Search Marketing (SM): A Qualitative Appraisal of Its Effectiveness as a Digital Marketing and Advertising Tool

by

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Abstract

This qualitative work was undertaken to establish the effectiveness of Search Marketing (SM) as a digital marketing and advertising tool. The study established the fact that virtually all information about goods and services are now sought from the internet using search engines like Google. For this reason, search marketing which involves carrying out marketing and advertising activities using the internet should be an integral part of all- size businesses' efforts at meaningfully engaging with and sharing meanings with their target audiences as the internet never sleeps and coupled with the fact that mobile gadgets like phones and tablets can now be used to access the internet while on the go. The study also established the fact that search marketing tools include Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Though an advertiser may choose to use any of the tools to attain her SM goals and objectives, it is the recommendation of the study that for the best results at awareness creation, positive behavioral change and sustenance, an advertiser should combine the two tools- ways of effectively doing so are contained in the study.

Keywords: Search Marketing (SM), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

1.0 Introduction

From time immemorial, the practice of creating awareness in order to instigate trial purchase, brand adoption and retention have been an integral aspect of marketing practice. Just as consumer tastes and preferences experience changes over time, requiring a seller to continuously innovate in order to remain competitive, channels for engaging with target audiences have also been in a state of continual flux. Before now, that is, before the advent of the internet; traditional channels of engaging with end users like the radio, outdoor, television, newspaper and personal selling featured prominently in sharing ideas with them. With the advent of the internet however, communications and methods of commerce as noted by Dennis (2022) have been revolutionized as it now supports the human communication of over 4.5 billion worldwide via social media, electronic mail (e-mail) as well as audio and video transmissions. Dennis, is observed not to be alone on how significantly the advent of the internet has impacted on ways and means of communication and commerce. For example, Marketing Schools (2020) submitted that about 1.4 million searches using *search engines* like Google, Bing, Yahoo and America-On-Line (AOL) and Baidu are currently carried out in the internet every minute and with up to 80% of such searches focusing on obtaining information about good and services- Computer hope (2021) defined a *search engine* as a web-based tool that enables users to locate information on the World Wide Web (www).

To key into the massive opportunities the scenario painted above offered organizations to share meanings with their various publics, *search marketing* using *search engines* became an essential communication tool in the digital advertising world and which WebFX (n.d.) submitted that advertisers will ignore at their own peril for the reason that it combines marketing with advertising thus offering companies a 360-degree approach to promoting their products online through *search engine marketing* (SEM) and/or *search engine optimization* (SEO). Additionally and equally important, Clay (2021), is observed to have been credited with the opinion that search marketing is not beneficial to only advertisers but also to search engine operators as it is how they generate most of their income.

This study which is purely an opinion paper has therefore been undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

1. Establish what search marketing (SM) as a digital marketing and advertising tool entails.
2. Determine and explain its components, that is Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
3. Establish conditions under which the components used as a stand-alone result in gaining the best mileage in terms of attaining set marketing communication goals and objectives
4. Make appropriate recommendations on how best to use SM in attaining set marketing and advertising goals and objectives.

To achieve the research objectives, secondary/desk research methodology was used in collating and summarizing data from the web, online platforms, and text books as well as previously published papers on the subject matter.

2.0. The Concepts of Search Marketing(SM), Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

2.1 Search Marketing (SM)

Search marketing (SM)is an advertising tactic used to gain more online presence and traffic for a seller's product offerings using paid and unpaid strategies on search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo (WordStream, n.d.). In the opinion of Wikipedia, search marketing connotes an internet marketing activity that involves the promotion of an organization's website in the search engine result pages (SERPs) of search engines through primarily paid advertising. In what passes for a better understanding of the above definitions, Search Engine Land (n.d.) submits that search marketing encompasses the following:

- Search Engine Marketing (SEM)- which is the paid strategy that involves buying traffic through paid search listings

- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - which involves attracting traffic through search listings that are free**.**

Going by popular opinion as expressed by Wikipedia, Search Engine Land and Sherman (2021), and which is the position of this paper, SEM and SEO constitute the basic approaches to SM. A minority opinion as expressed by Clay however exists and which is worthy of mention and which is that "the scope of what we do as search marketers has grown and so should our definition….SM in my view now has to include more than just SEM and SEO in major search engines; it also involves video, server issues, site performance, voice, You Tube, Amazon etc."

Of note is that the term search marketing (SM) as pointed out by Clay and Wikipedia was first used by Danny Sullivan in 2001. The use of the medium in communications and commerce is however observed not have gained momentum until about the year 2006 (SocialSEO, 2021) – a

development that has continued to gain grounds as it is being fueled by advances in mobile phone technology which now makes it possible for people to conveniently access the internet anytime, anywhere as opposed to the period when it can only be done with a desktop. Social SEO it should also be noted asserts that as at 2020, that is, since SM became an important digital advertising tool in 2006, advertisers in the US spent an estimated 59.22 billion dollars on paid search (Wikipedia credited the sum to be 24.6 billion dollars in 2007 implying that ad spend on search marketing increased by 140.73% within a period of 13 years). In terms of market share, Google as at 2016 had 89.3% share of the market with 4.36%, 3.3% and 0.68% market shares belonging to Bing, Yahoo and the Chinese search engine Baidu respectively (Wikipedia).
Search Marketing; it should be pointed out is not the same thing as Social Media Marketing or Social Media Advertising. Social media marketing in the opinion of Wikipedia is a type of marketing that involves exploiting the social media, like Facebook to influence consumers positively about a company and its product offerings- an opinion shared by Sherman (2021), but which espouses that social media advertising typically display ads based upon the data the social media company collected about the individual; allowing people to be targeted based on specific interests, locations, buying behaviours, and more, while search marketing especially SEM relies on keyword phrases to target people when they are performing searches on search engines such as Google. In this opinion paper, SEM and SEO as search marketing strategies are the focus.

2.2 Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

By definition, search engine marketing (SEM) is the practice of marketing a business using paid adverts that appear on SERPs….advertisers bid on keywords that users of services such as Google and Bing might enter when looking for certain products or services which gives the advertiser the opportunity for her ads to appear alongside results for those search queries (WordStream, 2020). Continuing, WordStream stated these ads often known by the term "pay-per-click" (PPC) ads come in a variety of formats such as small text-based-ads or product – listing ads or shopping ads which are more visual and allow consumers to view important information about a product such as price and reviews at a glance. Additionally, WordStream espoused that the greatest strength of SEM is that it offers advertisers the opportunity to put their adverts in front of motivated customers who are ready to buy at the precise moment they are ready to make a purchase and which no other advertising medium can accomplish; thus conferring on SEM the potential of being an amazingly powerful way to grow a business. Corroborating the views of WordStream on SEM, Forsey (2019) saw SEM front the point of view of using paid advertising to ensure that an advertiser's goods or services are visible in SERPs…. when an end- user types in a certain keyword such as 'shoes' and 'sports' as per somebody wanting to buy sports shoes, SEM enables your advert to appear as a result of the search query.

While defining it as "an advertising strategy that generates ads in search engines such as Google to position brands among top results, Cyberclick Academy (2021) also stated that the term could be referred to as *web positioning strategy* or *search engine advertising.* In like manner, Sherman added that SEM works by leveraging the power of search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo through paid ads to reach potential customers at the perfect time and place…. it is commonly used to refer to pay-per-click (PPC) advertising because of the paid search methods used. In what could pass for a summary while taking a look at SEM, Clay stated thus, "when you give a search engine such as Google money for your products ads to appear on their search engine result page, you are doing SEM".

2.2.1 Campaign Strategy Essentials of SEM

A *SEM campaign* in the opinion of Cyberclick is an advertising strategy that generates ads in search engines such as Google with a view to positioning brands among the top results. In the opinion of the academy, strategy and planning are fundamental to guaranteeing the results of such campaigns. For a successful SEM campaign, PPCexpo (2020) recommended that the following logical steps be followed:

- The advertiser will select / buy keywords to target with its ads. For example, if you are into the production of carbonated soft drinks, when a consumer looking for a "zero sugar soft drink" types this on a search engine like Google, an advert on your brand should appear on the search engine result page. *Keyword research for the terms end users commonly apply when searching for a brand is therefore the most essential step in SEM Campaign formulation.*
- State the maximum cost-per-click (CPC) that you are willing to pay for a single user/customer click on your ad.
- Where you have selected/paid for the right keywords and a user of a search engine clicks on your ad, the search engine operator charges you, the advertiser.

On *SEM strategy,* Forsey is of the opinion that in order to create a good strategy, an advertiser must understand how paid advert platforms work and effectively manage variables that affect performance such as a *budget, keywords and copy*. A PPC strategy she opines starts with choosing the right keywords to bid on; implying that keyword research must be undertaken to determine the keywords to bid on, or in other words, what queries you want your adverts to show up for. Forsey, while defining a keyword *as the likely questions someone searching for your product class on a search engine such as Google is likely to use,* also strongly recommended that advertisers should start by brainstorming brand terms that describe their product and even terms that describe that of their competitors. On Forsey,s view that keywords are the foundation of SEM and SEM campaigns strategies on the grounds that it is keywords-as part of search queries- that users of search engines employ to find what they are looking for; WordSmith agrees with it but also adds that advertisers must identify keywords that are relevant to their business or service and which prospective customers are likely to use when searching for products in their product class when formulating a SEM campaign strategy. *Using building materials as an example, WordSmith offered the following keywords: industrial building materials, used building materials, hardware building materials, building materials construction and recycled building materials etc.*

Widmer (2022) also wrote extensively on SEM strategy. In his opinion, a SEM strategy should contain the following basics:

- Choose your advert type and goals for each key word- personalize ads by device and audience and set clear goals
- Have a strong ad copy writing
- Pick the most relevant keyword themes- be consistent with your themes
- Decide on a budget
- Understand the Google Ad auction

Widmer added that search engines especially Google uses the ad auction system to determine which ads should be displayed every time a site with Google ads is visited making it imperative that the following factors that determine which ads get shown on a page be taken seriously in campaign strategy formulation: *your bid, the quality of your ads and the expected impact of yourad extensions and other ad formats.*

2.3: Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of increasing your businesses' visibility and rankings in organic search results…. higher rankings can result in more traffic, increased conversions and good return-on-investment (Rende, 2021). Sharing virtually a similar view, Techopedia (2018) referred to SEO as "methods used to obtain a high placement (or ranking) on a search engine result page in unpaid algorithm-driven results on a given search engine… sites using organic SEO in the truest sense will be much like organisms, meaning that they will grow, expand and adapt over time in response to readers' desires". In the opinion of Sherman, SEO is about positioning your website so that Google determines that you are the best website to answer a query. Continuing, he said to achieve such visibility; an advertiser needs to take cognizance of the following factors taken into consideration by Google in website rating:

- How fast your website is
- Whether people click when they see you in search results
- How in-depth the answer to the query appears
- How people interact with your website.
- The number of high quality back links from other web sites

Expressing virtually the same view with Sherman on the determinant factors that attract higher rankings from search engines, Techopedia submits that an advertiser must ensure the following:

- Your web page is optimized with relevant content.
- Links pointing to the content needed to be spread.
- The incorporation of Meta tags and other tag types.

On the subject matter, Lahey (2020) stated that SEO is all about creating the best result on the web for a search query and those who are able to do that can drive significant volumes of traffic to their site. Furthermore, he stated that "how high the rankings and how often you appear is merit-based; the search engines will show the results they consider to be the best fit for their users as SEO is all about ranking on the organic (or natural) results on search engine results page".

For Cyber click Academy, SEO works through the content you create and the way you present it. Based on this, search engines use an algorithm that tells it which sites can best respond to a given query with the algorithm based mainly on relevance (web content) and authority (links from other pages)…. these set of techniques and tools used to position organically in listings is known as SEO. Echoing the views of Cyber click, Rende insists that since Google constantly changes its algorithm, the following standard techniques are necessary for a successful SEO campaign:

- Incorporating selective keywords naturally into title tags, heading tags, Meta descriptions, etc.
- Blog posts and page copy that are of high quality and which incorporates business-relevant keywords.
- Carefully formatted page addresses
- Optimized page load speed.

Widmer, in what could be considered a synopsis of the above stated views, identified the following as constituting the major activities in SEO:

- ✓ On-page SEO (optimizing your content)
- ✓ Link building (getting back links from other web sites)
- ✓ Technical SEO (optimizing your website's code and structure)

In SEO, businesses do not pay Google for visiting and clicking on an advertiser's site, they earn a free spot in search engine results by having the most relevant content for a given keyword search (WordStream).

2.4: Choosing Between SEM AND SEO as Search Marketing Strategy

In choosing a digital marketing strategy, many people who have written on the subject matter consider it a simple question that does not have a simple answer as a lot of factors came into play.

Approaching the subject matter, Lahey opined that such a decision will be influenced by some of these factors:

- Your budget and resources.
- Your industry.
- Your current performance.

In seeming concurrence with Lahey, Mitchell (2021) identified the following factors as affecting preference between SEM and SEO:

- Your industry
- Your digital marketing goals
- Your budget
- How much time you have to develop your SEM and SEO efforts.

Though Mitchell also expressed the view that in marketing, everything 'depends'; it was also her thinking that for the best digital marketing plan, a combination of both SEO and SEM is advised.

Beal (2005) agrees with Mitchell on combining SEO and SEM to get the best SM results. In his opinion, SEO and SEM are not competing services – SEM is a broader term than SEO. Where SEO aims to provide better organic search results, SEM helps a business successfully target users of search engines via advertising (paid) links in SERPs which in addition to organic search sends targeted traffic to your website… Today, if you want to conduct business on the internet, you need both SEM and SEO, she concluded. PPCexpo also support the idea that both SEO and SEM should be part of an organization's digital marketing strategy as both have their merits… SEO helps establish your online reputation in the long-term, so you attract traffic continuously with evergreen information that connect with people at the top-of-the-funnel while SEM enables you to get quick results cost effectively by driving conversions at the bottom-of-the-funnel. Miller (2017) also supports the view that combining SEM and SEO is the best approach in digital marketing but insist that a fundamental and necessary initial step is an understanding of the behavioural tendencies of your prospective customers.

Techopedia focused on the advantages SEO has over SEM and they include:

- ✓ Generates more clicks as organically optimized sites offer relevant content related to the keywords searched
- ✓ Has more content relevancy, thus the search engine results will last longer.
- ✓ Builds greater trust among the users, and
- ✓ Very cost – effective when compared with paid listings.

Against the backdrop of these advantages, Techopedia mentioned that SEO has over SEM, Miller also pointed out that SEM has its own peculiarities as it offers a business the following opportunities:

- ✓ Improved ads
- ✓ Visual product ads

- ✓ Enhanced targeting by location, geography, mobile device etc.
- ✓ Speedy creation and placement of adverts
- ✓ Robust market intelligence gathering.

Aligning with the views of Miller on the peculiarities of SEM, Genete (2018) credited it with having the following benefits:

- Helps in lead generation.
- It is cost effective
- Good for awareness creation and brand building.
- It is intent – based
- Its impact is measurable.

On comparing SEM with SEO, Lahey provided in compressed form a good summary on the pros and cons of both (table 1 below refers).

Table 1

SEO vs. PPC (SEM): The Pros and Cons of each channel

SEO		**PPC (SEM)**	
The Pros	**The Cons**	**The Pros**	**The Cons**
Clicks are free	It takes time to see results as your site increases in authority	You can see almost instant results	Every click on your ads will cost you money
Organic results show 24/7	You need a specialist team of technical SEOs, content creators, and link builders	Yours ads can appear above all organic listings	You'll need a higher initial investment to get started
You can cost-effectively target keywords across the sales funnel	You don't control Google's algorithms and changes roll out regularly	You can enhance your ads with extensions	You're paying both for click costs and campaign management
SEO is a more cost-effective strategy in the long run	There is no guarantee your strategy will outrank your competitors	You'll need a smaller team than for SEO	When you turn off your ads, you lose your visibility
Organic results attract 10x the clicks that ads do		You can specifically target ads to your key audience	

Source: https://www.semnish.com/blog/seo-vs-ppc/

Continuing, Lahey stated that the reality is that for most businesses, it is almost impossible to choose between SEM and SEO, for the simple reason that the two integrate really well together to drive digital marketing success. Even against the backdrop of this view, Lahey still identified some common scenarios where a single channel could be considered most appropriate and which are:

- If you want to drive results quickly whatever the cost, choose SEM/PPC
- If you are already driving sales from other sources and want to maximize your returns long term, consider SEO

- If you are looking to test a new product or offer, use SEM. It has the capacity to quickly drive traffic to your site.
- If you want to accelerate the awareness around your business with the top-of-the funnel traffic, choose SEO to focus on solid content strategy

The online encyclopedia-Wikipedia- stated that the aim of SEM and SEO is maximizing visibility in search and thus their actions to achieve it should be centrally coordinated with the same team working on both- a stand adopted by this paper. Where this is done Miller believes that the result of the combination will have the capacity to drive results that are greater than their components and will specifically benefit an advertiser in the following ways:

- Keyword and conversion data from SEM can be fed into SEO
- The total volume of traffic can be increased by targeting clicks in paid and organic search (SEO) for high-performing keywords,
- High-cost keywords, high-volume or low-converting but important keywords can be moved from SEM to organic search
- Remarketing allows the advertiser to stay in front of visitors after an initial touch via an organic search on the advertiser's site.
- Test your keyword strategy in SEM before committing to long-term SEO strategies.
- Target users at all stages of the customer journey from research to comparison to purchase with commercial keywords.
- Increase confidence and awareness by having both strong organic and paid visibility.

In comparison, PPCexpo (2020) enunciated the following as the benefits of SM.

- It increases brand awareness and invariably the brand equity of the advertiser's goods and services.
- It increases brand visibility and website traffic
- You can advertise to an audience that is already interested in you.
- You can increase targeted feeds
- You can target your adverts to users by languages and/or locations
- It gives the advertiser a competitive advantage
- In comparison with other advertising media, it generates a higher return on investment (ROI) compared to other advertising media.

2.5: Creating A Winning Search Marketing (SM) Strategy

Extensive literature exists on the subject matter. For this paper however, the views of WebFX(n.d.) on the subject matter sufficed. The digital services company recommends that for a competitive and revenue-generating search marketing strategy, advertisers should adopt the following steps:

1. **Outline how your SEM and SEO strategies will work together**- In their opinion, not doing this may affect the objectives and goals of your SM strategy. Echoing Miller's view on how SEM and SEO can work together WebFX exemplified it thus:
   - Targeting the same keywords to maximize your presence in search results
   - Using SEO data to build SEM remarketing campaigns
   - Testing the value of keywords for SEO and SEM Campaign etc.
2. **Research valuable SEO and SEM keywords-** WebFX considers this a critical step in creating an effective SM strategy as SEO and SEM both use keywords. An advertiser wishing to get the most value and return from her search marketing strategy needs therefore to find the best keywords for its business, products and target audience. WebFX recommends that advertisers

use keyword tools like "Answer the Public" and "KeywordFx" to facilitate the search for the appropriate keywords.

3. **Launch your SEO and SEM Campaigns-** WebFX is of the opinion that this step in building a search marketing strategy can (and will) take time. They recommended that to facilitate a speedy and result-oriented launch, different tasks such as writing web site content, advertising copy and developing technical SEO to-dos should be assigned to different teams but working synergistically with each other and using the following checklists for both the SEM and SEO ad copies.

For SEM, the checklist should include:

- A researched and appropriate monthly ad spend
- Researched keywords categorized into ad groups
- Determination of additional targeting option
- Write ad copy
- Design and launch ad landing pages.
- Institute a routine reporting schedule for measuring campaign performance.

For SEO, the checklist should include:

- Complete a SEO audit
- Set up Google analytics and a Google search console for website
- Research keywords for existing website pages
- Integrate keywords into existing pages, content, title tags, and meta descriptions
- All site images to be compressed
- Optimize all site images
- Build a content calendar for new content
- Claim and optimize "Google my business profile"
- Institute a routine reporting schedule for monitoring SEO

4. **SM strategies performance monitoring-** WebFX observed that as is common with plans and indeed all human endeavours mis-steps can occur. For this reason, they recommended the following tools for tracking the performance of a SM strategy.

- Google Analytics
- Google Search Console
- Bing webmaster tools
- Advertising platforms, like Google Ads or Microsoft Advertising

For best results, they recommend a monthly assessment or even weekly for a new SEM campaign.

5. **Implement improvements to your Search Marketing Strategy**- Monitoring your campaign will enable you determine whether goals and objectives are being met. Where there are deviations, improvements should be made. WebFX considers such improvement as being necessary to push the advertiser past competitors.

2.5.1. **Characteristics of a Good SM Plan**

With regards to the features of a good SM plan, varieties of opinions exist on the subject matter. The opinions of Yesbeck (2019) on the subject matter can however be considered to have

appropriately captured these other views. Yesbeck recommends that a good SM plan contain below mentioned features:

i. Location targeting which sets ads to only show to people in a certain geographic area.
ii. Ad scheduling targeting which sets ads to only show at certain times of the day or on specific days of the week.
iii. Demographic targeting which sets ads to only show to people who fit certain demographic categories based on age and gender.
iv. Device targeting which sets ads to only show to users of specific devices such as mobile phones, desktops or tablets

(Clay used the following words to express the characteristics: Retargeting, geo-targeting, demographic targeting and mobile targeting as well as day-parting etc.).

Against the backdrop of the above mentioned logical steps to adopt in SM strategy formulation as well as essential ingredients, PPCexpo still identified some common mistakes to avoid in SM strategy plan formulation. The mistakes to avoid as recommended by them include:

- Avoid irrelevant ads.
- Ad copies that are non-compelling.
- Bidding on the wrong keywords
- Forgetting to optimize for mobile devices
- Forgetting about user intent
- Failing to measure effectively
- Ignoring your competitors
- Non –practice of remarketing/retargeting
- Not calling your customers to action

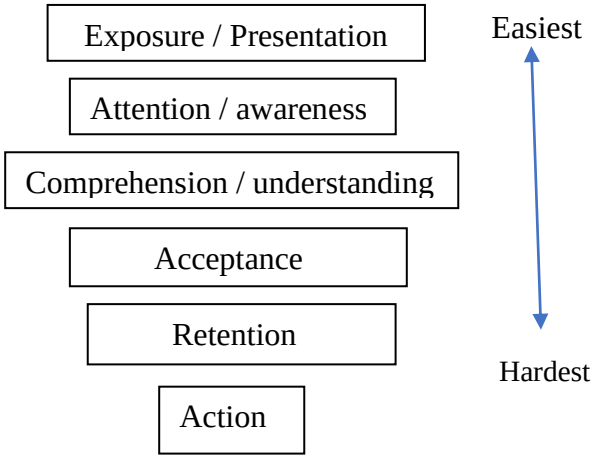
By avoiding these mistakes and performing the necessary keyword research, the creation of compelling ads, improving on quality score as well as the optimization of existing campaigns, Yesbeck believes that a SM strategy plan is bound to succeed.

3.0 Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this opinion paper is McGuire's theory of Persuasion. The model is a matrix of *inputs and corresponding outputs*. Applied to persuasion, the inputs are the different aspects of the persuasion / communication attempt; while outputs are the stages of persuasion; each of which can be measured as a measure of how persuasive the communication has been (Dahl, 2012, Teh-Runningman, 2011). Tey-Runnigman credits McGuire to have broken the persuasion process into 6(six) sequential steps (see illustration on figure 1, below).

Figure 1:

William McGuire,s Model of Persuasion (6 steps)



Source (https://ivanteh-runningman.blogspot.com/2011/10/william-mcguires-model-of-persuasion.6.html)

Explaining the model, Tey-Runningman stated as follows:

1.At the state of exposure/presentation, audiences are presented with a message through a channel (e.g. media) – this is the easiest step in the process.

2.At attention / awareness stage, audiences see and/hear and recognize the message either through creative exposure or repeated exposure – often 3 times or more.

3.At the comprehension / understanding stage, audiences comprehend the value or point of the message.

4.At the acceptance stage, audiences believe the message

5.At the retention level, audiences remember the message, and identity and/or associate the message with the company/advertiser and its products-company gets branded.

6.At the action stage, audiences change their behavior in the desired direction, that is, purchase.

Dahl, however differed slightly from Teh-Runningman with regards to the structure of McGuire's model – his opinion of the model is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2:
McGuires's Matrix of Inputs and Outputs in the Persuasion Matrix

	Source	Message	Channel	Receiver	Context
Exposure					
Attention					
Interest/Liking					
Comprehension					
Acquisition					
Agreeing					
Memorizing					
Retrieving					
Deciding					
Acting					
Reinforcement					
Consolidation					

Source: dahl.at/wordpress/2012/02/mcguire-communication-persuasion-matrix

Explaining the model: Dahl identified the following five (5) "inputs", each with some explanatory variables.

- Source as explained by the credibility, attraction, trustworthiness, etc. of the sender, that is, the advertiser.
- Message as explained by the type, strength, repetition, etc. of the argument.
- Channel as explained by the type of media and way in which the message is broadcast.
- Receiver as explained by the attitude, beliefs, prior knowledge, etc. of the person receiving the message and
- Context as may be affected by environmental factors, noise, clutter, etc.

The "output" and which represents each stage of the persuasion process as explained by Dahl include:

- Exposure – "Tuning into" the message

- Attention – paying attention to the message
- Interest/Liking – being interested in/liking the message
- Comprehension – understanding the message
- Acquisition – gaining skills to act on the message
- Agreeing (yielding) – agreeing with the message
- Memorizing – storing the message for later use (e.g. when shopping)
- Retrieving – retrieving the message from memory (while shopping)
- Deciding – to act according to the message
- Acting – performing the action(s)
- Reinforcement – receiving appropriate rewards.
- Consolidation – integrating the message into general behavior

Teh-Runningman observes that though the model is quite a useful tool in explaining persuasion, cognizance must be taken of the fact that the persuasiveness of an advert decreases over time. To overcome this challenge, he recommended that advertisers do the following:

- Repeat the advert
- Develop a creative advert that requires audiences to think
- Jog the memory through product placement, event sponsorship, etc.
- Consistency, that is, messages that are consistent. This can be achieved by maintaining consistency in terms of themes, colours, font, music, etc. – consistency aids brand recall

4.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to re-state as follows:

i) Ad spend on SM grew from 24.60 billion dollars in 2007 to 59.22 billion dollars in 2020- an increase of 140.73% and an annual growth rate of 10.83% (SocialSeo). This is indicative of the growing popularity of the digital advertising tool.

ii) About 5.6 billion searches are made daily on the internet using search engines (Widmer, 2022)

iii) About 1.4million searches are carried out world-wide on the internet every minute (Marketing Schools)

iv) About 80% of consumers carry out their product and service searches on line (WebFx)

It is therefore our opinion that the use of Search Marketing (SM) as a marketing communication tool can only continue to assume an upward trajectory as the internet never sleeps; implying that people will continue to use search engines to access product and other information. Supportive to our conclusion is the wide spread availability of hand-held internet- access communication equipment such as handsets and tablets which has significantly reduced the cumbersomeness associated with such searches. Sellers, we assert can only ignore the medium of engaging with their target audiences at their own risk. To have the capacity to fully take advantage of the opportunities offered by SM, sellers however need to take into consideration the recommendations we have made hereto.

5.0 Recommendations

To enhance the capacity of an advertiser to achieve her marketing communication goals and objectives through search marketing, this paper recommend as follows:

- Search marketing has two components - SEM and SEO. For the best results an advertiser needs to work out a system that will enable the two approaches complement and support one another.

- The process of creating an effective search marketing strategy as outlined in this paper should be adhered to.
- The characteristics of a good SM strategy as outlined in this paper should also be taken into consideration by advertisers in SM strategy formulation
- Mistakes to avoid when using SM in marketing and advertising your products and services as outlined in this paper should be taken seriously.

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