The Different Roles of Online Platforms:

A study of how online consumer search behaviour varies over the consumer decision process

Emma Barrebo (21860), Carl Edin (21976)

Stockholm School of Economics, Bachelor's degree essay

14 May 2012

Although online consumer behaviour is a popular topic in modern marketing research, little is known of how consumers practically use different Internet sources in decision-making. The purpose of this paper was to investigate if the consumers' choice of online sources of product information varies over the decision process. A preparatory study of online platforms was conducted in an attempt to map out available sources of product information on the Internet. Subsequently, a quantitative study including four product categories was conducted. The objective was to measure how consumers adapt the use of different online platforms over the decision-making process.

The results of the study show that consumers use different sources of online product information over the decision process. The choice of website visited depends partially on the depth and scope of information available on the site. These and other interesting findings are important contributions to the research of online consumer behaviour. However, since the area is rather unexplored, further research is needed to conclude whether the results can be applied directly to marketing and communication strategies.

Key words: *online consumer search behaviour; online platforms; consumer decision process; involvement; search and experience goods*

Mentor: *Anna Nyberg*

Examiner: *Per Andersson*

Thanks to:

Anna Nyberg	For excellent tutoring
Jonas Colliander	For answering statistical queries
Survey respondents	For taking the time to participate in our study
Friends and family	For all your support during the process
The Internet	For providing an ever-changing source of inspiration and entertainment

Kul citat?

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1. Introduction

When the Internet was born, the world began to change. With it, individuals are allowed to stay connected through more informational linkages than ever before (Breazeale, 2009). This is a development that has led to an explosive growth in communication, not only changing how consumers connect to each other, but also how they access information (Subramani & Rajagopolan, 2003). The Internet provides access to enormous amounts of information about brands and products. However, unlike conventional media, the Internet allows companies to target consumers who can target them back.

By facilitating information exchange among individuals (Van Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 2005), the Internet allows consumers access to product information that generates from other sources than marketers. With minimal cost and little regard for distance or time, individuals who have never met face to face are discussing their opinions and experiences of brands and companies (Breazeale, 2009). Through the Internet, consumers have access to the information they need, when they need it. Whether they want to know about product specifics (e.g. the number of megapixels of a camera) or other consumers' experiences (e.g. how the camera feels in your hand), the Internet provides them with access to personalized information (Senecal & Nantel, 2004).

Facts and recommendations about products can be found on a variety of websites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), generating not only from paid professionals, but also from websites where the general public is free to publish opinions (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). This flow of information about consumers' experiences and opinions can be said to increase market transparency (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). As Sir Francis Bacon once said, knowledge is power. The change in information exchange brought on by the birth of the Internet has provided consumers with more power to make informed decisions that are not only based on marketer-generated information.

1.1. Purpose and research question

As a result of consumers connecting and sharing their experiences, the Internet has changed how companies build reputation (Breazeale, 2009). Great emphasis has been put

on the need to understand online consumer behaviour. Previous research has tried to cover the subject; starting from what motivates individuals to publish content, to how the content created affect purchase intentions and recommendations. For example, previous studies have shown that consumer recommendations are very influential, sometimes more so than product information generating from companies (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Lee & Youn, 2009; Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Senecal & Nantel, 2004).

However, the Internet is an ever-changing phenomenon, and studies of new ways to connect online are published each year. In 2004, Bickart and Schindler recognized the difference between marketer and non-marketer sources of information in their study of what motivates the consumer to use the latter. Lee and Youn (2009) and Cheong and Morrison (2008) distinguished between different types of online platforms when studying how online information influence consumers. However, they chose to examine only a handful of existing online sources and did not consider that consumers' use of product information may vary over the decision process. This approach was adopted by Bronner and de Hoog (2010) who studied the respective roles of marketer versus non-marketer-generated information in consumer decision-making. However, they made no distinctions between different websites.

The objective of this thesis is to fill this gap in knowledge through an empirical study of how consumers vary their search for information over the decision process. We argue that practitioners and academics would benefit from a more practical and detailed perspective of how consumers use online product information. The study thus aims to answer the following questions:

Does consumers' choice of source of online product information vary over the decision-making process? If so, what types of online platforms are used in which steps of the process?

1.2. Expected contribution

The study is expected to contribute to different areas in three ways: 1) by increasing marketers' knowledge of how consumers search and use online product information, 2) by guiding non-profit actors towards the best way of providing consumers with relevant

information, and 3) by adding empirical evidence to theory of online consumer search behaviour.

Marketers would likely benefit from greater knowledge of where consumers search for what type of information, and on what online platforms they spend time during different steps of the decision process. Knowing how to provide consumers with relevant information on the right place at the right time would likely allow them to increase accuracy of communication efforts and make marketing campaigns more efficient. This knowledge would, in a similar manner, have implications for non-profit and government organisations managing websites with the objective to educate consumers and help them make informed decisions. Increased knowledge of consumers' search behaviour should help these actors to provide the public with more relevant information that in turn can have greater effect on their decisions. A study of online consumer search behaviour that gives a more detailed view of how different online platforms are used would hopefully also provide academics with more insights and a base for further research on an evolving subject.

1.3. Delimitations

To accommodate the study to fit within the scope of a bachelor's thesis, delimitations are made. The first is to limit the study to Swedish students. Sweden is chosen for practical reasons, and student sampling because previous studies show that this population possesses traits that are beneficial when studying online consumer behaviour (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Chu & Kim, 2011). Furthermore, to concretize the research while maintaining its relevance for a number of different areas, four types of purchases are studied. The products (i.e. televisions, bicycles, drilling machines and running shoes) were chosen based on theory of purchase involvement and quality classification. Ten different types of online platforms are studied, and were chosen based on their contents and popularity among Swedish consumers.

2. Theory

In the first section of this chapter we briefly discuss earlier findings that are relevant to our continued study. We start by defining what is included in the definitions of marketer respectively non-marketer-generated information. Focus is on theory of why the latter is so influential and frequently used in decision-making. In the second section of this chapter we introduce and define the consumer decision process model upon which the empirical study is based.

2.1. Earlier studies

Much research has been conducted on the subject of online consumer behaviour. The distinction between marketer and non-marketer-generated product information has become a popular subject of study in recent years (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Lee & Youn, 2009; Cheung *et al.*, 2009), with researchers attempting to answer questions like: "why do consumers publish, forward and read online recommendations?" (Chu & Kim, 2011; Bickart & Schindler, 2001), and "how do marketer and non-marketer generated content published influence consumer behaviour?" (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Lee & Youn, 2009; Bickart & Schindler, 2001)

2.1.1. Marketer vs. non-marketer-generated information

Information available on the Internet is in literature defined as either marketer or non-marketer-generated (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005), depending on the source of the published content. Studies have shown that consumers use both forms of information to a similar extent, and as complements (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). Marketer-generated content is generally defined as information originating from professionals paid by the company producing or selling the product. Non-marketer-generated product information, on the other hand, is defined as consumers' opinions and experiences about products and brands shared over the Internet (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). This type of information can be defined as a mix between two popular concepts in modern marketing literature: user generated content (UGC) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

The definition of UGC includes, among others, all texts, photos and videos that are published on the Internet by the general public (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). eWOM, on the other hand, is defined as all statements about products and companies made online by customers (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Consumers that are in some way expressing opinions about a brand are engaging in eWOM, while content created by website users is called UGC. As an illustrative example we consider a customer who consumes a product and publishes her opinions about it online. The review is classified as non-marketer-generated product information, and the act of writing it as both eWOM and creation of UGC. If another consumer reads the product review and forwards it to someone else, the act would be defined as eWOM but not UGC, and if the content published were a music video instead of a product review, it would be UGC but not eWOM.

Today, online non-marketer-generated information is of growing importance in consumer decision-making (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005), and the number of online reviews is increasing enormously (Hu & Liu, 2004).

2.1.2. Motivations behind reading non-marketer-generated information

Several researchers have studied the motivations behind consumer engagement in user-generated content. Previous research indicates that the main motivation behind reading consumer recommendations is saving decision-making time (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003) through depending on information and guidance from peers (Chu & Kim, 2011). Rather than collecting relevant information about all available products, consumers can narrow down the number of considered brands based on customer ratings and other forms of expressed consumer opinions.

The Internet allows individuals to exchange information with people they do not know or with whom they share only weak ties (Chu & Kim, 2011). This increases the possibility of collection of information from someone with product expertise (Lee & Youn, 2009).

Other end-users' recommendations can also provide consumers with information that is not offered by companies. Theory of quality classification of products argues that sometimes the most important product qualities cannot be ascertained before consumption (e.g. a restaurant experience). In this case the only ways to learn

about product characteristics are to consume the product or ask the opinion of someone who has experience with it (Nelson, 1970). However, results from previous research indicate that information that is experience-based is rarely searched for. Instead, information about product qualities that are searchable is usually found on non-marketer rather than on than marketer-generated websites (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010).

Consumers have long used marketer-generated as well as non-marketer-generated information to make informed purchase decisions. Internet sources increases access to product information as well as facilitates exchange of experiences among consumers. As the previous section has discussed, there are several factors motivating consumers to read non-marketer-generated information before making a purchase.

2.1.3. The influence of non-marketer-generated information on consumer behaviour

While studies have shown that regular face-to-face word-of-mouth can influence up to 12 people (Lyons & Henderson, 2005), the influence opinion leaders can have on others via the Internet is practically unlimited. Studies show that customer recommendations are indeed influential on consumer behaviour. Product ratings, for example, have been proven to increase the likelihood of a product being bought (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). This positive effect is apparent even if not all reviews are in favour of the product, in fact, a few negative messages among a majority of positive ones have been shown to improve the influence of information (Doh & Hwang, 2009).

Non-marketer-generated information is very influential (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Bickart & Schindler, 2001), partly because it is perceived as originating from more trustworthy sources than marketer-generated content (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2009; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Research shows that trust plays a crucial part in the exchange of information and determines whether or not a consumer is to attain or provide information (Chu & Kim, 2011). Results from a worldwide Nielsen study show that consumer recommendations are the most credible form of advertising (Nielsen Online, 2009). Studies have shown that this sense of trust in non-marketer-generated product information is attributable to the fact that its authors do not share companies' selling intentions (Lee & Youn, 2009), and thus convey more than just positive information about products. The trust associated with consumer recommendations has

been shown to be similar regardless of whether the information is positive or negative (Morrison & Cheong, 2008).

Several studies have proved that non-marketer-generated product information strongly influences consumer behaviour. A continued study of how consumers use this type of information should thus provide valuable insights on online consumer behaviour.

2.2. The (Edited) Consumer Decision Process model

Several attempts have been made to "map out" consumer decision-making. The approach of describing consumer behaviour as a process has received a lot of critique by researchers claiming that it is unrealistic to claim that consumers' actions follow certain steps. However, the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model is widely accepted as a useful tool among academics and practitioners. The goal of the CDP model is to provide a roadmap of consumers' minds by describing how individuals sort through facts and influences to make decisions that are logical and consistent for them (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). The model is generally used by marketers and managers to help guide product mix, communication and sales strategies. The most well known version of the model is built up of five steps: *need recognition*, *search for information*, *pre-purchase evaluation*, *purchase* and *post-consumption evaluation*. Consumers are thought to pass through these steps in one way or another during the decision-making process.

The model explains how consumers use different sets of choice criteria in the process of narrowing down the available brands from multiple choices to one single product (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). Research indicates that the individuals' choice criteria and use of brand-related information vary over the stages in the decision process (Beach, 1993; Levin & Jasper, 1995). As the problem is reformulated throughout the process and the consumer comes closer and closer to making a purchase, more and more choice criteria are included in the decision-making (Kuusela *et al.*, 1998). Based on the assumption that consumers adapt their search in order to obtain relevant information when making these sub-decisions, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: The consumers' choice of source of online product information varies over the decision-making process.

In the CDP model, search is classified as internal or external depending on whether the consumer retrieves knowledge from memory or outside sources like the Internet. The search for information can occur either passively by the consumer simply becoming more receptive to information in the surroundings, or actively by engaging in search behaviour (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). The focus of the thesis is to study consumers' external and active information search behaviour on the Internet, or more specifically how their intentions to visit different online platforms vary over the CDP. In order for the model to better correspond to the objective of the study, the following section will interpret the model based on consumers' search for online product information.

2.2.1. Need recognition

The first step, need recognition, occurs when an individual senses a difference between the ideal and actual state of affairs (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). Purchases are made when the consumer believes that a product's ability to solve a problem is worth more than the cost of buying it. Research shows that information search does not start until after a need has been recognised (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010), and the need recognition step is thus excluded from the edited model upon which the continued study is based. We will instead focus on the four other steps, where information search will be referred to as step one. This edited model will be called the Edited Consumer Decision Process model (ECDP).

2.2.2. Step one: Information search

In the first step of consumers' search for product information they begin to search for solutions to the perceived problem (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). The objective is to create awareness of alternative ways to satisfy the unmet need. In this step, the consumer might consider all products that meet some basic choice criteria (e.g. considering all smartphones and excluding all other types of mobile phones). Since consumers use fewer choice criteria when making decisions early in the process (Kuusela *et al.*, 1998) it is likely that relatively small amounts of information about the alternatives are needed. Making the same assumption as when formulating H1, the following hypothesis is formulated for step one:

H2: Consumers have higher previsit intentions for online platforms that contain less information about each available product or brand in step one compared to later steps.

2.2.3. Step two: Pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives

In the second step of the ECDP, consumers evaluate the brands and products found in step one in order to limit the number of considered solutions to the perceived problem (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). The considered brands and products are compared based on some standards and specifications. Some attributes are salient and believed to vary little between different types of products (e.g. the short text message-function of a mobile phone), while determinant attributes usually decide the type of product chosen (e.g. megapixels of the built in mobile camera). The objective of the evaluation step is to reduce the awareness set created in step one to a smaller, more manageable evaluation set (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005).

Kuusela (1998) argues that it is presumptuous to assume that there is a fixed process in which consumers first eliminate all undesirable options and then rigorously evaluate the remaining alternatives. It is, according to Kuusela, more logical to assume that consumers narrow down the list of available brands in several turns. The model is adjusted according to this reasoning and the objective of the evaluation step is instead defined as restricting the number of considered brands and products. Research shows that this kind of cut is made with easy-to-use decision rules, using more elaborate choice criteria than when scanning the market (Kuusela *et al.*, 1998). Alternatives that are not eliminated are later evaluated.

The ECDP model's interpretation of the evaluation step differs from the original model's in that it does not have to result in the consumer deciding on what product to purchase. The final evaluation and decision is instead made in the third step of the ECDP, the purchase. Assuming that consumers adapt their search in order to obtain relevant information when making sub-decisions in the consumer decision process, the following hypothesis is formulated based on the assumption that consumers adapt their search in order to obtain relevant information when making sub-decisions in the ECDP:

H3: Consumers have higher previsit intentions for online platforms that contain more information about each available product or brand in step two compared to step one.

2.2.4. Step three: Purchase

The objective of the fourth step in the CDP model is originally defined as making choices about when and where to purchase the chosen product (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). In our edited version of the process however, the focus is on how consumers use product information when deciding on what product to buy. In this step, the considered alternatives are evaluated based on more elaborate evaluative criteria than earlier in the decision process (Kuusela *et al.*, 1998; Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). The following hypothesis is formulated based on the same assumption as for previous hypothesises :

H4: Consumers have higher previsit intentions for online platforms that contain more information about each available product or brand in step three compared to earlier steps.

2.2.5. Step four: Post-consumption evaluation

The fourth and final step of the ECDP occurs after the product has been purchased and consumed. In this stage, the consumer experiences either satisfaction or dissatisfaction depending on whether or not her expectations were matched by perceived performance. Consumers often second-guess their purchase decisions, even if the product functions as planned. This cognitive dissonance is generally a result from having to reject attractive features of the alternatives (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). Consumers may therefore carry out a post-consumption evaluation to determine whether or not they made the right decision.

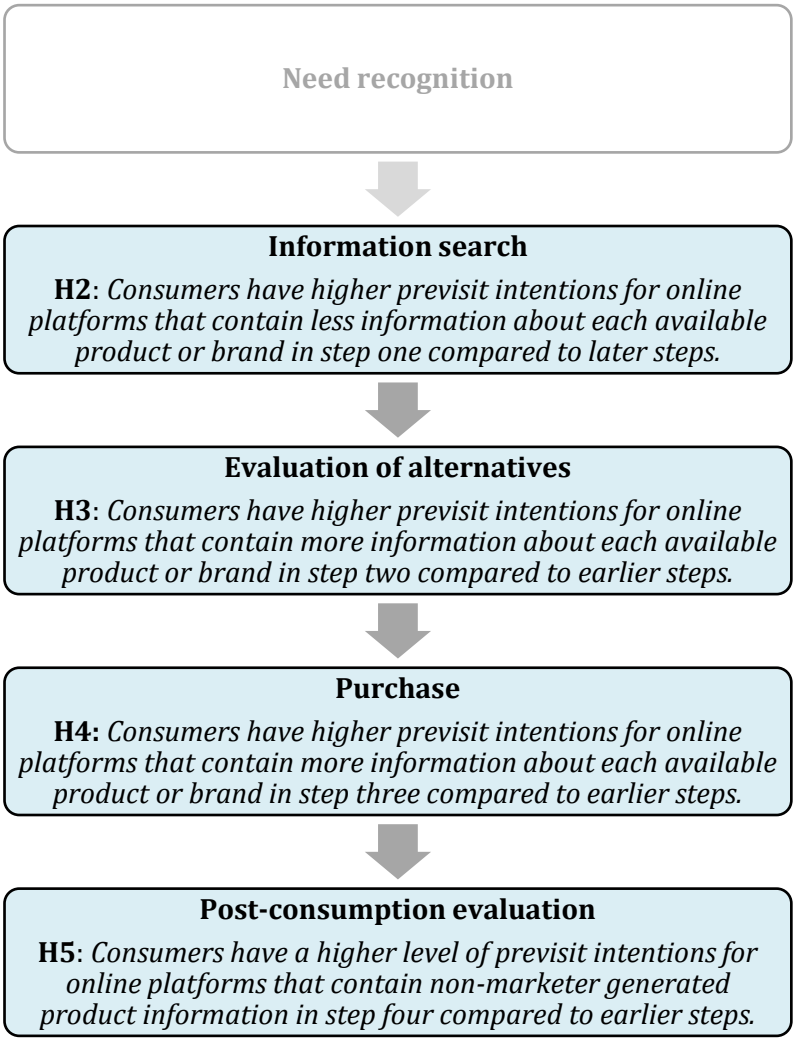
Since post-purchase evaluation is not a part of the actual decision-making, theory of choice criteria is presumably not applicable to this step. Since the decision has already been made, it is likely that less information about product characteristics is sought. Applying logical reasoning, the search for information should not be focused on finding the best alternative, but rather on comparing one's perception of the product to the experiences and opinions of other customers. The objective may for example be to learn about ways of usage or how to deal with potential problems. Based on this logical reasoning, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Consumers have a higher level of previsit intentions for online platforms that contain non-marketer-generated product information in step four compared to earlier steps.

2.2.6. The Edited Consumer Decision Process model

Although only the second stage in the original model explicitly treat consumers' search for information, we argue that consumers use information in all steps of the process as a way to eliminate alternatives. We also argue that consumers do not gather all information needed about products in the first stage, since it would be impractical to research all available options so thoroughly (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Kuusela *et al.*, 1998). The original CDP model was modified according to these assumptions, and the following four hypothesises (H2-H5) were made:

Model 1: The Edited Consumer Decision Process (ECDP) model and hypothesises



3. Method

In this section, the research approaches of the preparatory and main studies are described. The objective of the preparatory study is to gain knowledge of the online platforms that consumers use as sources of product information. The main study aims at answering the research question – if and how consumers' online search behaviour varies over the decision-making process – through a quantitative study based on an Internet survey. The survey is based on the edited version of Blackwell's, Miniard's and Engel's *the Consumer Decision Process model* in order to make a more appropriate test of consumers' search behaviour over different steps in the decision-making process. In order to increase the study's applicability to different areas, the fictional purchases of four different products are used as a base for the surveys.

3.1. Preparatory research of online platforms

Little research has examined the different sources of product information available on the Internet. Bickart and Schindler's (2001) research focused on describing what characterises discussion forums, while Chu and Kim (2011) focused on social networking sites. Lee and Youn (2009) used product review sites, producers' websites and personal blogs in their research, but put little effort into defining these types of online platforms. Somewhat more research has focused on social media, one example being Mangold (2009) who studied a long list of social media websites. However, since the Internet is an ever-changing phenomenon there are continuously new types of online platforms containing product information.

In order to decide what types of online platforms to include in the study, two listings of popular websites in Sweden are used (Alexa, 2012; Sveriges Annonsörer, 2012). The online platforms need to meet two criteria in order to be considered relevant to this study: 1) the website is on top 75 of the most popular platforms among Swedish consumers, and 2) it is likely to contain relevant product information. Based on the second criteria, news, weather, dating, and bit torrent sites are excluded, as are banks' and television channels' websites and telephone and address directories. The preparatory research resulted in a list of ten types of online platforms: *producers'*

websites, distributors' websites, product review websites, discussion forums, consumer-to-consumer markets, specialized blogs, personal blogs, user-generated encyclopaedias, social networking sites and *video clip sharing sites* (Alexa, 2012; Sveriges Annonsörer, 2012). Below follows a short description of the websites included in the study.

Table 1: Online platforms studied

Online platform	Most popular example (Alexa rank)
Marketer-generated:	
Producer's website	Apple (34)
Distributor's website	Amazon (41)
Non-marketer generated:	
Social networking site	Facebook.com (2)
Video clip sharing site	YouTube.com (4)
User-generated encyclopaedia	Wikipedia.org.org (6)
Consumer-to-consumer market	Blocket.se (8)
Message board	Passagen (19*)
Blog	WordPress (13)
Product review site	IMDb (19)
Discussion forum	Flashback (36)

The online platforms studied are included based on top 75 of two listings of popular websites among Swedish consumers (Alexa, 2012; Sveriges Annonsörer, 2012). 32 websites on these lists are considered likely to contain product information and classified as one of the online platforms above. * Indicates a KIA rather than an Alexa ranking.

3.1.1. Producers' and distributors' websites

The information on *producers'* own websites often function more or less as marketing of their products. *Retailers' websites* are similar to producers' websites, with the difference that they generally cover multiple brands. Both types of websites generally contain marketer-generated information, however companies sometimes allow publishing of consumer reviews. Studies show that non-marketer-generated information does not have the same influential effect on these platforms as on third party websites (Sussan *et al.*, 2006).

3.1.2. Social networking sites

Social networking sites are social utilities which original function is to connect individuals. Engaging in this type of platforms is the most popular online activity (Nielsen Online, 2009), and many companies and brands are managing their own profiles on these sites. Previous studies show that social networking sites are popular platforms for exchanging consumer recommendations (Chu & Kim, 2011).

3.1.3. Personal and specialized blogs

Personal blogs often contain information about the thoughts, opinions and everyday life of the writer, and can attract enormous amounts of followers (Sveriges Annonsörer, 2012). *Specialized blogs*, however, are generally created and managed by one or a few individuals who post information and experiences about their field of interest. Some of these blogs attract enough followers to make companies provide them with products and services, which the bloggers in return review or mention on their blogs.

3.1.4. Product review websites

Virtual opinion platforms make it possible for consumers to read opinions and experiences of other consumers on a part of the Internet that is not controlled by the company or the consumer, but by a third-party platform (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). One type of opinion platform is the *product review site*, which focuses on comparisons of products and services, often through lists of product specifics and customer ratings.

3.1.5. Discussion forums

Another form of virtual opinion platform is the *discussion forum*, which differs from product review sites in that it is a platform for more than consumer advice. Discussion forums connect individuals with similar interests, providing virtual message boards where they can express opinions on different subjects (Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Studies show that this shared mutual interest with the forum strengthens ties, resulting in the forum's content having a persuasive influence on the behaviour of its members (Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Since anyone, including companies, can publish

recommendations anonymously on these websites there is often some form of self-regulation on discussion forums, and posts with unbiased or commercial purpose are likely to face a reaction from other users (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

3.1.6. Video clip sharing sites

Creativity work sharing sites include websites where users can share photos, videos and music (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). YouTube.com is the most popular example, and is rated as the third most popular website in the world (Alexa, 2012).

3.1.7. User-generated encyclopaedias

Collaborative websites include user-generated encyclopaedias like Wikipedia.org.org (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), where users collectively publish and update information on many different subjects.

3.1.8. Consumer-to-consumer online markets

Commerce communities include *consumer-to-consumer online markets*, where individuals can supply and demand products and services. Blocket.se is the most popular Swedish example of a consumer-to-consumer online market place (Alexa, 2012).

3.2. The main study

3.2.1. Research method

A quantitative study is conducted in order to determine if consumers' choice of online source of product information varies over the decision-making process. The quantitative method was chosen primarily because the analysis methods possible with this type of data allows for statistical tests to be made to conclude if there are significant differences consistent with the hypothesises.

3.2.2. Product categories studied

Previous research on the subject has often focused on information about a specific product. Bronner and de Hoog (2010) chose to examine consumer decisions regarding vacation plans. This approach was considered to concretise the study and prevent respondents from interpreting survey questions wrongly. However, a too narrow focus runs the risk of decreasing the relevance of the research. Thus, the main study is based on the fictional purchases of four different types of products, since four is considered to be a manageable number to study. Basing the main study on four different product categories is also considered to increase the validity of the study by making possible findings applicable to more fields of practice and research.

The product categories studied are chosen based on two classifications used in previous studies of online consumer behaviour (Wu, 2007; Huang *et al.*, 2009; Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Yoon & Kim, 2001): product involvement and quality classification. Involvement is a key determinant of the extent to which consumers evaluate a brand, and is linked to the expenditure and perceived risk of buying a product (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Blackwell *et al.*, 2005; Wu, 2007). Research shows that consumers are more likely to seek information about products with which they are highly involved than about products for which involvement is low (Yoon & Kim, 2001; Wu, 2007; Morrison & Cheong, 2008). Since this thesis focuses on online consumer information search behaviour, only products that are thought to incur higher levels of involvement and thus more search are included in the study. We previously argued that studying four different product categories would increase the validity of our findings, however the result of this approach is likely larger if the similarity between the products is small. It is thus considered appropriate to study products with a wide dispersion of price and perceived risk to represent different levels of involvement.

The other theory used to decide product categories is quality classification. Nelson's (1970) theory classifies products according to consumers' ability to obtain information about the quality of products before purchase. This is the original and most widely used classification of quality (Huang *et al.*, 2009), and it divides products into two groups: search goods and experience goods. Information about important attributes of a search good can for example be found through reading information about a product. The

quality of an experience good, however, cannot be ascertained without retrieving information from someone who has experience with the product.

The example products included in the study are chosen based on three criteria: 1) the products incur some higher level of involvement, 2) the products are listed on Nelson's original classification of search and experience goods, and 3) information about the products can be found online. Four product categories that meet the criteria are televisions (experience good), drilling machines (search good), bicycles (experience good) and running shoes (search good). The selected examples can all be classified as high involvement purchases due to the lack of purchase repetition and the fact that they are generally relatively expensive. However, the large difference in prices among these objects indicates that the involvement connected to these purchases differs.

The average prices of the products were calculated using information from Sweden's two most popular price comparing sites: Pricerunner.se and Prisjakt.nu (Alexa, 2012). The average prices were: 8400 SEK for a television, 1730 SEK for a drilling machine, 5430 SEK for a bicycle, and 990 SEK for a pair of running shoes.

Table 2: Average prices for products studied

Product category	N	Mean*	SD
Television	94	8398,93	4966,58
Drilling machine	97	1726,80	883,00
Bicycle	96	5426,04	2833,24
Running shoes	98	991,84	291,26

* Based on a sample of 100 prices per product category from the most popular products on Swedish websites Pricerunner.se and Prisjakt.nu (Pricerunner; Prisjakt). The prices are in Swedish crowns (SEK).

3.2.3. Respondents

The targeted population is Swedish youths in the ages 18 to 26. Sweden is chosen for practical reasons, and the age span because the heavy Internet usage within student samples has shown to be more effective than random sampling when studying online consumer behaviour. Students are among the heaviest Internet users, and likely attractive to marketers because of their unsolidified brand loyalties (Morrison & Cheong,

2008; Chu & Kim, 2011). These traits make students and presumably other consumers in this age likely to research products online (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2009), which make them good participants for this study.

3.2.4. Survey structure

The survey is constructed out of four parts: 1) respondents' likeliness to search for online product information and previsit intentions for different websites, 2) evaluation criteria of online platforms, 3) evaluation criteria of the risk associated with the purchase, and 4) socio-demographics. The questions regarding previsit intentions for online platforms in different steps of the ECDP are considered most important to the study and are therefore placed first (Christensen *et al.*, 2010). Demographic questions are, due to their more sensitive nature, placed last. Our Edited Consumer Decision Process model is used as a structure throughout the first part of the survey.

In the first part of the survey, respondents are asked to grade the possibility that they would use online platforms in different steps of the ECDP. The questions include short scenarios congruent with the edited model. The objective is to study what type of online platforms consumers visit in which part of the consumer decision process, and to what extent the different websites are used as sources of product information. The respondents are asked to read the scenarios corresponding to each of the four steps in our Edited Consumer Decision Process before answering the questions. These are constructed so as to create a clearer idea of what is asked and minimize misunderstandings and differences in interpretation among respondents.

The objective of the second part of the survey is to study how consumers perceive the characteristics of different types of online platforms. The respondents were asked to rate the websites based on two evaluative criteria that have been used in previous research: depth and scope of information (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). A test shows that there is high correlation between the two criteria, and they are thus used together as a measure of richness of product information ($\rho > 0{,}625$; $p < 0{,}002$).

In accordance with the definition of involvement as perceived risk (Wu, 2007), eleven risk-measuring questions used in previous research (Eroglu & Machleit, 1990; Venkatraman & Price, 1990) are included in the survey. The respondents are asked to rate to what extent they consider certain risk aspects of a product when

contemplating a purchase. From these variables, four risk factors were obtained (KMO = 0,711): financial risk, complexity of product, risk of not appreciating the product after purchase and risk of potential problems with performance[1].

3.2.5. Scale and measuring methods

For all questions in the three first parts of the survey, seven-point semantic differential scales are used. In accordance with Malhotra (2010), number one is placed furthest to the left and represents the lowest value (e.g. "very unlikely"). Correspondingly, seven is placed furthest to the right and represents the highest value (e.g. "very likely"). The seven-point scale is chosen because it is easier for respondents to consider fewer alternatives (Malhotra & Birks, 2010). Even though the seven-point semantic differential scale includes a neutral alternative, it is considered beneficial for the study since the objective with the questionnaire is to study relative differences between the extent to which consumer use different online platforms.

3.2.6. Collection of data

Four versions of an Internet-based study are created using Qualtrics.com, one for each product type (i.e. television, drilling machine, running shoes and bicycle). 400 objects in the targeted population are invited to participate in the study via Facebook.com, and 50 printed-paper versions of the survey are handed out during a ski trip among first grade SSE bachelor students. These responses are later added to the online responses manually. The distribution between different versions of the survey is completely random. The surveys are activated on March 23 and answers are collected during three weeks time until April 9.

[1] Risk factors are obtained using factor analysis of the eleven risk variables (Varimax rotation). Coefficients below 0,4 are compressed, and factors with Eigenvalues above 0,9 tolerated in order to get four logical and applicable factors. KMO-value = 0,711, and cumulative variance explained = 71,9 percent. Appendix 1.

3.2.7. Reliability and validity

To ascertain the credibility and relevance of the thesis, reliability and validity must be taken into consideration. The two measurements are connected, but they are not to be considered as equal (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

In order to achieve reliability of the survey, Malhotra (2010) provides three options: 1) to ask the respondents to redo the exact same test at a later date (i.e. test-re-test reliability), 2) to have two comparable surveys answered at two separate dates (i.e. alternative form reliability), and 3) to have questions within the survey asking more or less about the same thing (i.e. internal consistency reliability).

Due to the nature of our study, with a four-step process and ten different web platforms, the use of several similar questions is deemed impractical. The total length of the survey would have been increased dramatically, rendering the survey longer and less varied. The alternative of issuing a second survey at a later date is not considered feasible since the time that went in to creating the original survey was substantial. The most practical approach would have been to use the test-re-test consistency method. However, taking into consideration the recommended interval of two to four weeks between the test and re-test (Malhotra & Birks, 2010), and the time spent planning and creating the survey as well as gathering answers, a second running of the survey is not possible within the scope of our bachelor's thesis.

In order for a study to have validity, the right questions are needed to get the right answers. Internal validity concerns how the dependent variable is affected by the independent variable (Malhotra & Birks, 2010). The questions in the first part of the survey are identical in all aspects apart from the different stages of the ECDP, which are the independent variables we intend to study. To eliminate confusion and differing interpretations, the questions includes scenarios describing the scenarios of different steps, and examples of well-known websites are given. The respondents who answered their surveys manually did not have the possibility of visiting websites, however they were allowed to ask questions in person.

External validity concerns the applicability of the thesis to a larger scope than the directed respondents (Malhotra & Birks, 2010). As mentioned in the delimitations section, four product categories were included in the study. This approach

was considered to increase the validity of the study by making it applicable to more fields of practice and research than if using only one product.

4. Results

The main objective with the thesis is to empirically study potential variations in online consumer search behaviour over the decision-making process. Initially, tests are conducted to determine the sample's suitability for continued research. A preparatory study of products then determines if there are differences in involvement among the product categories researched. These differences' effects on online consumer search behaviour are then examined to conclude if the products are appropriate as a base of continued study.

In the main study, H1 is studied by comparing previsit intentions for different steps. The objective is to determine if the consumers' choice of source of product information varies over the Edited Consumer Decision Process (ECDP). Variations found are then studied to conclude if these are consistent with H2-H5.

The different online platforms studied are: producers' and distributors' websites, product review websites, discussion forums, consumer-to-consumer markets, personal and specialized blogs, user-generated encyclopaedias, social networking sites and video clip sharing sites. The open-ended "other" questions did not render any relevant responses[2]. Data will be processed using "IBM SPSS Statistics" version 20. Results are called significant at a 0,05 level of significance.

4.1. The sample

Through inviting social contacts on Facebook.com to answer the surveys, 96 responses are collected. Adding the 47 answers collected via handing out printed-paper surveys renders a total sample of 143 respondents. The answered surveys are randomly distributed over different product categories as following: bicycle = 36, running shoes = 33, drilling machine = 43, and television = 31 responses. 51,8 percent of the respondents are male and 48,2 percent female. The average age among respondents is 21,8 years. The largest group of 60,1 percent of respondents are in the ages 21 to 23, and the second largest group of 22,4 percent consists of 18 to 20 year-olds. Respondents aged 24 to 26 years are in the smallest group with 17,5 percent of the sample size. The

[2] The only suggestions of other sources of information were Google.com and face-to-face word-of-mouth.

majority of respondents are students with 78,3 percent of the sample studying at either a high school or university. 14,7 percent are employed and 7,0 percent list their occupation as unemployed or other.

The assumed benefits with using student samples in online consumer behaviour research are that this population is thought to spent more time online researching products before purchase (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Chu & Kim, 2011). This assumption was tested by studying the results from questions regarding Internet habits and intention to research products online before making a purchase. Results show that students spend an average of 5,0 hours a day online. 65,4 percent of this group rate the possibility that they will use online sources to research products as "very likely", answering 7,0 out of 7,0 on the question. The average answer to the question is 6,5; indicating that student samples indeed are beneficial when studying online consumer behaviour.

The other respondents, those that do not study, spend an average of 6,8 hours a day online. 83,3 percent of this group claimed to be "very likely" to research products on the Internet before purchase, the average answer being 6,8. Since respondents in the ages 18 to 26 that do not study have higher ratings on the two attributes considered beneficial, data supports that this group possesses the same beneficial traits as students when it comes to online consumer behaviour research.

The total average of hours per day spent online is 5,3, and the intention of using Internet sources for product research is 6,6 out of 7,0. 69,6 percent are "very likely" to research products online, and 0 percent answers lower than 4 to this question. According to theory that high Internet usage and research is beneficial when studying online consumer behaviour (Morrison & Cheong, 2008), this sample is considered appropriate for the study.

Table 3: Time spent online and general previsit intentions

	Time spent online*			Likelihood of researching products online before a purchase**		
Occupation	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
Students	107	4,95	0,950	108	6,50	0,794
Others	30	6,80	4,397	30	6,80	0,484
Total	137	5,32	2,792	137	6,57	0,744

* Open-ended question, interval between steps is one hour. ** Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely", higher value is more positive.

4.2. Preparatory study

4.2.1. Product involvement

Four product categories with different quality classifications and levels of involvement are included in the study to increase its relevance: bicycles, drilling machines, running shoes and televisions. In accordance with the definition of involvement (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985) are prices and perceived risk used as determinants of involvement. The average prices are: 8400 SEK for a television, 1730 SEK for a drilling machine, 5430 SEK for a bicycle, and 990 SEK for a pair of running shoes.

Eleven risk-measuring questions used in previous research (Venkatraman & Price, 1990; Eroglu & Machleit, 1990) are included in the survey to determine consumers' involvement with different product categories. Four risk factors are studied: financial risk, complexity of product, risk of not appreciating the product after purchase and risk of potential problems with performance. The products are then compared on these factors to investigate if there are any differences in consumers' perception of risk associated with purchase. The results show that perceived financial risk ($p < 0,001$) and risk of not appreciating the product after purchase ($p < 0,005$) vary between products[3]. The purchase of a television is seen as the financially riskiest ($p < 0,019$), followed by that of a bicycle ($p < 0,019$), a drilling machine ($p < 0,007$) and running shoes ($p < 0,001$). The results also show that consumers take greater consideration to the risk that they will not appreciate the product when purchasing running shoes ($p < 0,016$) and

[3] Appendix 2.

bicycles ($p < 0,044$), compared to drilling machines ($p < 0,044$). A study of total perceived risk[4] shows that televisions ($\mu = 4,57$; $p < 0,023$) and bicycles ($\mu = 4,49$; $p < 0,015$) are perceived as significantly riskier purchases than running shoes ($\mu = 3,71$; $p < 0,023$)[5].

The financial and total risks are consistent with the calculated average prices. The differences in consumers' perceived risk of not using or liking the product as much as they expected are few and not considered relevant to this study. Product involvement is considered to vary between different products, so that the purchase of a television incurs the highest level of involvement, followed by bicycle and drilling machine. Running shoes is considered to incur the lowest level of product involvement.

4.2.2. The quality classifications' and level of involvement's effect on online consumer search behaviour

The objective of the preparatory study is to determine if consumers' online search behaviour varies depending on whether the product is classified as a higher or lower involvement purchase, or a search or experience good. Statistical tests were conducted in order to find significant differences in previsit intentions for search goods (i.e. drilling machines and running shoes) and experience goods (i.e. televisions and bicycles)[6].

The only difference found when comparing experience goods to search goods is that the former are researched more frequently on consumer-to-consumer market websites like Blocket.se ($\mu = 3,12$) than search goods ($\mu = 2,41$; $p < 0,002$)[7]. However, this difference is only attributable to the first step of the ECDP[8]. Thus, except for small differences, there were no significant results pointing to Nelson's (1970) original classification of search and experience goods having any effect on consumer online search behaviour.

[4] Index is created based on Cronbach's alpha = 0,802.

[5] Appendix 2.

[6] Using independent samples t-tests

[7] Indexes for online platforms are created in order to make conclusions about the product's effect on total use of online platforms. Step three was excluded to obtain higher Cronbach's alpha values. Cronbach's alpha > 0,800 for all websites.

[8] Appendix 3.

Theory about product involvement connects perceived risk and expense of a purchase to the amount of search undertaken before purchasing a product (Blackwell *et al.*, 2005). However, when studying previsit intentions for online platforms, results show that the level of product involvement only affects search behaviour for three types of websites: product review websites ($p < 0,002$), consumer-to-consumer markets ($p < 0,002$) and user-generated encyclopaedias ($p < 0,050$)[9].

Our preparatory study indicated that the type of purchase considered has small effect on consumers' online search behaviour. For different quality classifications, significant differences were found only on two types of online websites. The level of involvement with a product only affected previsit intentions for three of the ten types of online platforms. These differences were considered to be of small importance to the study. Since data showed few differences in respondents' previsit intentions for different goods, a continued study of the whole sample is considered appropriate. As previously argued, this approach should increase the study's external validity.

4.3. Main study

The main objective of the study is to find potential differences in online consumer search behaviour over different steps of the ECDP. First, we compare respondents' total previsit intentions for all steps. The use of online platforms as sources of product information is then compared over the steps of the ECDP, with the objective find evidence to either support or reject H2-H4. Finally, a comparison of the level of use of marketer relative to non-marketer generated sources is made to study H5.

4.3.1. H1: The ECDP's effect on search behaviour

The total means of previsit intentions for each step are compared to see if consumers' search for online product information varies over the process[10] [11]. The results indicates that consumers make less effort to research products in the post-consumption step, showing significantly different previsit intentions for step four ($\mu = 2,93$) compared to

[9] One-way ANOVA test. Multiple comparisons are made with a Scheffe post hoc test.

[10] Indexes of websites are made to represent each step. Cronbach's alphas for the indexes are: step one = 0,735, step two = 0,762, step three = 0,772, and step four = 0,849.

[11] Paired samples t-tests are conducted comparing each step to all others.

step one (μ = 3,43; p < 0,001), step two (μ = 3,46; p < 0,001) and step three (μ = 3,50; p < 0,001). These results are consistent with the assumptions made in chapter 2 and appear logical since this step has less to do with decision-making than earlier steps of the ECDP. There are no significant differences in the extent to which consumers research products in the first three steps. It is thus concluded that consumers use Internet sources when searching for product information to a similar extent in the information search, evaluation and purchase steps[12].

Table 4: Total previsit intentions over the ECDP

	Step 1 (μ=3,43, SD=0,98)				**Step 2** (μ=3,46, SD=1,02)				**Step 3** (μ=3,50, SD=1,08)			
Step	**df**	**μ dif.**	***t***	**2-tail sig.**	**df**	**μ dif.**	***t***	**2-tail sig.**	**df**	**μ dif.**	***t***	**2-tail sig.**
2	141	-0,03	-0,611	0,542								
3	141	-0,07	-1,014	0,312	142	-0,03	-0,638	0,524				
4	141	0,50	5,039	0,000** *	142	0,54	6,071	0,000** *	142	0,57	6,128	0,000** *

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely", higher value is more positive. Significance levels are calculated using paired samples t-tests comparing each step to all other steps. Step 4: (μ=2,93, SD=01,26). * Indicates p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01 and *** p < 0,001.

Consumers search for the same amount of online product information independent of whether they are scanning the market, narrowing down options or choosing which product to purchase. However, results show that they vary the sources from which they search information. Results showed that consumers' previsit intentions for eight out of ten of the studied websites vary over the decision-making process[13]. Only personal blogs and video clip sharing sites are used to a similar extent in all steps of the ECDP. Consumers' previsit intentions for a majority of sites thus vary over the ECDP, and this is considered to be sufficient evidence in support of H1.

H1 is partially supported by data.

[12] Appendix 5.

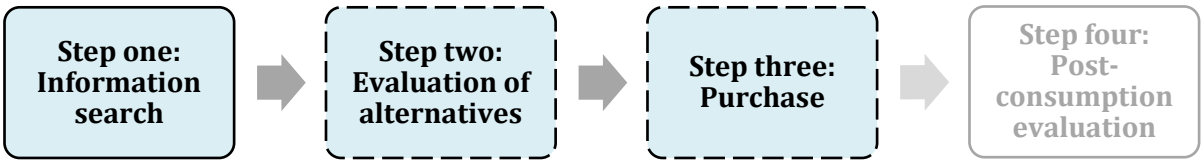
[13] Appendix 6.

4.3.2. An introduction to the studies of H2-H4

In this section, statistical tests are made to determine if the differences in online consumer search behaviour found in H1 correspond to H2-H4[14]. Since H3 compares results for steps one and two and H4 partially compares steps one and three, tests made for H2 comparing step one to steps two and three are applicable to H3 and H4. Thus, support of H2 automatically means that H3 is supported and H4 is partially supported.

4.3.3. Testing H2 and H3

Model 2: H2



In H2, step one is compared to steps two and three. "H2: Consumers have higher previsit intentions for online platforms that contain less information about each available product or brand in step one compared to later steps."

Tests are conducted comparing respondents' previsit intentions for online platforms in step one to steps two and three. Results showed that consumer-to-consumer markets (μ = 3,04) and user-generated encyclopaedias (μ = 2,44) are visited more in the information search step, than in later steps of the ECDP. Data also show significantly higher previsit intentions for social networking sites in the information search step (μ = 2,31) than the evaluation of alternatives step (μ = 2,12).

Consumers have significantly lower previsit intentions for producer's websites (μ = 4,69) and product review websites (μ = 4,83) in the first step compared to steps two (μ = 5,34 and μ = 5,32) and three (μ = 5,32 and μ = 5,43). Results also show lower previsit intentions for discussion forums (μ = 3,92) and specialized blogs (μ = 2,92) in these steps (μ = 4,22 and μ = 4,39)[16]

[14] Using paired samples t-tests comparing online platform variables for one step to corresponding variables in other steps.

[16] Appendix 6.

Table 5: Previsit intentions for different online platforms, steps one and two

Probability that respondents, while searching for product information, visit …	Step 1: Information search		Step 2: Evaluation of alternatives		*t*	2-tailed Sig.
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**		
Consumer-to-consumer market	**3,04**	2,03	2,58	1,83	3,950	0,000***
User-generated encyclopaedia	**2,44**	1,75	2,14	1,60	3,368	0,001***
Social networking site	**2,31**	1,52	2,12	1,54	2,142	0,034*
Producer's website	4,69	1,92	**5,34**	1,87	-4,666	0,000***
Product review website	4,83	2,01	**5,32**	1,75	-3,874	0,000***

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely", higher score is more positive. Only significant differences are included in the table. The higher mean values are bolded. * Indicates $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$ and *** $p < 0,001$[17].

Probability that respondents, while searching for product information, visit …	Step 1: Information search		Step 3: Purchase		*t*	2-tailed Sig.
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**		
User-generated encyclopaedia	**2,44**	1,74	2,03	1,60	3,968	0,000***
Consumer-to-consumer market	**3,04**	2,02	2,61	1,90	3,449	0,001**
Discussion forum	3,92	2,02	**4,22**	2,34	-1,725	0,087*
Specialized blog	2,92	1,86	**3,49**	2,31	-3,302	0,001***
Producer's website	4,69	1,92	**5,32**	1,90	-3,835	0,000***
Product review website	4,82	2,01	**5,43**	1,90	-3,443	0,001***

Table 6: Previsit intentions for different online platforms, steps one and three

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely", higher score is more positive. Only significant differences are included in the table. The higher mean values are bolded[18]. * Indicates one-tailed $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$ and *** $p < 0,001$.

Tests are conducted to compare richness of product information on the sites that are visited significantly more in step one to those that are visited significantly less. Results show that consumer-to-consumer markets are perceived as containing significantly less information about products ($\mu = 2,87$) than producers' websites ($\mu = 5,69$; $p < 0,001$), and product review websites ($\mu = 4,43$; $p < 0,001$). The same is true for user-generated encyclopaedias ($\mu = 3,18$; $p < 0,001$), and data shows similar results for social networking sites ($\mu = 2,41$; $p < 0,001$). Consumer-to-consumer markets and user-

[17] Since the hypothesises are directed, it is the one-tailed significance that is relevant.

[18] Differences in mean values and standard deviations are due to different number of observations being included in the tests because of missing values.

generated encyclopaedias are also considered to contain more superficial and limited information about products compared to discussion forums ($\mu = 4{,}96$; $p < 0{,}001$) and specialized blogs ($\mu = 4{,}63$; $p < 0{,}001$)[20]. It is thus concluded that websites visited to a greater extent in the first step of the ECDP contain less rich information about products than websites visited less.

H2 and H3 are supported by data.

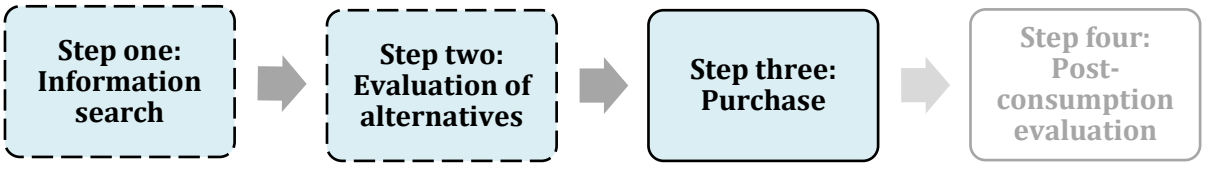
Table 7: Richness of product information on online platforms

	Richness of information		
Online platform	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
Producer's website	143	5,69	1,41
Distributor's website	142	5,07	1,33
Product review website	142	4,43	1,37
Discussion forum	142	4,96	1,50
Consumer-to-consumer market	142	2,87	1,22
Specialized blog	141	4,62	1,63
Personal blog	142	2,56	1,42
User-generated encyclopaedia	142	3,18	1,53
Social networking site	142	2,41	1,23
Video clip sharing site	142	2,89	1,64

Richness of information is an index of two evaluative criteria measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "superficial" to "deep" and "limited" to "unlimited", higher score is more positive.

4.3.4. Testing H4

Model 3: H4



H4 compares step three to steps one and two. "H4: Consumers have higher previsit intentions for online platforms that contain more information about each available product or brand in step three compared to earlier steps."

[20] T-tests are used to compare the evaluative criteria of each online platform to the others.

H2 states that, because consumers use more choice criteria later in the consumer decision process (Kuusela *et al.*, 1998), previsit intentions should be higher for online platforms containing relatively more information about the product researched in the third step of the CDP. As concluded above, the online platforms visited significantly more in step three contain richer information than those visited in step one.

Comparing steps two and three, we see that respondents in step three have significantly lower previsit intentions for distributors' websites ($\mu = 5,69$; $p < 0,050$) and user-generated encyclopaedias ($\mu = 2,15$; $p < 0,020$). Furthermore, specialized blogs are visited more in the purchase step ($\mu = 3,43$) than the evaluation step ($\mu = 3,07$; $p < 0,001$).

Table 8: Previsit intentions for different websites, steps two and three

Probability that respondents, while searching for product information, visit ...*	**Step 2: Evaluation of alternatives**		**Step 3: Purchase**			
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	***t***	**2-tailed Sig.**
Specialized blog	3,07	1,90	**3,43**	2,28	-3,390	0,001***
Distributor's website	**5,69**	1,55	5,50	1,71	1,750	0,082*
User-generated encyclopaedia	**2,15**	1,60	2,01	1,57	2,185	0,031*

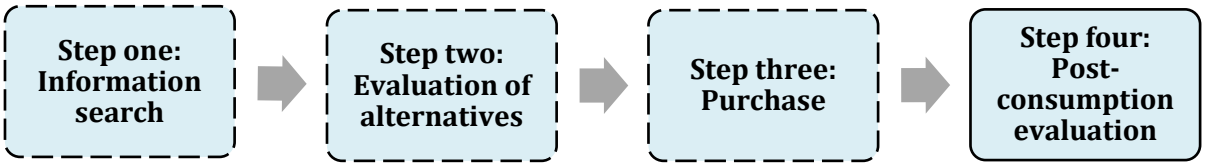
Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely", higher score is more positive. Only significant differences are included in the table. The higher mean values are bolded. * Indicates one-tailed $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$ and *** $p < 0,001$.

For H4 to be supported by data, results must show that consumers perceive specialized blogs as containing richer information about products than distributor's websites and user-generated encyclopaedias. The information on the latter ($\mu = 3,18$) is rated as more superficial and limited compared to information from specialized blogs ($\mu = 4,62$; $p < 0,001$). However, specialized blogs are not perceived as containing richer product information than distributors' websites ($\mu = 5,07$; $p < 0,005$).

H4 is partially supported by data.

4.3.5. Testing H5

Model 4: H5



H5 compares the level of use of non-marketer-generated sources for all steps. "H5: Consumers have a higher level of previsit intentions for online platforms that contain non-marketer-generated product information in step four compared to earlier steps."

The reasoning leading up to H5 was that, since the last step in the consumer decision process has less to do with decision-making than earlier steps, consumers should search for less information in this step. This assumption has already been proven when studying H1, since respondents showed significantly lower previsit intentions for step four than for any other step. Consumers who have purchased a product are assumed to want information about other end-users' experiences rather than facts of product characteristics. Non-marketer sources of information should thus be sought to a greater extent compared to earlier steps. In fact, the only online platforms visited significantly more in the fourth step compared to previous steps are specialized blogs ($\mu = 3,56$; $p < 0,001$) and discussion forums ($\mu = 4,29$; $p < 0,001$)[21]. H5 is tested by comparing the percentage use of online platforms containing marketer–generated information to those with non-marketer sources.

The levels of previsit intentions for marketer-generated online platforms for steps one to three were similar: 31,8 percent in step one, 33,7 percent in step two and 32,9 percent in step three. For step four however, the corresponding value was only 25,4 percent. Tests are conducted to compare the differences between marketer- and non-marketer-generated sources of information for all steps[22]. Results show a significant difference ($p < 0,001$) for the post-consumption step compared to all other steps[23].

[21] Appendix 6.

[22] Level of non-marketer-generated sources – Level of marketer-generated sources = Difference tested

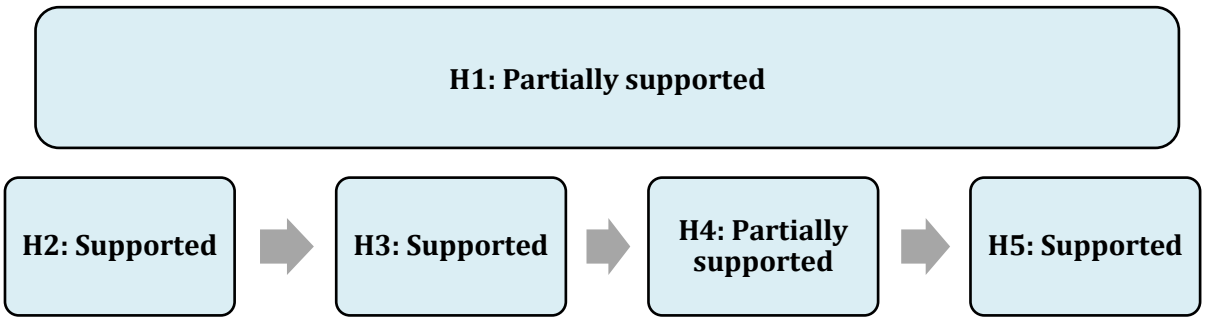
[23] Appendix 7.

H5 is supported by data.

4.4. Conclusion of results

Results shows that consumers' choice of source of information varies over the Edited Consumer Decision Process, and that H1 is partially supported. Continued testing compared the existing differences to those expected by theory. Respondents have, with the exception of searching for more information on specialized blogs in step three, higher previsit intentions for online platforms containing richer product information in later steps of the consumer decision process. H2 and H3 are fully supported empirically, while H4 is partially supported. Since the difference between marketer and non-marketer-generated information used in each step is significantly greater in step four of the ECDP, H5 is also supported empirically.

Model 5: Results of testing hypothesises



5. Discussion

The objective of this study is to research online consumer search behaviour and increase knowledge of how consumers use online sources when searching for product information. The goal is to be able to make conclusions about whether or not consumers' choice of sources for online product information varies over the decision-making process, and to compare these differences to theory of consumer behaviour. The outcomes of the quantitative study are considered successful as they to a large extent supported the hypothesises made. In the following section, the results of the study will be discussed.

5.1. Results

5.1.1. The ECDP's effect on online consumer search behaviour (H1)

Consumers do not search for significantly more or less information on the Internet in any of the steps preceding purchase. A more detailed study of previsit intentions for different platforms did however show that consumer search varies over the edited decision-making process (ECDP). The differences include eight of the ten online platforms studied, and the results are considered large enough to give partial support to H1. There are thus significant differences in online consumer search behaviour that marketers and other actors could take into account in order to efficiently provide consumers with information. One actor that has realised that consumers search for information on several different sites before making a purchase is the owner of the popular Swedish site Prisjakt.nu. The company is as of now running the product review website Prisjakt.nu, the discussion forum MinHembio.nu and the specialized blog Pryl.nu.

As predicted, the amount of search is substantially lower when consumers are making post-consumption evaluation of products, which is probably a result of this step having less to do with the actual making of a decision. Consumers likely feel that additional information about the product will not help them become more satisfied with their decision. One respondent said that she would not search for information of fear of

becoming more dissatisfied[24]. As a result of these findings, steps one to three and four were studied separately.

5.1.2. Search behaviour in the first (information search) step of the ECDP (H2)

Consumers search for product information on sites like Blocket.se, Wikipedia.org and Facebook.com to a greater extent in the initial step of the Edited Consumer Decision Process compared to later steps. The information found on these websites is considered as being more superficial and limited than information from sites that are used more in other steps. These findings are consistent with theory of choice criteria and consumer decision-making, and H2 is supported.

These results have implications for understanding how consumers practically use different sources of information on the Internet. For example, consumer-to-consumer markets might be visited as a first step to explore less expensive, second-hand options. If none are found, or if the consumer wishes to learn more about the available objects, the consumer will move on to other sites. User-generated encyclopaedia sites might be used to learn what solutions are available, while social networking sites might be used to ask contacts if someone has recommendations or products to sell.

User-generated encyclopaedias, consumer-to-consumer markets and social networking sites were, together with video clip sharing sites and personal blogs, rated as containing less product information than all other online platforms. One likely explanation is that these websites generally contain more than product information while producers', distributors' and product review websites generally focus on providing information about products. Similarly, discussion forums and specialized blogs generally contain content published by individuals with some sort of expertise on the subject (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

[24] Answer to the open-ended "other" survey question representing the fourth step of the process.

5.1.3. Search behaviour in the second (evaluation of alternatives) step of the ECDP (H3)

In the second step of the ECDP, consumers search for information on producers' websites, product review websites and distributors' websites to a greater extent than in other steps. Producer and product review websites contain richer information about products than the online platforms primarily used in the first step. Since producers' and product review websites are visited significantly more in this step than in the first, H3 is supported empirically.

A possible explanation to why consumers' search for information on these websites is that they need information that is relevant to the more extensive decision rules used in this step to reduce the number of products considered (Kuusela *et al.,* 1998). The initial study of online platforms conducted shows that producers' websites, product review websites and distributors' websites generally are consumer friendly since they have distinctive filters, product comparison and rating functions. These features likely make it easier for consumers to narrow down the number of considered options. However, these online platforms might not be used until the consumer has an idea of what type of product is desired, or alternative options (e.g. second-hand) has been excluded.

5.1.4. Search behaviour in the third (purchase) step of the ECDP (H4)

Discussion forums, specialized blogs, product review sites and producers' websites, are popular destinations for consumers who are close to a purchase and are only considering a smaller number of products. Apart from distributors' websites, these four online platforms contain the deepest and most unlimited information about products. Comparing the online platforms, we see that data partially supports the hypothesis that consumers visit sources of richer information later in the process. However, the decreased use of distributors' websites and increased use of specialized blogs are not consistent with the hypothesis and the overall pattern, since distributors' websites are regarded as being the source of the deepest and most unlimited information after producers' websites. However, previous research shows that specialized blogs possess characteristics that make them highly influential. For example do specialized blogs often

contain non-marketer generated expertise due to the publishers' extensive knowledge and personal experience within the specific product category (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). These findings indicate that there are more website characteristics than richness of information that influence consumer online search behaviour.

5.1.5. Search behaviour in the fourth (post-consumption evaluation) step of the ECDP (H5)

Results support that consumers search for less information after purchasing the product. Previsit intentions are significantly lower for almost all online platforms that are popular destinations in earlier parts of the decision-making. The exceptions are discussion forums and specialized blogs, which are more popular as sources of product information after a purchase has been made. These findings are consistent with the logical reasoning that consumers should search for more non-marketer-generated information in the fourth step of the process compared to earlier steps. A test of the difference in previsit intentions between marketer- and non-marketer-generated sources of information showed similar results. The ten types of online platforms chosen for this study do not reflect the actual ratio of non-marketer- to marketer-generated websites, however the level of use of non-marketer sources was significantly larger for step four compared to other steps.

5.2. Implications

5.2.1. Implications for researchers, marketers and organisations

The results show that consumers vary their search for product information over the decision-making process, which is the main objective of this study. Methods are used to describe these differences, however the tests focus on relative and not absolute differences. Further research on the subject is needed to make any real conclusions of where consumers search for product information.

The findings of this study have several implications for practitioners and academics. Firstly, the study has provided the research area with empirical evidence indicating that consumers vary their search for information over the decision-making process. Another of the study's contributions is that it sheds light on the fact that

consumers use many different sources of product information. Specialized blogs, for example, are very influential sources of information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). We hope that these findings will increase interest in the subject of online consumer search behaviour and lead to more research being carried out within this area of modern marketing.

The second objective of the study is to increase marketers' knowledge of how to provide consumers with relevant information. By communicating through media that consumers are using, marketing efforts will likely become more efficient. The same applies to non-profit and government organizations that wish to educate consumers. An increased knowledge of how consumers use the Internet when searching for information will likely provide these actors with tips on how to better influence consumer decisions. The results of this study show that there are variations in consumers' search behaviour that these actors should take into account when for example planning online marketing campaigns or designing websites.

5.2.2. Implications for research of theory of product classifications

Results from the preparatory study of product involvement and quality classification imply that these definitions are in need of an update. Part of the definition of product involvement is that higher involvement purchases should be preceded with a more extensive search for information. However, results show that differences in level of involvement of higher involvement goods do not affect how consumers search for information. One likely reason is that the change in access to information brought upon by the Internet has facilitated search and led to consumers spending more effort researching products with lower prices and levels of risk than before.

As implied by Huang Lurie and Mitra's (2009) research, the original way of dividing products into search and experience goods is likely in need of an update. The Internet provides the consumer with information about product characteristics that are classified as experience-based. For example can running shoes be evaluated before trying them thanks to extensive running communities, blogs and large amounts of reviews. Despite differences in usage, personal preferences and physical conditions, the Internet increases the possibility of finding someone with relevant experience of the product of interest (Lee & Youn, 2009).

5.3. Critique

The study conducted was preceded with thorough preparatory research in order to make relevant and correct conclusions. However, some points of improvement could be made:

5.3.1. Relative comparisons

The study is based on the differences in search behaviour over the steps of the Consumer Decision Process model. The majority of the discussion has regarded the relative changes in previsit intentions, not the absolute values given by the respondents. It was for example concluded that the use of specialized blogs increases significantly in step three however, consumers have consistently higher previsit intentions for producers' websites, product review websites and distributors' websites ($\mu = 3{,}48$ compared to $\mu \approx 5{,}50$). There are significant differences in search behaviour, but the results from this study should be considered more as hints of these variations than as implications of how to act.

5.3.2. Distinction between marketer and non-marketer generated sources of information

When studying H5, general definitions of marketer and non-marketer information are used to classify different online platforms. However, some websites can contain both types of information, for example do a lot of companies allow consumers to publish opinions about brands and products on their websites. Also, on non-marketer generated websites it can be difficult for users to determine who the creator of content is (Lee & Youn, 2009).

5.3.3. Sampling method

Malhotra (2010) emphasises the benefits of using random samples that are representative of a whole population. The use of convenience sampling is generally considered to lower the sample's representativeness of a population. However, in our case the convenience sampling method resulted in respondents possessing traits

considered beneficial to the study (Morrison & Cheong, 2008). A sampling method that is more representative of the whole population would have increased the study's relevance to different consumer groups, however students sampling is acknowledged as an appropriate basis of studies of online consumer behaviour (Morrison & Cheong, 2008; Chu & Kim, 2011).

5.3.4. Product choice

The cheapest product category studied is running shoes (990 SEK), which can be considered as a fairly costly expense, especially for someone on a student budget. Studying less expensive products might result in lower levels of involvement, which would likely impact the results. A study of lower involvement products is needed to conclude if the way consumers search for product information is similar for all purchases.

5.3.5. Reliability

Due to the study's time limitation, the survey was only sent out one time. As mentioned in the method section of the thesis, it would have been preferred to conduct a second survey some time after the first to increase the reliability of the study.

5.4. Conclusion

The birth of the Internet has led to changes in communication. These changes are greatly affecting how consumers access information. A variety of online sources provide consumers with brand information that is published by both marketers and users of products. As a result, consumers have greater power to make informed decisions that are not only based upon information provided to them by paid professionals. This study managed to contribute with insights of how consumers use these and other sources of information.

The objective of many previous studies has been to understand consumers' online behaviour, but few have focused on how consumers' use of Internet sources varies in decision-making. This study succeeded at proving the existence of variations in online consumer search behaviour through focusing on how previsit intentions for

different online platforms vary over an Edited Consumer Decision Process. Results of the study should also have implications for continued research of consumers' use of online platforms in particular, and online consumer search behaviour in general.

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7. Appendixes

7.1. Preparatory study

7.1.1. Appendix 1

Communalities

Risk	Extraction
Grow tired of	0,699
Not like as much as expected	0,777
Not use as much as expected	0,593
Buying affect financial ability	0,776
Price fall	0,645
Problem with performance	0,814
Not the functions expected	0,792
Expensive	0,665
Little experience of purchase	0,637
Buying may be risky	0,761
Technically complex	0,753

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
Risk factor	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Grow tired of			0,807	
Not like as much as expected			0,831	
Not use as much as expected			0,711	
Buying affect financial ability	0,843			
Price fall	0,751			
Problem with performance				0,864
Not the functions expected				0,853
Expensive	0,743			
Little experience of purchase		0,784		
Buying may be risky		0,720		
Technically complex		0,818		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

7.1.2. Appendix 2

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Risk factor - financial	Between Groups	34,166	3	11,389	14,84	0,000
	Within Groups	102,834	134	0,767		
	Total	137	137			
Risk factor - performance	Between Groups	12,851	3	4,284	4,624	0,004
	Within Groups	124,149	134	0,926		
	Total	137	137			

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

Risk:	(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Financial	Bicycle	Running shoes	,76*	0,213	0,006
		Drilling machine	0,06	0,204	0,993
		Television	-,70*	0,216	0,018
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-,76*	0,213	0,006
		Drilling machine	-,70*	0,207	0,011
		Television	-1,46*	0,219	0,000
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	-0,06	0,204	0,993
		Running shoes	,70*	0,207	0,011
		Television	-,76*	0,211	0,006
	Television	Bicycle	,70*	0,216	0,018
		Running shoes	1,46*	0,219	0,000
		Drilling machine	,76*	0,211	0,006
Appreciate	Bicycle	Running shoes	-0,10	0,234	0,978
		Drilling machine	,65*	0,224	0,043
		Television	0,36	0,237	0,508
	Running shoes	Bicycle	0,10	0,234	0,978
		Drilling machine	,75*	0,228	0,015
		Television	0,47	0,241	0,295
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	-,65*	0,224	0,043
		Running shoes	-,75*	0,228	0,015
		Television	-0,29	0,232	0,679
	Television	Bicycle	-0,36	0,237	0,508
		Running shoes	-0,47	0,241	0,295
		Drilling machine	0,29	0,232	0,679

* The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

Descriptives

Total risk

Product:	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Bicycle	36	4,49	0,904	0,151
Running shoes	33	3,71	1,178	0,205
Drilling machine	42	4,30	1,013	0,156
Television	31	4,57	1,047	0,188
Total	142	4,27	1,075	0,090

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15,029	3	5,01	4,672	0,004
Within Groups	147,97	138	1,072		
Total	162,999	141			

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Bicycle	Running shoes	,79*	0,250	0,022
	Drilling machine	0,19	0,235	0,876
	Television	-0,08	0,254	0,993
Running shoes	Bicycle	-,79*	0,250	0,022
	Drilling machine	-0,60	0,241	0,116
	Television	-,86*	0,259	0,014
Drilling machine	Bicycle	-0,19	0,235	0,876
	Running shoes	0,59	0,241	0,116
	Television	-0,27	0,245	0,750
Television	Bicycle	0,08	0,254	0,993
	Running shoes	,86*	0,259	0,014
	Drilling machine	0,27	0,245	0,750

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

7.1.3. Appendix 3

Group Statistics

	Quality classification:	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Consumer-to-consumer market	Experience good	66	3,12	1,774	0,218
	Search good	76	2,41	1,641	0,188

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	**Sig.**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**
Consumer-to-consumer market	Quality classification: Equal variances assumed	2,417	0,122	2,480	140	0,014	0,711	0,287
	Equal variances not assumed			2,466	133,576	0,015	0,711	0,288

Group Statistics

	Quality classification:	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Information search, consumer-to-consumer market	Experience good	65	3,63	2,126	0,264
	Search good	76	2,53	1,785	0,205
Purchase, personal blog	Experience good	64	1,64	1,074	0,134
	Search good	76	2,16	1,705	0,196

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	**Sig.**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**
Information search, consumer-to-consumer market	Equal variances assumed	7,729	0,006	3,354	139	0,001	1,104	0,329
	Equal variances not assumed			3,309	125,519	0,001	1,104	0,334
Purchase, personal blog	Equal variances assumed	12,026	0,001	-2,1	138	0,038	-0,517	0,246
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,18	128,409	0,031	-0,517	0,237

7.2. Appendix table 4

Descriptives					
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Product review website	Bicycle	35	5,15	1,510	0,255
	Running shoes	33	4,23	1,860	0,324
	Drilling machine	43	5,63	1,332	0,203
	Television	31	5,58	1,382	0,248
	Total	142	5,17	1,606	0,135
Consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	35	3,52	1,863	0,315
	Running shoes	33	1,84	1,007	0,175
	Drilling machine	43	2,85	1,893	0,289
	Television	31	2,67	1,575	0,283
	Total	142	2,74	1,735	0,146
User-generated encyclopaedia	Bicycle	35	2,42	1,621	0,274
	Running shoes	33	1,73	1,257	0,219
	Drilling machine	43	2,62	1,772	0,270
	Television	31	1,94	1,156	0,208
	Total	142	2,21	1,531	0,129

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Product review website	Between Groups	43,588	3	14,529	6,266	0,001
	Within Groups	319,961	138	2,319		
	Total	363,549	141			
Consumer-to-consumer market	Between Groups	49,005	3	16,335	6,004	0,001
	Within Groups	375,469	138	2,721		

	Total	424,474	141			
User-generated encyclopaedia	Between Groups	18,856	3	6,285	2,782	0,043
	Within Groups	311,842	138	2,26		
	Total	330,699	141			

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

	(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Product review website	Bicycle	Running shoes	0,92035	0,36946	0,107
		Drilling machine	-0,48029	0,34665	0,591
		Television	-0,43303	0,37555	0,723
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-0,92035	0,36946	0,107
		Drilling machine	-1,40063*	0,35239	0,002
		Television	-1,35337*	0,38086	0,007
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	0,48029	0,34665	0,591
		Running shoes	1,40063*	0,35239	0,002
		Television	0,04726	0,35876	0,999
	Television	Bicycle	0,43303	0,37555	0,723
		Running shoes	1,35337*	0,38086	0,007
		Drilling machine	-0,04726	0,35876	0,999
Consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	Running shoes	1,68543*	0,40023	0,001
		Drilling machine	0,67497	0,37551	0,361
		Television	0,85714	0,40682	0,223
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-1,68543*	0,40023	0,001
		Drilling machine	-1,01045	0,38174	0,077
		Television	-0,82828	0,41257	0,263
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	-0,67497	0,37551	0,361
		Running shoes	1,01045	0,38174	0,077
		Television	0,18217	0,38864	0,974
	Television	Bicycle	-0,85714	0,40682	0,223
		Running shoes	0,82828	0,41257	0,263
		Drilling machine	-0,18217	0,38864	0,974
User-generated encyclopaedia	Bicycle	Running shoes	0,69654	0,36475	0,306
		Drilling machine	-0,19635	0,34222	0,954

		Television	0,48833	0,37075	0,63
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-0,69654	0,36475	0,306
		Drilling machine	-0,89288	0,34789	0,091
		Television	-0,20821	0,37599	0,959
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	0,19635	0,34222	0,954
		Running shoes	0,89288	0,34789	0,091
		Television	0,68467	0,35418	0,296
	Television	Bicycle	-0,48833	0,37075	0,63
		Running shoes	0,20821	0,37599	0,959
		Drilling machine	-0,68467	0,35418	0,296

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Including process steps, step one:

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Information search, product review site	Bicycle	34	5	1,842	0,316
	Running shoes	33	3,45	2,063	0,359
	Drilling machine	43	5,35	1,811	0,276
	TV	31	5,35	1,762	0,316
	Total	141	4,82	2,005	0,169
Information search, consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	34	4,09	2,151	0,369
	Running shoes	33	1,91	1,234	0,215
	Drilling machine	43	3	2,000	0,305
	TV	31	3,13	2,012	0,361
	Total	141	3,04	2,019	0,170
Information search, user generated encyclopaedia	Bicycle	34	2,53	1,926	0,330
	Running shoes	33	1,88	1,431	0,249
	Drilling machine	43	3	1,988	0,303
	TV	31	2,16	1,214	0,218
	Total	141	2,44	1,742	0,147

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Information search,	Between Groups	83,521	3	27,840	7,962	0,000

product review site	Within Groups	479,046	137	3,497		
	Total	562,567	140			
Information search, consumer-to-consumer market	Between Groups	79,876	3	26,625	7,430	0,000
	Within Groups	490,946	137	3,584		
	Total	570,823	140			
Information search, user generated encyclopaedia	Between Groups	26,558	3	8,853	3,046	0,031
	Within Groups	398,179	137	2,906		
	Total	424,738	140			

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

	(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Information search, product review site	Bicycle	Running shoes	1,545*	0,457	0,012
		Drilling machine	-0,349	0,429	0,882
		Television	-0,355	0,464	0,900
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-1,545*	0,457	0,012
		Drilling machine	-1,894*	0,433	0,000
		Television	-1,900*	0,468	0,001
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	0,349	0,429	0,882
		Running shoes	1,894*	0,433	0,000
		Television	-0,006	0,441	1,000
	Television	Bicycle	0,355	0,464	0,900
		Running shoes	1,900*	0,468	0,001
		Drilling machine	0,006	0,441	1,000
Information search, consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	Running shoes	2,179*	0,463	0,000
		Drilling machine	1,088	0,434	0,104
		Television	0,959	0,47	0,249
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-2,179*	0,463	0,000
		Drilling machine	-1,091	0,438	0,107
		Television	-1,22	0,473	0,089
Information search, user generated encyclopaedia	Running shoes	Bicycle	-0,651	0,417	0,489
		Drilling machine	-1,121*	0,395	0,049
		Television	-0,283	0,426	0,932
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	0,471	0,391	0,695
		Running shoes	1,121*	0,395	0,049

	Television	0,839	0,402	0,230

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Step two

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Evaluation - product review site	Bicycle	35	5,17	1,757	0,297
	Running shoes	32	4,34	1,994	0,352
	Drilling machine	43	5,79	1,473	0,225
	TV	31	5,81	1,424	0,256
	Total	141	5,31	1,749	0,147
Evaluation - consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	35	3,20	2,084	0,352
	Running shoes	33	1,73	1,008	0,176
	Drilling machine	42	2,88	1,978	0,305
	TV	31	2,42	1,669	0,300
	Total	141	2,59	1,825	0,154

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Evaluation, product review site	Between Groups	48,124	3	16,041	5,781	0,001
	Within Groups	380,145	137	2,775		
	Total	428,270	140			
Evaluation, consumer-to-consumer market	Between Groups	42,043	3	14,014	4,527	0,005
	Within Groups	424,099	137	3,096		
	Total	466,142	140			

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

	(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Evaluation, product review site	Bicycle	Running shoes	0,828	0,407	0,253
		Drilling machine	-0,619	0,379	0,449
		Television	-0,635	0,411	0,498
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-0,828	0,407	0,253
		Drilling machine	-1,447*	0,389	0,004
		Television	-1,463*	0,420	0,009
	Drilling machine	Bicycle	0,619	0,379	0,449
		Running shoes	1,447*	0,389	0,004
		Television	-0,016	0,392	1,000
	Television	Bicycle	0,635	0,411	0,498
		Running shoes	1,463*	0,420	0,009
		Drilling machine	0,016	0,392	1,000
Evaluation, consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	Running shoes	1,473*	0,427	0,010
		Drilling machine	0,319	0,403	0,890
		Television	0,781	0,434	0,360
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-1,473*	0,427	0,010
		Drilling machine	-1,154	0,409	0,051
		Television	-0,692	0,440	0,483

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Step three

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Purchase, consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	35	3,31	2,097	0,354
	Running shoes	33	1,88	1,139	0,198
	Drilling machine	43	2,7	2,053	0,313
	Television	31	2,45	1,823	0,327
	Total	142	2,61	1,89	0,159

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Purchase, consumer-to-consumer market	Between Groups	36,11	3	12,037	3,551	0,016
	Within Groups	467,805	138	3,39		

	Total	503,915	141

Multiple Comparisons

Scheffe

	(I) Product	(J) Product	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Purchase, consumer-to-consumer market	Bicycle	Running shoes	1,435*	0,447	0,019
		Drilling machine	0,617	0,419	0,541
		Television	0,863	0,454	0,311
	Running shoes	Bicycle	-1,435*	0,447	0,019
		Drilling machine	-0,819	0,426	0,301
		Television	-0,573	0,461	0,672

8. Appendix, main study

8.1. Appendix table 5

Paired Samples Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
step1_index	3,43	142	0,977	0,082
step2_index	3,46	142	1,018	0,085
step1_index	3,43	142	0,977	0,082
step3_index	3,50	142	1,082	0,091
step1_index	3,43	142	0,977	0,082
step4_index	2,93	142	1,266	0,106
step2_index	3,47	143	1,015	0,085
step3_index	3,50	143	1,079	0,090
step2_index	3,47	143	1,015	0,085
step4_index	2,93	143	1,262	0,106
step3_index	3,50	143	1,079	0,090
step4_index	2,93	143	1,262	0,106

Paired Samples Test						
	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
step1_index - step2_index	-0,03	0,614	0,052	-0,611	141	0,542
step1_index - step3_index	-0,07	0,812	0,068	-1,014	141	0,312
step1_index - step4_index	0,50	1,189	0,100	5,039	141	0,000
step2_index - step3_index	-0,03	0,554	0,046	-0,638	142	0,524
step2_index - step4_index	0,54	1,062	0,089	6,071	142	0,000
step3_index - step4_index	0,57	1,109	0,093	6,128	142	0,000

8.2. Appendix table 6

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error
Information search - producer's website	4,69	141	1,924	0,162
Evaluation - producer's website	5,34	141	1,874	0,158
Purchase - producer's website	5,32	141	1,895	0,160
Post-purchase - producer's website	3,60	141	2,107	0,177
Information search - distributor's website	5,73	141	1,463	0,123
Evaluation - distributor's website	5,69	140	1,546	0,131
Purchase - distributor's website	5,50	140	1,707	0,144
Post-purchase - distributor's website	3,59	142	2,046	0,172
Information search - product review site	4,83	140	2,011	0,170
Evaluation - product review site	5,32	140	1,752	0,148
Purchase - product review site	5,43	141	1,902	0,160
Post-purchase - product review site	3,75	140	2,109	0,178
Information search - discussion forum	3,92	139	2,018	0,171
Purchase - discussion forum	4,22	139	2,337	0,198
Post-purchase - discussion forum	4,29	141	2,344	0,197
Information search - consumer-to-consumer market	3,04	140	2,025	0,171
Evaluation - consumer-to-consumer market	2,58	140	1,827	0,154
Purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	2,61	141	1,897	0,160
Post-purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	2,16	141	1,486	0,125
Information search - specialized blog	2,92	140	1,855	0,157
Evaluation - specialized blog	3,07	139	1,902	0,161
Purchase - specialized blog	3,43	139	2,278	0,193
Post-purchase - specialized blog	3,56	140	2,166	0,183
Information search - user generated encyclopaedia	2,44	140	1,748	0,148
Evaluation - user generated encyclopaedia	2,14	140	1,601	0,135
Purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	2,03	141	1,599	0,135
Post-purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	1,94	141	1,576	0,133
Information search - social networing sites	2,31	139	1,517	0,129
Evaluation - social networing sites	2,12	139	1,537	0,130

Only variables showing significant differences when compared with other online platforms are included.

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
step1_index - step2_index	-0,65	1,660	0,140	-4,666	140	0,000
Information search - producer's website - Evaluation - producer's website	-0,63	1,955	0,165	-3,835	140	0,000
Information search - producer's website - Purchase - producer's website	1,09	2,430	0,205	5,301	140	0,000
Information search - producer's website - Post-purchase - producer's website	1,74	2,474	0,208	8,377	141	0,000
Evaluation - producer's website - Post-purchase - producer's website	2,16	2,119	0,178	12,082	140	0,000
Information search - distributor's website - Post-purchase - distributor's website	0,19	1,256	0,106	1,750	139	0,082
Evaluation - distributor's website - Purchase - distributor's website	2,11	2,126	0,178	11,801	141	0,000
Evaluation - distributor's website - Post-purchase - distributor's website	1,92	2,220	0,187	10,279	140	0,000
Purchase - distributor's website - Post-purchase - distributor's website	-0,49	1,505	0,127	-3,874	139	0,000
Information search - product review site - Evaluation - product review site	-0,61	2,104	0,177	-3,443	140	0,001
Information search - product review site - Purchase - product review site	1,07	2,619	0,221	4,841	139	0,000
Information search - product review site - Post-purchase - product review site	1,56	2,314	0,196	7,961	139	0,000
Evaluation - product review site - Post-purchase - product review site	1,66	2,532	0,213	7,782	140	0,000
Purchase - product review site - Post-purchase - product review site	-0,30	2,016	0,171	-1,725	138	0,087
Information search - discussion forum - Purchase - discussion forum	-0,41	2,493	0,210	-1,959	140	0,052
Information search - discussion forum - Post-purchase - discussion forum	0,46	1,391	0,118	3,950	139	0,000
Information search - consumer-to-consumer market - Evaluation - consumer-to-consumer market	0,43	1,465	0,123	3,449	140	0,001
Information search - consumer-to-consumer market - Purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	0,87	1,839	0,155	5,631	140	0,000
Information search - consumer-to-consumer market - Post-purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	0,42	1,773	0,149	2,802	140	0,006

Evaluation - consumer-to-consumer market - Post-purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	0,44	1,952	0,164	2,709	141	0,008
Purchase - consumer-to-consumer market - Post-purchase - consumer-to-consumer market	-0,56	2,022	0,171	-3,302	139	0,001
Information search - specialized blog - Purchase - specialized blog	-0,65	2,185	0,185	-3,519	139	0,001
Information search - specialized blog - Post-purchase - specialized blog	-0,36	1,251	0,106	-3,390	138	0,001
Evaluation - specialized blog - Purchase - specialized blog	-0,48	1,848	0,156	-3,063	139	0,003
Evaluation - specialized blog - Post-purchase - specialized blog	0,31	1,079	0,091	3,368	139	0,001
Information search - user generated encyclopaedia - Evaluation - user generated encyclopaedia	0,41	1,231	0,104	3,968	140	0,000
Information search - user generated encyclopaedia - Purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	0,50	1,873	0,158	3,147	140	0,002
Information search - user generated encyclopaedia - Post-purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	0,14	0,771	0,065	2,185	140	0,031
Evaluation - user generated encyclopaedia - Purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	0,24	1,599	0,135	1,791	140	0,075
Evaluation - user generated encyclopaedia - Post-purchase - user generated encyclopaedia	0,19	1,069	0,091	2,142	138	0,034
Information search - social networking sites - Evaluation - social networking sites	-0,65	1,660	0,140	-4,666	140	0,000

Richness of product information

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error
rich_c2c	2,87	142	1,221	0,103
rich_prod	5,71	142	1,399	0,117
rich_revi	4,43	142	1,374	0,115
rich_encyc	3,18	142	1,527	0,128
rich_sns	2,41	142	1,233	0,103
rich_speb	4,62	141	1,626	0,137
rich_dist	5,07	141	1,335	0,112

Paired Samples Test						
	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
rich_c2c - rich_prod	-2,84	1,967	0,165	-17,197	141	0,000
rich_c2c - rich_revi	-1,56	1,597	0,134	-11,668	141	0,000
rich_encyc - rich_prod	-2,53	2,140	0,180	-14,099	141	0,000
rich_encyc - rich_revi	-1,26	2,092	0,176	-7,159	141	0,000
rich_sns - rich_prod	-3,30	2,015	0,169	-19,511	141	0,000
rich_sns - rich_revi	-2,02	1,795	0,151	-13,443	141	0,000
rich_speb - rich_dist	-0,45	2,003	0,169	-2,691	140	0,008
rich_speb - rich_encyc	1,45	1,736	0,146	9,918	140	0,000

8.3. Appendix table 7

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error
is	0,36	141	0,193	0,016
ev	0,33	141	0,196	0,017
pur	0,35	141	0,219	0,018
post	0,50	141	0,211	0,018

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
is - ev	0,03	0,128	0,011	2,866	140	0,005
is - pur	0,01	0,176	0,015	0,963	140	0,337
is - post	-0,14	0,220	0,019	-7,432	140	0,000
ev - pur	-0,02	0,152	0,013	-1,255	141	0,212
ev - post	-0,17	0,212	0,018	-9,445	141	0,000
pur - post	-0,15	0,222	0,019	-8,173	141	0,000

9. Appendix 3: The survey

Internetanvändning

Tack för att du tar dig tid att svara på denna enkät!

Enkäten handlar om hur du som konsument söker information om produkter på Internet. Du behöver inte uppge ditt namn, men svaren kommer likväl behandlas med total anonymitet och användas endast i utbildningssyfte.

Enkäten består av 9 frågor och tar ungefär 10 minuter att svara på.

Denna enkät är en del av en undersökning utförd för en C-uppsats vid Handelshögskolan i Stockholm. Din medverkan betyder mycket för oss, och du har dessutom chans att vinna trisslotter som tack för ditt deltagande!

Fråga 1: Hur troligt är det att du använder Internet för att söka information om en produkt?

Inte alls troligt						Mycket troligt
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Fråga 2: Antag att du ska köpa en cykel och att du som första steg vill ta reda på vilka alternativ som finns på marknaden. Hur troligt är det att du använder någon av följande webbsidor när du söker information om vilka alternativ som finns på marknaden?

	Inte alls troligt						Mycket troligt
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Annat:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Fråga 3: När du har en bild av vilka produkter som finns på marknaden vill du välja ut några produkter att titta närmare på. Hur troligt är det att du använder någon av följande webbsidor när du söker information för att kunna begränsa antalet cyklar du ska undersöka närmare?

	Inte alls troligt						Mycket troligt
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Annat:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Annat:

Fråga 4: Ett antal cyklar återstår innan du tar ett beslut. Hur troligt är det att du besöker någon av följande webbsidor när du söker information om ett antal cyklar för att kunna ta ett beslut om vilken du ska köpa?

	Inte alls troligt						Mycket troligt
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)							
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)							
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)							
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)							
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)							
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)							
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)							
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)							
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)							
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)							
Annat:							

Fråga 5: Anta nu att du har köpt en cykel och att du efter köpet börjar fundera på om du gjorde rätt val. Hur troligt är det att du besöker någon av följande typer av webbsidor när du söker information för att i efterhand undersöka om du valde rätt?

	Inte alls troligt						Mycket troligt
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)							
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)							
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)							
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)							
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)							
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)							
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)							
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)							
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)							
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)							
Annat:							

Fråga 6: När du söker information om produkter, hur **pålitlig** tycker du att informationen på följande typer av webbsidor är?

	Opålitlig						Pålitlig
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)							
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)							
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)							
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)							
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)							
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)							
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner,							

kändisar eller andra)							
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)							
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)							
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)							

Fråga 7: När du söker information om produkter, hur **djupgående** tycker du att informationen på följande typer av webbsidor är?

	Ytlig						Djupgående
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)							
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)							
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)							
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)							
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)							
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)							
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)							
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)							
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)							
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)							

Fråga 7: När du söker information om produkter, hur **omfattande** tycker du att informationen på följande typer av webbsidor är?

	Begränsad						Omfattande
Tillverkarens webbsida (t.ex. crescent.se)							
Återförsäljares webbsida (t.ex cykloteket.se)							
Produktjämförelse-webbsida (t.ex. prisjakt.se)							
Diskussionsforum (t.ex. swebikers.se)							
Webbaserad köp & säljmarknad (t.ex. blocket.se)							
Specialiserad blogg (t.ex. Cykelbloggar)							
Personlig blogg (t.ex. vänner, kändisar eller andra)							
Användargenerade uppslagsverk (t.ex. wikipedia.se)							
Sociala nätverkstjänst (t.ex. facebook.com)							
Sida för delning av videoklipp (t.ex. youtube.com)							

Fråga 9:
Denna fråga handlar om risk. Var vänlig markera till vilken grad du tar hänsyn till följande när du överväger köp av en cykel:

	Tar inte alls hänsyn till						Tar stor hänsyn till
Att inte tröttna på produkten after köpet							
Att inte gilla den så mycket som jag förväntade mig							
Att inte använda den så mycket som jag förväntade mig							
Att köpet påverkar min finansiella förmåga att göra							

andra köp							
Att det kan bli ett fall i priser snart after att jag köpt produkten	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att det kan finnas oväntade problem med prestanda	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att produkten inte gör de saker jag förväntade mig att den skulle	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att produkten jag tänker köpa är dyr	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att jag inte har mycket erfarenheter med att köpa denna produkt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att beslutet att köpa denna produkt kan vara riskfyllt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Att det är en tekniskt komplex produkt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Socio-demografi

I snitt, hur mycket tid spenderar du på Internet under en dag?

	0	2	4	7	9	12	14	16	19	21	24
Antal timmar											

Är du?

- ○ Man
- ○ Kvinna

Ålder

Är du?

- ○ Studerande, gymnasiet
- ○ Studerande, högskola/universitet
- ○ Förvärvsarbetande
- ○ Arbetslös
- ○ Pensionär
- ○ Annat

Om du vill vara med i utlottningen av trisslotter, vänligen skriv din mailadress nedan.

Tack för din medverkan!
Tryck på pilen nedan för att skicka in dina svar.