Srinivasan, 2016). Because of these attributes, when examining SEM as a tactic within digital marketing strategy, it is most commonly utilized to gain engagement, generate sales, acquire and retain customers (Stokes, 2013). The set-up of this tactic constitutes of the continual execution of the following steps: targeting relevant keywords, selecting and optimizing the monetary bids on these keywords and creating the ad copy with the matching landing page (Klapdor, Anderl, Wangenheim & Schumann, 2014). That is why some of the relevant KPIs of SEM are as follows: number of search referrals, cost per click on the ads and click-through rate.

As for the role of search engine advertising works in academia found that it is diverse, for example expressing brand image and value, reinforcing brand loyalty and appearing to the selected target audience. These goals, however, must be clearly set and
understood before the launch of the search campaign (Yang, Lu, Tang & Pei, 2015). By selecting one of these aims, we also choose a stage of the consumer behavior we want to focus on. Even though, it is visible, that sponsored search is more impactful than offline methods in encouraging online consumer behavior, unfortunately, not a lot of paper in academia deals with how search engine advertising can influence specific parts of the customer journey (Stephen, 2016). In the following paragraphs, those findings will be detailed, that do highlight the role of this marketing method in one of the above defined phases.

Srinivasan et al (2016) reported, that consumers research not only products with high perceived risk, but also mundane, low risk products. This means, that consumers view the search engine as an important information source, when reaching the information search of their customer journey. Search engine advertisers measure this learning segment by the number of clicks on the ad (Srinivasan et al, 2016).

Klapdor et al (2014) also studied this phase of the consumer behavior. He examined the link of the information search stage and sponsored searches and concluded, that the more the alignment of the consumer’s information want, and the marketer’s information offer is satisfactory, the more positive the response was to the message of the ad. Thus, advertisers should consider writing ad copies, that aims to fulfill the information need of the consumer. Klapdor et al (2014) also signified the difference between the measurement of clicks and conversions. (See definition in Appendix) The conversion rate is regarded as a key success indicator, as it directly affects sales. In comparison to clicks, conversions are further along in the consumer behavior process. Therefore, campaigns optimized for clicks are more sufficiently supporting of consumers’ information search, while campaigns with a high conversion rate objective are closer related to the purchase phase.

Yang et al (2015) focused on other parts of the consumer behavior. In his paper he identifies two main types of search advertising: ones with informative and ones with persuasive ad copies. Ads with informative texts want to communicate economically important messages to the consumers like price and product features. This information purpose can help consumers select the goods or services, that best match their criteria set. Therefore, advertising with these messages helps the alternative evaluation stage of the consumer behavior as it mainly influences the price consciousness and the quality consciousness. In contrast, persuasive ads are selected, if the firm wants to transform
the preferences and tastes of consumers. This affects the need recognition phase and the initial problem consideration phase as well, as often branded messages are utilized here.

However, not only ad copies influence the goal set of a search advertisement. Academia also highlights the connection of keyword usage and the targeted consumer behavior. Keywords are generally categorized into two sets: general or popular keywords and specific or less-popular keywords. Stephen (2016) wrote, that searches for keywords of lower popularity is more impactful. Keywords with lower search volume were shown to have a higher click-per-search rate, demonstrating, that searchers of them are more invested in their research and are closer to the purchase phase of the customer journey (Jerath & Park, 2014). In conclusion, the utilizers of specific keywords can reach those consumers, who are browsing the Internet with a concrete shopping goal, and thus generate direct sales. However, broader keywords are of equal importance. They direct more traffic to the website of the advertiser, due to their higher search volume. They can reach the consumers in earlier stages of the consumer behavior, thus generate indirect sales. Furthermore, a spillover effect can be examined between the two keyword categories: searches for general keywords often transform into branded searches (Aslam & Karjaluoto, 2017).

The last relationship highlighted is post-purchase behavior and search engine advertising. Court et al (2009) found, that over 60 percent of customers of facial cosmetics do an online research about the product after they bought it. This is a new phase, where paid search can influence that consumer.

All in all, the variety of choices for advertisers to utilize search engine advertising is vast. It can be connected to nearly all the phases inside the consumer behavior. Advertisers must make it clear, however, what their goal really is and how they can custom-tailor this marketing solution to best suit their aims. The next pages are attributed to the study of these methods.

2. Research methodology

While reviewing the papers of academia I focused on the general questions proposed in the introduction. To help gain a better understanding on how companies can move consumers along the customer journey, I conducted both secondary and primary research in the topic. My aim was to provide a more in-depth overview of the above-mentioned questions while concentrating on the EBM model of consumer behavior.
2.1 Secondary research

First, I utilized secondary research options to get a clear picture of the environment surrounding the topic. To further analyze the relation of search engine advertising and consumer behavior, first the existing market conditions were examined. Data were taken to support the findings in academia from various databases, specialized websites and published researches. Within this framework I am investigating the Hungarian digital marketing industry looking at it both on the consumer level and the industry level. The Hungarian market was chosen as a base, as the interviewed professionals were most knowledgeable in this geographic area. In this section the Internet penetration of Hungary is examined to highlight the potential reach of digital marketing methods. Next, the search engine utilization habits are portrayed. Having established, that a vast number of Hungarians are adopting these technologies the impact of the Internet on the purchase behavior was investigated. These together form a solid groundwork why digital marketing can and should be utilized in this region. To understand the size of this industry I researched the ad-spend and growth visible in this sector. I also highlighted search engine marketing’s expenditure to show how important it is to understand the correct utilization of this advertising option.

2.2 Primary research

Second, I conducted my primary research. This is articulated in academia as a direct collection of data about a research module with the aim of answering the predetermined research question (Gyulavári, Mitev, Neulinger, Neumann-Bódi, Simon & Szűcs, 2011). Primary research can be separated into two types: qualitative and quantitative research. I chose the qualitative research technique of conducting in-depth interviews with highly qualified marketing experts. An in-depth interview is defined as an unstructured, direct, in-person interview, where a highly qualified interviewer is talking to a single individual with the aim of understanding the motivations, views, attitudes and feelings of the interviewee in a question (Malhotra & Simon, 2011). I designed my interviews to fit all the criteria in the definition. The interviewees were chosen, because they have been working within the marketing sector for years. I met them alone and asked them my questions during one-on-one, face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, I designed my questions to be open-ended, so that the interviewees could freely share their opinions about the topic in question. I also asked them helping
questions, if needed. My aim was to get their point of view, so my interaction with them was never strategically guiding them towards a predetermined opinion or answer.

Within this method I chose to do professional in-depth interviews, where the interviewer seeks to gain the opinion of individuals, who are highly knowledgeable in the research topic (Gyulavári et al, 2011). Due to this requirement of the chosen method I specifically selected interviewees from the digital marketing industry with vast experience in paid search.

The reason for choosing this method is coming from my research questions highlighted in the Introduction. The answers to these questions require complex overview of the whole SEA process. To cover all sides of this complexity with a mathematical model would be out of scope of a Bachelor thesis of my study course (Business and Administration). Furthermore, the main aim of this thesis is not to understand the impact of search engine advertising on consumers’ life, but rather to show the proven methods of campaign set-up, when targeting consumers at different levels of the customer journey. To gain this knowledge it was essential for me to get insights from marketing professionals working closely with SEA. I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the best-practices within the digital marketing industry. I believe, that with choosing in-depth interviews as a research method I could gain a more holistic overview of SEA and the EBM model from a professional side. Asking helping questions if needed or asking the interviewees to elaborate more on their answers during the in-person interviews allowed me a greater freedom to investigate the research topic. This would not have been possible with a questionnaire format. Moreover, by interviewing SEA professionals, who are actively working in their field, I believe, the implications for managers will be clearer and reflect a more up-to-date conclusion. My interviewees know all sides of the businesses, as it is essential for them to keep up with not only consumer trends, but also with the latest technological improvements of the industry.

For sampling method, I chose non-probability sampling, where I selected my interviewees subjectively. My aim in the selection process was to gain the perspective of highly qualified experts from various areas of performance-marketing. Following this logic, I chose marketing professionals from both marketing agencies and companies. Furthermore, my aim was to select experts from different sides of digital marketing. On the one hand, I turned to digital project managers, because they have a wider overview of the digital marketing channels utilized in marketing efforts. In choosing them my
hope was, that they can provide me answers to my first two research questions: how the
internet changed the customer journey and where search marketing fits within the
marketing strategy. On the other hand, SEA specialists were interviewed as well, as
they are the ones who are actively involved in the day-to-day management of paid
search campaigns. My goal with this was to seek answers to my last two research
questions: again, SEA’s place within the customer journey and how marketing agents
can custom-tailor their campaigns to fit the consumers’ expectation at a given phase.

My chosen interview questions can be broken down into five main categories:
the effect of Internet usage on consumers, the EBM model in practice, Digital
Marketing trends in Hungary, search engine advertising and finally search engine
advertising and the EBM model. During the interviews most time and questions were
assigned to the last topic, as that is the key research question of this thesis. In this
section my aim was to find out, that based on their experience, in which phase of the
model would a paid search campaign be most successful and what features of the SEA
campaign set-ups do the specialists custom-tailor to target the different phases of the
customer journey. The list of my exact interview questions can be found in the
Appendix section. I followed these questions during my sessions, but I did ask helping
questions or provided a relevant example, if I deemed, that the interviewee did not
understand my question in focus at the time.

The interviewees gave me their consent to record our meeting, to use their
names and to quote them word-by-word or to compress a longer argument they had. The
list of my interviewees and their background is collected in the table below (strictly in
chronological order):

   Table 1: Name, date of the interview, position, company and work experience of the
digital marketing experts interviewed (own editing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>DATE OF INTERVIEW</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>WORK EXPERIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Umfährer</td>
<td>16.08.2018</td>
<td>Digital Project Manager</td>
<td>E:ON Hungary</td>
<td>8 yrs Digital Marketing and SEM specialist (company side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Csilla Berta</td>
<td>12.09.2018</td>
<td>Digital Project Manager</td>
<td>Universal McCann</td>
<td>2.5 yrs Digital Marketing and PPC specialist (agency setting &amp; e-commerce)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Analysis of the practical problem

3.1 Digital trends in Hungary

In 2017, 84.3 percent of households in Europe had access to the Internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2017). On an individual level this meant in the same year, that 79 percent of residents used the Internet in the EU. Hungary is only a bit below this average as 78 percent of the population is an Internet user. Furthermore, a remarkable growing trend is visible in the country, as from 2016 to 2017 the percentage of Web users grew by 6 percent (European Commission, 2017).

The Internet has become a part of our everyday lives in various ways; one of which is the way we look for information. In 2012 already 175.9 billion searches were made by the search engines (Sullivan, 2013). In 2017, the market leader search engine was Google. The site had an average net global market share of 74.54 percent (Mangles, 2018). Google’s market share was notably higher in Europe the same year, it reached 91.92 percent. Hungary has an even higher preference for the search engine as here in 2017 this number was 97.36 percent with the second competitor, Bing, having only a 1.13 percent share (Statcounter, 2018).

3.2 Online consumer behavior in Hungary

After establishing, that the Hungarian public is active on the Internet, the effect of this digital openness was investigated. How consumers are becoming more knowledgeable and are conducting more research prior to purchase was shown in the Google Consumer Barometer, 2014/15, a research conducted by the company of Google, now known as Alphabet Inc. In this study appr. 82,000 people from 63 countries were either interviewed in person or on the phone about their Internet usage habits. For this thesis I highlight the Hungarian findings, as the primary research also concentrates on this market. Further, the section of the research focused on is 'The
Smart Shopper’ as this part has the most relevant data to the topic of this paper. These filtered findings showed, that in 2014, 84 percent of the consumers conducted research prior to their purchase (Google, 2015a) with 49 percent of Hungarians doing this at least one day before buying the good in question (Google, 2015b). The importance of the World Wide Web is growing here as the theoretical overview highlighted it previously. The Internet is now regarded as the primary place to look for information by 78 percent of Hungarians. (Google, 2015c) This is depicted in the kind of research consumers utilize about a product as well: 67 percent of Hungarians used online research tools to get more information about the considered product or service (Google, 2015a). It is also important to highlight, that majority of Hungarians (51 percent) frequently compare both the products offered, the prices and the product attributes (Google, 2015d). These pieces of information are easily accessible through search engines; thus, 47 percent of consumers used a search engine to help them make a purchase decision (Google, 2015e).

These findings point to an opportunity for marketers to reach consumers online and more importantly, reach them while they are utilizing a search engine. In connection to the research questions of this thesis, these statistics are also of paramount importance. The high level of Internet penetration in Hungary makes the first question relevant in this region. Consequently, the changed customer behavior can be seen in the findings of Google Consumer Barometer. Furthermore, the massive number of search engine users enable marketers to influence this shifted consumer behavior. The importance of this touchpoint cannot be ignored by marketing professionals.

### 3.3 Digital marketing investment trends in Hungary

Modern businesses are acknowledging this shift to digital purchase journey, take advantage and invest in digital marketing more regularly. In 2016, the annual spending on digital marketing was 194 billion USD. This grew by 17.8 percent and thus reached 229.25 billion USD in 2017. Statista projects, that by 2020 this sum would amount to 335.5 billion USD with an average CAGR of 13.3 percent (Statista, 2018b). In comparison, global advertising spending slowed down in its growth with a CAGR of 3.8 percent in 2017. The drivers of this (slowing) growth according to a report by the Dentsu Aegis Network, examining 59 markets across the globe, are digital marketing solutions. They predict, that digital ad spending is going to pass marketing investment in TV for the first time (Dentsu Aegis Network, 2017). Reports differ when estimating
the share of digital advertising in 2017, but they all put it over 34.7 percent (Denstu Aegis Network: 34.8 percent, eMarketer: 39.1 percent, Magna: 41 percent) (Dentsu Aegis Network, 2017, eMarketer, 2017, Magna, 2017). Predictions regarding the share of marketing solutions for 2020 also varies across reports, however, they all estimate the share of digital to be appr. half of all ad spending (eMarketer: 47.3 percent, Magna: 50 percent, Statista: 46.3 percent) (eMarketer, 2017, Magna, 2017, Statista, 2018a).

The growing importance of digital holds for the European region as well. According to a research conducted by the weCAN agency network in the Middle- and East-European region 29 percent of the total marketing budget (5 percent more compared to the statistics of 2015) was contributing to online forms of marketing in 2017. This number was even higher in Hungary, where 37 percent of marketing budget was allocated to digital tools (Médiapiac, 2017). Businesses invested 79.3 billion HUF into digital marketing solutions here, which meant a YoY of 16 percent. Out of this expenditure 30.9 billion HUF was allocated to search engine marketing. This share in percentage terms is 38.97 percent. Furthermore, the growth of investment into this channel is constantly growing on a year-to-year basis. From 2016 to 2017 the growth in search engine advertising investment was 14.87 percent. When comparing search engine advertising to the digital marketing tactics of display, listings and email, we can see that only display surpasses search in ad-spend (IAB Hungary & PWC, 2018).

*Figure 3: Net ad-spend (in billion HUF) realized by the different digital marketing channels*

![Net ad-spend in billion HUF](image)

*Own editing based on the IAB Adex 2017 report of IAB Hungary & PWC, 2018.*
In the next section the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with marketing professionals are documented. The material collected is organized into topics within my research questions. The data collected is displayed in a cumulative, summarizing manner, highlighting the most important sections, that more, than one interviewee confirmed.

3.4 The effect of Internet usage on consumers

During the interviews the effect of the growth of the Internet on consumer behavior was investigated. Most interviewed performance marketing specialists highlighted, that the rise of the Internet accelerated the lives of the consumers. One of the experts sees this trend portrayed in the rising number of impulse buys and the decreasing time taken by consumers to decide on a purchase. On the other hand, this acceleration was also expressed during the interviews in the way users can reach information. Subsequently, consumers can now attain product information more freely and quickly. The spread of the Internet was said to be the second biggest transformation in content generation after the television, as now everyone is a micro-influencer on his/her own level. The experts agree, that although, there is a visible pattern, this trend differs on a generational level.

According to both academia in Chapter 1.2.3 (Töröcsik, 2006) and my secondary research (Google, 2015) in Chapter 3.1, consumers now spend more time to research the product. The opinion of the marketing professionals differs in this topic. It was agreed by all, that the bigger amount of information reachable with the Internet creates an opportunity for the consumer to be well-informed. However, according to Dávid, those consumers who did not have the urge to look for (more) information before a purchase or made ill-advised purchase decisions in the past will continue to do so, despite the opportunities, that the Internet provides. This reinforces Chapter 1.2.3 and the findings of Karimi et al (2015) about satisficers approaching online information search selectively.

Concerning the place of the consumers’ research the experts all pointed to the Internet’s growing penetration in this regard. The search engines of Google and Youtube were mentioned as a prominent information source. Two marketers emphasized the role of price contrasting websites in the Hungarian market, highlighting the importance of the price-consciousness out of the four criteria of alternative evaluation described in Chapter 1.1.4. The webrooming and showrooming phenomena
3.5 The EBM model in practice
The marketing professionals all agreed with the finding of Lemon & Verhoef (2016) in Chapter 1.2, that it is important to utilize consumer behavior models. The biggest benefit derivable from models of the kind was said to be the structure they provide to ideas. It further helps communication between divisions and between clients and agencies by making visualization easier. It was established, however, that a marketing model can never mirror real life exactly.

When asked about the EBM model particularly all experts said, that it is a logical system and portrays the way consumers make decisions. Two experts shared the view, that with the Internet the first and last stage of the model was influenced the most. As the thesis stated in Chapter 1.2.6, there are a bigger variety of channels, where consumers can leave a review based on their post-purchase emotions (Court et al, 2009; Kono, 2009). The experts warned companies not to ignore this as the reviews now can reach more people than ever and one misstep can go viral in a second’s time. Returning customers were also emphasized, as their conversion values tend to be higher. One expert said, that consumers prefer to use products they already had a good experience with, but companies should not take this for certain. For this reason, it was suggested for the model to be cyclical in line with academia in Chapter 1.2 (Boncheck & France, 2014; Karimi et al, 2015).

3.6 Digital marketing trends in Hungary
All specialists agreed, that, as the secondary research showed, digital marketing solutions are spreading in Hungary. However, Inez and Richárd mentioned exceptions. According to them, specific SME-s find digital marketing methods a burden, because of their lack of expertise. Dávid told me, that the tools, that have a longer presence in the market (e.g. classic display, Facebook and Google advertisements) are well-known and commonly used by Hungarian marketers, but the new-wave digital methods (e.g. niche social media platforms) are only utilized by the most innovative businesses.
When inquiring about the goal of digital marketing campaigns the interviewees all shared the same viewpoint; it is diverse. The ability of this type of marketing to support product development was stated. The public’s response to a new business venture can be easily monitored digitally making necessary adjustments to the product easier to catch. This is in line with the attribute of flexibility highlighted by Kotler & Keller (2016) regarding this marketing solution in Chapter 1.3. Classic FMCG and multinational companies were further given as an example, as they often view digital marketing as an alternative for classic media. Opposingly, lead and conversion focus was highlighted as well as frequent goals businesses have with digital marketing. The following observation was made, that puts these diverse opinions into perspective: companies will usually align their digital marketing strategy to their general approach to marketing (i.e. if a company prefers a brand focused marketing approach, it will launch branding and image building digital marketing campaigns).

The results of the interviews support the findings of Chapter 3.1, that search engine advertising is commonly utilized in the market. SME-s were claimed to take advantage of SEA increasingly, as they usually have a lower marketing budget. Consequently, they value paid search’s ability to reach the consumer at a lower stage of the consumer behavior. This goes parallel to the claim of Bill (2009) highlighted in Chapter 1.4, that SEA can be a deeper source of engagement. Colliding views on how bigger corporations utilize this marketing option arose during the interviews. On the one hand, Inez told me, that bigger, image focused companies view 24/7 search ads as basic nowadays. On the other, Dávid’s experience was, that bigger companies put lower emphasis on paid search.

Regarding which search engine would prove to be the most efficient marketing tool in the Hungarian market the experts agreed with the secondary research findings in Chapter 3.1. All said, that Google is the only viable option in Hungary.

To get a deeper understanding about the reasons for choosing paid search in marketing strategy, I asked the experts to tell me the biggest advantages of this type of marketing solution. The answers can be arranged into two categories: most of them stem from the fact, that SEA is a digital marketing method, but the experts also mentioned characteristics, that were unique to paid search. The advantages and disadvantages are collected in the following table:

*Table 2: The advantages and disadvantages of SEA mentioned by the experts*
## Advantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stems from the attributes of digital marketing (Chapter 1.3)</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• precise targeting</td>
<td>• companies might find it hard to keep up with the always evolving platform and innovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• flexibility &amp; customizability (e.g. with budget)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• quick &amp; seeable results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• optimizable &amp; effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• good results are achievable with lower budgets, if the expertise is present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stems from the attributes of SEA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Google uses Machine Learning heavily</td>
<td>• less reach (pull type of advertising – only appears, when user is actively searching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• targeting can be on a time and locational level as well</td>
<td>• not suitable for branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• consumers initiate the process; thus, ads find them in a better mindset (push type of advertising)</td>
<td>• lacks lasting effect (no spillover effect after campaign is finished)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the business goal SEA most experts highlighted lead and traffic generation consistent to Chapter 1.4. Three experts mentioned purchase focus as well.

As an additional viable reason for launching paid search campaigns being above the competitors in the search results page was deemed realizable. This approach gives SEA a branding-focus. Richárd had an opposing view concerning this subject. He suggested using SEO (Search Engine Optimization) for these purposes.

Furthermore, I asked the interviewees to tell me if paid search can support a specific phase of the EBM model. Next, I focused my questions on specific parts and settings of a campaign of this sort and we went over how these can be customized to target the phases of the model.

### 3.7 Search engine advertising within the phases

Need/want recognition was a phase, that experts deemed unfit for SEA to support. The arguments were the following: for this stage an inner change within the consumer is needed, offline media is more suitable to initiate the recognition. The
utilization of TV advertisements was suggested instead. An exception was disclaimed by Inez, who mentioned impulse buys as a possible exception. Csilla further declared an exemption, by recommending this phase only if the budget available is high.

Information search was a phase where three experts agreed, that SEA can have a great impact. The only opposing view came from Richárd, who suggested SEO to be utilized to target consumers at this phase. The findings of the interview support the conclusions of Srinivasan et al (2016) in Chapter 1.4, that consumers do regard search engines as an essential information source.

Paid search was deemed to support the alternative evaluation phase immensely during the interviews. In this stage I also want to highlight the work of Court et al (2009) cited in Chapter 1.4.2. This paper described the phenomenon, that consumers of today increase their alternative sets after the information research phase, instead of lowering this number, as the classical model suggested. The interview with Dávid supported this. He claimed, that smaller advertisers can take advantage of search engine advertising uniquely: “while in offline media channels usually those succeed, who have a large marketing budget, in SEA the sophistication and professionalism of campaign execution has an equal, if not higher importance than the budget used.” This is in line with the claim of Court et al (2009), that what was lost at the earlier phases to advertisers with lower available funds, can be gained back here.

The purchase phase was only moderately found to be suitable for SEA to support. The importance of remarketing lists (See definition in Appendix) and conversion driven campaigns were highlighted in this stage. The findings of the in-depth interviews reinforce the study of Klapdor et al (2014) in Chapter 1.4.2 saying, that campaigns, whose goal is to achieve a high conversion rate are closer related to the purchase phase of the customer journey.

For the after-purchase phase one expert suggested using SEA under the condition, that an appropriate landing page is available e.g. an opinion’s page or product usage recommendations. Loyal customers came in scope here. They have the highest cart value and they are cheaper to keep, than turning a new consumer into a customer. For this reason, treating them separately was suggested. These results are emphasizing the alternative evaluation criteria of brand-loyalty mentioned in the theoretical overview in Chapter 1.4. Richárd recommended using SEO as a post-purchase communication tool.
The aggregated findings of the in-depth interviews are shown in the following figure. The darkest color represents the stage, where unconditional influence was claimed by every expert. The colors fade with each condition and opposing view stated.

Figure 4: A color-schemed representation of the findings of the in-depth interviews about how SEA can influence the customer journey

![Diagram of the customer journey with stages: Need recognition, Information search, Alternative evaluation, Purchase, After-purchase evaluation.]

Own editing based on the work of Theo & Yeong (2003) and the findings of the in-depth interviews.

3.8 Customizing SEA campaigns with keywords

In this section, answers to the third question found are explored. Looking at campaigns on a keyword level the experts’ description supported the claims of Jerath & Park (2014) in Chapter 1.4: searchers of long-tail keywords are more committed in their research and are in lower phases of the model. The interviews found, that long-tail keywords are of paramount importance for sales focused web shops. The other finding of Jerath & Park (2015) was found to be applicable in practice by the interviewees: Short-tail keywords generate more traffic to the website, because more users search for them. Broader keywords are regarded as achieving quicker results and having more reach. These keywords were told to be more suitable for earlier phases of the customer journey. However; caution should be taken with them, as these searches are not necessarily related to the product. For this reason, utilizing negative keywords (see definition in the Appendix) from the beginning of campaign set-up were suggested.

Additionally, Dávid told me, that the keywords users search for draw out the EBM model. He provided the example of buying a car for this phenomenon: “initially users search for ‘car purchase’ or ‘what to look for when buying a car’, then later as
they move to downward phases of the model users search for specific models they want to compare e.g. ‘Skoda Kodiak’.

3.9 Customizing SEA campaigns with ad-copies

CTA-s (Call to Action-s) were commonly regarded as an essential part of every search ad. Contradicting the categorization of ad-copies in the work of Yang et al (2015) in Chapter 1.4 (informative ads vs. persuasive ads), the character limit of the ad-texts make persuasion unrealistic for advertisers. For this reason, calling the consumer to click on the ad and visit the website was suggested as an alternative method of influencing.

USP-s were found to be important in the information research phase. The reason being, that later, when the consumer is looking for alternatives, the uniqueness of the business will be valuable. Highlighting different USP-s when targeting different parts of the customer journey was recommended based on the following roadmap: At the information search level marketers should inform customers, that the product/service is available at the company. Here a more general ad-copy is advised (e.g. focusing on the large variety of colors and sizes available). When targeting the alternative evaluation phase, the USP of the product itself should be emphasized (e.g. focusing on special features). Finally, at purchase level marketers should focus on the USP-s of the company and the company’s business model (e.g. free-shipping, fast shipping). This approach to USP-s is similar to the purpose of informative ad-texts described in the work of Yang et al (2015) in Chapter 1.1.4.

Customizing the ad copies based on whom we retarget and how familiar they are with the business (i.e. what the users collected on to our remarketing list have already seen from our website or application) was also recommended by the experts.

The alternative evaluation criterion of price-consciousness from Chapter 1.1.4 was a further topic relevant here. Price communication is advised, if the company’s prices are above the price-level of the competitors. This was found to be important in the need recognition phase (in case of impulse-buys) and the alternative evaluation phase.

3.10 Customizing SEA campaigns with remarketing lists

Next section displays the finding of the primary research regarding remarketing lists. (See Appendix for further information.) Generally, those individuals, who have
already been on the website (and, thus, are part of a remarketing list), are usually in a lower phase of the customer journey and often bring better results for the campaign. Consequently, interviewees suggested, that a separate campaign only targeting users on the remarketing list should be set up and monitored closely. If these campaigns are achieving higher click-through-rates, raising the budget and the bids here were found to be beneficial.

A common recommendation was custom-tailoring the ad-copies based on the level of the remarketing list. Remarketing lists can be segmented and assigned to a specific part of the consumer behavior. The following example was given: if someone watched a video about the company, but did not visit the company’s website, he/she might be in the information phase and should be targeted by messages appropriate to that phase. Cart-leavers, on the other hand, are lower in the journey, but for some reason they did not decide yet on purchase. In this case the reason should be investigated, and the messages should be formulated accordingly.

3.11 Customizing SEA campaigns with landing pages

All experts suggested to use different landing pages for different stages of the customer journey. Loyalty programs for returning customers or special coupons for selected users from a remarketing list (e.g. for cart-leavers) were mentioned as an example. Landing pages were further recommended to be altered based on the ad-copy and the keyword. The following roadmap was given as an illustration: If the user is searching for a product: utilize a product page or a product comparison page. If the marketer knows, that the user wants to purchase: utilize a landing page, that allows him/her to do so. In case of a significant budget, a whole new website was recommended to be created for strategically valuable mid- or long-tail keywords.

3.12 Customizing SEA campaigns with devices targeted

The last level of the SEA campaigns is the device bid adjustment options (see Appendix) inside Google Ads. The interviews found, that targeting only mobiles were less frequently utilized, as the consumer usually does not give content on this device his/her undivided attention. According to the primary results consumers conduct information research and alternative selection more on mobile devices. This was claimed to be, because Hungarians approach online shopping and mobile payment alternatives still precariously. Instead they usually make purchases on desktop.
However, this was deemed to be only a generalization and the recommendation was made, that marketers should be present with all devices in every part of the customer journey.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary and discussion of findings

This paper is aiming to find the answers for the following questions: *How the growing ease of Internet access affected the customer journey? Can search engine advertising be utilized to affect consumers at every level of the journey to purchase? How can search engine advertising campaigns be custom-tailored to target a certain phase of the customer journey?* The main reason for formulating these problems is that despite the massive amount of investment going into search advertising, there exists a hole in academia regarding the interconnection of the customer journey with search engine advertising.

In the Theoretical overview the customer journey was defined, and the phased models of consumer behavior was introduced. The customer journey model utilized was the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard linear model, which consists of the following phases: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase and after-purchase (Theo & Yeong, 2003). This might be an accepted model as it stems from the decision-making process of people, and overall, making a purchase is a decision. Later, a cyclical model (Boncheck & France, 2014; Court, et al, 2009; Karimi et al, 2015) was developed as academia realized, that due to the growing Internet penetration the values and the way consumers make purchase decisions shifted (Diaz, Gómez & Molina, 2017). The possible reason why academia is invested in creating a new model is the practical application of them. Marketing models give structure and a guideline for managers to utilize when formulating strategy.

An appropriate answer to this evolvement is the positive attributes of digital marketing: precise targeting, flexibility, customizability, relatively low-cost and possible higher customer satisfaction and increased brand-loyalty (Court et al, 2009; Karimi et al, 2015; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Tseng, 2015). Search engine advertising was also shown to be effective in this regard. Academia holds this marketing tool as a beneficial touch-point due to generating traffic, engagement and sales; thus, pushing the consumer further down the customer journey (Bill, 2009; Klapdor et al, 2014; Srinivasan, 2016; Stokes, 2013). The existing research about SEA
and consumer behavior was also listed. This included SEA in the information research phase, campaigns optimized for clicks vs. conversions, informative vs. persuasive ads, long- and short-tail keywords and finally SEA in the post-purchase phase (Srinivasan et al, 2016; Klapdor et al, 2014; Yang et al, 2015; Jerath & Park, 2014; Stephen, 2016; Court et al, 2009).

In the practical overview secondary research data were shown in connection to the topic. First the basic environment of digital marketing and SEA was established. In 2017, 78 percent of Hungarians used the Internet (European Commission, 2017). This enabled the changes mentioned in the Theoretical overview. Furthermore, 6 years ago already 175.9 billion queries were made by users in search engines (Sullivan, 2013). This figure might have been reached, because of the information-thirst of the new consumer (Töröcsik, 2006). In Hungary the leader search engine is Google with a market penetration of 97.36 percent in 2017 (Statcounter, 2018). This formal information channel (Boncheck & France, 2014) might be utilized as much, due to its ability to cater to the needs of the new consumer: it provides information in real time (Diaz et al, 2017), portraying only the relevant pieces of information. Moreover, due to Google’s long presence in the market, consumers might trust it more despite of their constant state of losing trust (Töröcsik, 2006).

Having seen, that there are many factors, which make it possible for the customer journey to be impacted, research in the domain was cited. Google Consumer Barometer 2014/15 found, that 67 percent of Hungarians utilized online tools to get more information about the product/service under consideration (Google, 2015a) with 47 percent of consumers using search engines to help them reach a decision about purchase (Google, 2015e). This might be the case, because of the shift to a globally active consumer in the purchase process, who must do research in hopes of finding ‘the one’ (Töröcsik, 2006). Online information outlets might meet the criteria-set of the new consumer, because of the ease these channels provide for consumers to look for real-time information. However, caution should be taken when generalizing this trend, as it might vary between generations (stated in the primary research) and between satisficers and maximizers (Karimi et al, 2015)

Finally, marketing tools catering to these consumer trends were examined using secondary data: Hungary’s marketing industry invested 79.3 billion HUF into digital marketing solutions. The reason for this large investment might be, because digital marketing offers a precise, yet relatively low-cost and speedy alternative to reaching
consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Search engine marketing gained significance possibly within this field, because marketers realized the findings of the secondary data, namely how consumers are using this touchpoint increasingly. 38.97 percent of this investment was allocated to search engine marketing (IAB Hungary & PWC, 2018). Further reason for this choice could be the realization of the benefits of this solution collected both in the primary research in Chapter 3.6 and in the Theoretical overview in Chapter 1.4.

As a primary research tool in-depth interviews with experts were chosen with a non-probability sampling, due to the nature of the research questions. Four digital marketing experts were chosen as interviewees from varying backgrounds.

Firstly, the findings to the first research question are detailed. Two experts said, that the wide availability of the Internet accelerated the lives of the consumers. Furthermore, all interviewees agreed, that due to the larger quantity of information available, there are more opportunities for consumers to be well-informed. To support this claim, they pointed out the growing trend of searching for product information online. Regarding the EBM model, the specialists agreed, that it is a logical system, while emphasizing the growing importance of after-purchase behavior. A cyclical model was further suggested in line with academia.

Regarding the second research question the answer of the interviewees confirmed, that SEA can impact the customer journey. The need recognition phase was deemed either circuitous for paid search to support by nearly all experts. This might be, because realizing an imbalance inside the consumer is an inner shift, that first has to be realized. Search engine advertising, however, is a process, that is initiated by the consumer, thus imbalance has to be realized beforehand. When targeting consumers in the information phase SEA was suggested by the majority. The reason might be how consumers regard this tool as a beneficial information source (Srinivasan et al, 2016). Richárd argued for utilizing search engine optimization instead. His reason might have been, that SEO has a longer lasting, spillover effect, while SEA does not. When guiding the alternative evaluation of consumers all interviewees agreed, that search engine advertising is beneficial. This might be, because paid search ads can display information regarding the four alternative evaluation criteria in Chapter 1.1.4. In the purchase phase SEA was deemed to be suitable by two experts. This finding might be the result of the nature of the channel. While SEA provides significant amount of information to the consumers, that might influence the purchase decision as shown in Chapter 1.1.5 and
1.2.5. However, search engine is not suitable for payment, which might be why the other experts did not share this view. Regarding the after-purchase evaluation weaker suitability was found. Experts reported, that while certain aspects of it should be in scope, utilizing SEA here has limitations. This limited support might be, because consumers turn to informal channels in this phase, turning to peers both online and offline (Boncheck & France, 2014).

The customizability to the specific phase was also in the scope of this thesis. The following answers were collected in this topic to the third research question:

*Table 3: The connection of the specific settings of SEA to the phases of the EBM model (own editing based on the findings of the in-depth interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need recognition*</th>
<th>Information search*</th>
<th>Alternative evaluation*</th>
<th>Purchase*</th>
<th>After-purchase*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-tail</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-tail</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USPs</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price-comm.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landing page</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarketing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile users</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop users</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Color-scheme is based on the level of impact of SEA on the phases highlighted in the second research question*

| Table 4: Recommendations of the experts regarding the specific setting of SEA campaigns (own editing based on the findings of the in-depth interviews) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Keywords**                  | **Ad-copies**            | **Remark., lists**       | **Landing page**          | **Devices**                 |
| - long-tail: target lower phases of the customer journey | - call-to-actions in ad-texts | - ad-copies written based on members retargeted | - different landing pages to different phases | - mobile users are usually in information search or alternative evaluation, while purchase usually made on desktop |
| - short-tail: more reach, higher phases of the customer journey | - all phases segmented by utilizing different USPs | - members in remark. lists lower in the customer journey | | - do not limit targeting to a specific device |
4.2 Managerial implications and limitations of the thesis

Several points were found in the research, which might provide benefits to digital marketing managers. Firstly, the marketing solution of search engine advertising might be of assistance, when targeting different parts of the customer journey. The most beneficial way to use SEA in this regard is probably to advertise to users in the information search and alternative evaluation phase as these were the ones mostly highlighted by the interviewed performance marketing professionals.

Best-practices were listed regarding the customizability of SEA campaigns to phases targeted. Long-tail keywords might help target the lower-phases of the EBM model, while their short-tail counter parts might be of use with the upper stages. The set-up of remarketing lists might further segment consumer based on phases as members might be lower in the customer journey. Regarding ad-copies, call-to-action texts can be generally beneficial in generating more clicks. Formulating ad-texts with phase and remarketing list specific content (e.g. in utilizing USPs) could also prove to be favorable. Price-communication here might also help, when marketers want to reach consumers in the information search or alternative evaluation stages. In the topic of landing pages difference made between the phase might be further useful.

However, statistically the research is limited. Thus, the implications should be taken with caution. Several aspects have been considered, that can be sources of error.

Firstly, the sample size and sampling method is examined. The thesis only considered the experience of four digital marketing experts; thus, we cannot generalize the findings and implications. Furthermore, the environment and business line of the marketers were also limited as companies of not all sizes and industries were considered. This means, that because of the smaller sample size, the conclusions not only might not be relevant to businesses of the interviewees (agencies, multinationals), but also might prove unbeneifical to other business types (e.g. to SMEs or non-profit organizations).

A further limitation is due to the geographical positioning of the research. The results might have shown a different picture have the interviewees asked been active in different parts of the world.

All in all, a geographical, business-size and industry-wide encompassing research is suggested to scholars of the topic, that uses a larger sample-size and a probability sampling method.
References:


Google. (n.d.). Search result page for the phrase “excel online training” Retrieved 23 September, 2018, from https://www.google.hu/search?q=excel+training+online&oq=excel+&aq=chrome.3.69i57j69i60l2j35i39j69i60j35i39.4746j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8


Appendix

1. In-depth interview questions:

I. Work experience of the interviewee
   - What is your current position?
   - How long have you been working inside the digital marketing industry?

II. The effect of the Internet usage on the consumer
   - Within your work what was your experience: how did the development of the Internet effect the consumer’s purchase behavior?
   - What disadvantages could companies be facing due to the spread of the Internet?
   - Can we talk about a more knowledgeable consumer?
   - Where does the consumer look for information about a product of a service?

III. The EBM model
   - Do you utilize holistic marketing models when creating the marketing strategies?
   - Why are such models useful?
   - Is the EBM model a good approach to understanding the consumer behavior of today?
   - How did the Internet and its affect alter this model?
   - What channels are the most important at the specific phases?

IV. Digital marketing trends in Hungary
   - How popular are the different digital marketing solutions in Hungary?
   - Most commonly, why do advertisers use these solutions?

V. Search engine advertising
   - How often do companies utilize search engine advertising in Hungary?
• Which search engine would you advise for marketing professionals to advertise in?
• What advantages and disadvantages do you see of SEA?
• Most often why do companies utilize SEA?
• How do advertisers differentiate the search engine advertising campaigns based on their objectives?
• What common mistakes do unprofessional and inexperienced advertisers make when creating and running an SEA campaign?
• Why do you like to use search engine advertising?

VI. Search engine advertising and the EBM model
• When you set up the SEA campaigns do you consider the consumer’s phase within the EBM model?
• Can SEA campaigns support the need recognition phase of the EBM model? If so how?
• Can SEA campaigns support the information phase of the EBM model? If so how?
• Can SEA campaigns support the alternative comparison phase of the EBM model? If so how?
• Can SEA campaigns support the purchase phase of the EBM model? If so how?
• Can SEA campaigns support the post-purchase phase of the EBM model? If so how?
• Do the ad copies vary based on the consumer behavior phase targeted?
• When would you recommend using price communication inside the text of the ads?
• Would you highlight and if so which USP would you highlight at each phase of the customer journey?
• Would you use a different landing page when target consumers at different levels of the model? If so, what would be a suitable landing page for each?
• What factors do you consider when choosing the keyword list?
Can specific types of keywords be assigned to campaigns focusing on one phase?

What do you think of short-tail and long-tail keywords? Can they differentiate users based on their phase within the customer journey?

Do the devices utilized indicate what phase the consumer is in?

How can remarketing lists help consumers move through the various phases of the consumer behavior?

2. Technical definitions of SEA:

I. **Remarketing list**: An assortment of those Internet users, who have visited a certain webpage or application. These browsers are collected with the help of snippets placed to the code of the website or application. (Google, 2018a)

II. **Conversion**: An action conducted by a user clicking on the business’s ad, that was previously defined by the business to be the goal of the advertisement, because of its peculiar importance to the business. (e.g. purchase on the website or calls made by consumers) (Google, 2018e)

III. **Negative keyword**: A special set of keywords hinder your paid search advertisements from appearing for certain keywords in the search results page. (Google, 2018b)

IV. **Ad extension**: Extra components added to your paid search advertisement, that exhibits more information about your business, e.g. “an address, phone number, store rating, or more webpage links”. (Google, 2018c)

V. **Device bid adjustment**: To modify your bids when your advertisement is shown on a certain device (mobile, tablet or computer) device bid adjustments can be utilized. These can be given in a percentage format, thus if the marketer sets the device bid adjustment to +20% for mobile, the system will bid twenty percent more, than the predetermined campaign bid if a search is conducted on a mobile for a keyword in that campaign. (Google, 2018d)
3. Search Result Page of a selected query:

Figure 4: Search Result Page of a selected query (own editing based on Google, n.d.)

Paid Search Advertisements

Organic result

4. The outlook of a search ad taken from a selected search result page with the important ad-parts named:

Figure 5: The outlook of a search ad taken from a selected search result page with the important ad-parts named (own editing based on Google, n.d.)

- Headlines of the search ad (max. 30 characters)
- Description line / text line of the search ad (max. 90 characters)
- Ad extensions of the search ad