

PECULIARITIES OF ONLINE USER'S CONTENT SEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF INBOUND MARKETING

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Abstract. The article addresses the issue of the distribution of users browsing the internet for content in a specific format through alternative content delivery channels in the context of inbound marketing. The problem being addressed is part of a broader problem with the formation of traffic to an organization's website. The theoretical part of the work presents the concept of inbound marketing and analyzes the theoretical aspects of its tactical activities, such as content marketing, search engine marketing, and social media marketing. Based on the theoretical research, the scientific hypothesis is formulated – there are links between the desired content format and the choice of content search and consumption channel. The research methodology consists of data collection by survey method and hypothesis testing using Cochran's Q test. Empirical research has shown links between the content format sought and the channels for searching and consuming content. Although in almost all cases the search for video and audio content is dominated by search engines, evaluating other content delivery channels reveals a significant specialty of users' web browsing.

Keywords: inbound marketing, content marketing, content format, search channels, consumer behavior, online user, social media marketing.

JEL Classification: M31, L81, L82, O33.

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1. Introduction

Marketing management, especially marketing communication management, is becoming increasingly complicated. Organizations have access to unlimited tools and channels of interaction with users provided by the digital space. There is a lack of knowledge on using those tools and channels most effectively for the organization's marketing purposes. This is due to the rapid development of online services, which has led to new marketing approaches, concepts, and strategies. Businesses are increasingly aware that their communication with consumers must be geared to providing added value, not limited to classic promotion functions. These are the characteristics of so-called content marketing, which aims to provide users with timely, relevant, and valuable content. The scientists analyzing social media marketing (Ahmad et al., 2016; Appel et al., 2020; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Lei et al., 2017; Radzi et al., 2018; Zhang & Li, 2019), inbound marketing (Baranchenko et al., 2019; Dakouan et al., 2019; Kovalenko & Kuzmenko, 2020; Soegoto & Simbolon, 2018; Vinerean, 2017) or online user

behavior (Davidavičienė et al., 2017; Davidavičienė et al., 2021; Davidavičienė et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2018; Müller & Christandl, 2019; Ritz et al., 2019; Sabaitytė et al., 2019) but still the lack of complex approach in studying the online user search behavior exist.

It should be noted that the concept of content marketing is widely used as the basis for another, a broader concept that focuses on actions that target the interest and intentions of consumers in a particular product, brand, or organization – inbound marketing. Proponents of applying these concepts to their work face a number of challenges. It is no longer enough for organizations to have a website and host information about their products. Organizations are forced to build entire ecosystems based on the creation of the most demanding content, selecting the most appropriate content format for users, content delivery channels, and solutions that direct users to the organization's website from other ecosystem channels. It is likely that all of these elements are interrelated and form the framework for consumer decisions regarding content retrieval and consumption. (needs further expansion here).

The latter assumption forms the basis of the problem of this study: Whether the format of the content sought determines the choice of channels for content search and consumption. The paper aims to reveal the peculiarities of online users' content search in the context of inbound marketing in terms of association of choice of search channels and content format.

To achieve the paper's aim, the following methods were applied – literature analysis, comparison, survey, and Cochran's Q test.

The article consists of three structural parts. The first part presents the theoretical background for solving the problem, the second presents the methodology of empirical research, and the third presents the results of the empirical research and discussion.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Content formats, defined by the concept of content marketing

Marketers see content as a bridge that can connect an organization with customers to achieve value in communication (Bezbaruah & Trivedi, 2020). A more detailed analysis of the concept of content or digital content is appropriate for a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of content marketing. Vinerean (2017) distinguishes tactical content marketing solutions: blog posts, e-books, templates, infographics, videos, podcasts, guides, kits, advice sheets and checklists, webinars, white papers, case studies, surveys/research results, and user-generated content. The author also emphasizes that in addition to the measures listed, the basic forms of content, such as images, video, text, and sound, should also be mentioned. It must be emphasized that the classification of some of the tactical solutions listed is to be criticized, e.g., user-generated content belongs to a whole series of specific forms of content that have their own, rather specific, purpose, explaining only to the extent that it is user-generated content in any form. However, depending on the media used, user-generated content on social media can take forms such as photos, links, texts, videos, pictures, or events (Moser, 2016). According to Patruțiu Baltes (2015), content, in the context of content marketing, takes the following forms: consumer magazines, print or online newsletters, digital content, websites or microsites, white papers, webcasts or webinars, podcasts, video portals or series, personal road exhibitions, round tables, interactive online events, e. letters. According to Mansour and Barandas (2017), content marketing tactical decisions consist of the website content, blog posts, e-mail newsletters, infographics, social media chats, podcasts, video and visual content, webinars, books, and downloadable white papers. The classification of content by developer distinguishes between user-generated content and firm-generated content. According to Human et al. (2018), based on Krumm et al. (2008) and Cha et al. (2007), the term user-generated content describes the content in any

form: video, blogs, discussion forum posts, digital images, audio files, or other media generated by users of internet systems and services or users and are publicly available to other users. Meanwhile, content created by a company is content in any form: video, e-mail, blogs, discussion forum entries, digital images, audio files, or other media created by businesses and addressed to all stakeholders (Human et al., 2018). Thus, according to the definitions provided, user-generated and branded content differs only in the creator but not in the form of the content, the properties of the content, or the content distribution channels, so all forms of content can be attributed to both branded and user-generated content. There is a lack of clarity and consistency in the analysis of tactical content marketing decisions. The lists of tactical decisions of the analyzed authors include, in addition to the basic forms of content, those that are more relevant to the means of communication or channels than the content (e.g., website, blog, e-mail) or integrated content forms, i.e., the content consists of several basic forms of content (white papers, podcasts, recordings of discussion forms, infographics, etc.) (Davidavičienė et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2020; Volk & Zeffass, 2021). Also, content classified by a developer (user-generated content) falls into the same categories and is presented as if it were a different content format, but it is clear that user-generated content can take the same forms and formats as branded content, and, of course, has specific forms of content that are unique to it, e.g., ranking, reviews and so on. For clarity, it is necessary to clarify the definition and classification of content in the context of digital content. The term "content" originated from publishing, where words, images, or moving images must be of interest enough to target users to use the publishing platform, be it a newspaper, magazine, TV, or radio channel (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Adapting this concept to the internet and digital marketing, Handley and Chapman (2011) argue that "content is everything that is created and uploaded to a website: words, images, or other things there." Halvorson and Rach (2012) suggests perceiving content as "what a user comes to (your website) to read, learn, see or experience." Thus, the content concept includes communicative text, image, video, audio, and other media designed to communicate with external visitors. This is the opposite of non-communicative media, which means that the concept of content does not include HTML code for web page functions. Content is also directed outward for communication with external visitors rather than internal communication with colleagues (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). Content is a combination of static content that shapes web pages, as well as dynamic rich media content that encourages interaction. Video content, podcasts, and user-generated content or interactive product selection solutions must also be treated as content that needs to be improved in order to attract visitors (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). This study will be limited to the basic formats of the content – image, video, text, sound and interactive

content, mixed content and VR content as emerging one additionally (Davidavičienė et al., 2021).

2.2. Content delivery channels in the context of inbound marketing

Clearly, as a holistic strategy, inbound marketing involves more than one marketing activity. The areas of activity related to inbound marketing presented by the authors vary. Opreana and Vinerean (2015) offers four inbound marketing activities – content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and brand-focused marketing communication. Patrutiu-Baltes (2016) five – personalized e-mails, social media marketing, SEO, blog posts, visual advertising, Dakouan et al. (2019) and Chaffey and Smith (2013) only three – content marketing, social media marketing, and search marketing. Despite the varying number of marketing activities related to inbound marketing, all the analyzed sources are dominated by content marketing, social media marketing, and search marketing. Elements such as personalized e-mails, blog posts, display advertising, and brand-focused marketing communications remain the subject of discussion. It should be noted that some authors blog posts quite rightly attribute to content marketing tactical decisions (Human et al., 2018; Mansour & Barandas, 2017), which makes attempts to single them out as independent marketing activities illogical. The concept of brand-focused marketing communication, in turn is also integrated into the concept of content marketing through the desired consumer response – engagement in the brand relationship (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Wong et al., 2015). E-mail marketing, depending on its use with the permission of the user, can be classified as an inbound marketing component. Patrutiu-Baltes (2016) classification of image advertising as an inbound marketing component can be considered quite controversial – on the one hand, the nature of advertising is invasive, on the other hand, modern targeting technologies and methods such as contextual targeting or remarketing using collected data about the user, allow to make unique offers that quite accurately meet the needs or interests demonstrated by the user at that moment. However, the fact that, for example, a remarketing solution can be portrayed to the consumer even after he has purchased the product sought undoubtedly highlights the invasive nature of advertising through interference with the consumer's environment when advertising is no longer relevant. At the same time, the user can feel tracked and harassed. In view of the above arguments, image advertising in the research will not be considered as an element of inbound marketing. Chaffey and Smith (2017) presents inbound marketing as a complex system of activities, channels, tools, and flows in which all activities, from brand content development to marketing observation, social listening, and engagement, focus on generating traffic to the so-called content hub, the role of which can be assigned to the website, the blog and the portal. So the search engines that are related to search marketing and all kind of social media can be considered

as alternative channels of distribution of the visitors while seeking for the certain content related to organization.

For the purposes of the research, it is also appropriate to analyze social media as alternative channels for searching and using content.

Social media is a valuable channel for marketers because it can strengthen a brand by sharing positive comments about products or content, thus creating a viral effect called "strengthening social media" (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). The effect of this social reinforcement is that social media users are more exposed to content that has been shared and endorsed by other users (Zhang et al., 2018). These unique features of social media provide opportunities for marketers to drive consumer engagement and build lasting relationships (Shawky et al., 2019). The challenges in the context of social media use are that consumers do not want to be hampered by branded ads and unwanted branded content or products in the social space (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Social networks can be categorized according to the primary purpose and target audience: personal and professional (Appel et al., 2020; Davidavičienė et al., 2017; Zhang & Li, 2019). Because the implied context of the investigation is defined as durable goods intended for the final consumer, it is appropriate to use personal social networks. In presenting the social media classification. Chaffey and Smith (2013) offers the so-called social media radar, which lists the types of social media arranged in order of relevance to the organization's website, which is inversely proportional to the need for content syndication between different platforms. Thus, the types of social media listed are social networks, social broadcasting platforms, social search platforms, social commenting, social niche communities, social customer service, social publishing platforms, social knowledge platforms, and social bookmarking. Some social media are irrelevant in the context of digital marketing, such as, e.g., social bookmarking and social search platforms (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Kovalenko & Kuzmenko, 2020; Westermann et al., 2019). Due to a large number of categories, using them all in the study is a rather complicated task and will therefore be limited to social networks, social broadcasting platforms, and social knowledge platforms.

3. Methodology

In order to investigate the links between content search and consumption channel selection and the content format, the scientific hypothesis H1 – exists on the links between content search and consumption channel selection in the context of inbound marketing (see Figure 1). A consumer survey was conducted to test the hypothesis. The survey was conducted among consumers of durable products in Lithuania. Cochran's Q test was chosen to test the nominal data collected during the survey, considering the comparison of dependent samples. Test H0 – There is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of channel choices depending on the content format sought. H1 – There are statistically significant differences in the

distribution of channel choices depending on the content format sought.

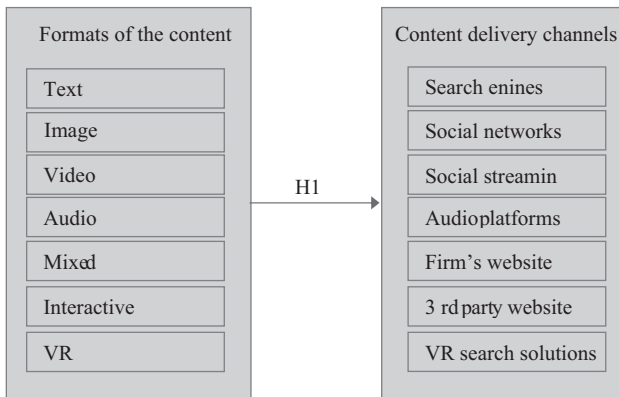


Figure 1. Test Model: factors affecting the choice of content search channel

It should be emphasized that when looking for significant differences between content and search channel choices depending on the content format you are targeting, the same content search and consumption channel is compared, but under different circumstances. In this case – different content formats.

4. Results and discussion

To test the hypothesis: H1 – the choice of content search/consumption channel depends on the content format preferences, it is assumed that in the relationship between content form and content search and consumption channel selection, respondents will show differences by linking a particular content form to the most appropriate channel alternatives. Three hundred thirty-six respondents participated in the research. The gender of respondents distributes as follows – 31% men and 69% women. Age structure of respondents: less than 18 years old – 1.5%, from 18 to 24 years old – 39.3%, from 25 to 34 years old – 14.6%, 35 to 44 years old – 27.3%, from 45 to 54 – 12.2%, 55 to 64 years old – 3.6%, 65 and more – 1.8% of respondents. For browsing and content use 88.7% use smartphones, 65% laptops, 14.5% tablets, 19.6% desktops, television – 15.1%, VR device – 1.2%. Respondents selected channels for video (VD), audio (AU), text (TXT), images (IM), interactive (IN), mixed (MX), and VR content. The alternatives of choice were search engine (SE), social networks (SN), social video streaming platforms (SVS), social knowledge (SKN), social

image streaming platforms (SIS), organization website (OW), third-party websites (TW), audio platforms (AP), VR search solutions (VRS).

In most cases, search engines can be identified as the dominant search channel by users searching for text, images, interactive content, mixed content, or VR content (see Figure 2). A notable exception is a search for video content and audio content. In these cases, social broadcasting platforms are gaining importance. Probably due to the high level of specialization in the presentation of this content. Paradoxically, respondents noted social video streaming platforms not only in the case of video content but also in the case of audio content. It should be noted that social video broadcasting platforms clearly differ in their importance from audio broadcasting platforms. This can be explained by the fact that the study is conducted in the context of marketing, i.e., consumers identify content with a product or brand, and such content is more likely on channels like youtube than, e.g. Spotify. Where audio content is likely to be equated with the entertainment purpose of the content expressed through music.

Excluding search engines and comparing other content search and consumption channels (see Figure 2), it can be seen that in the case of textual content, the role of the organization’s website and third-party websites is highlighted, as are social knowledge platforms. Social image streaming platforms are noticeably more important for image retrieval. In the case of mixed content, consumers tend to pay attention to social networks and social broadcasting platforms. Although limited in use, VR content would be searched through search engines, social video streaming platforms, and specialized search environments.

Looking for statistically significant differences (see Table 1), the application of the Cochran’s Q criterion was chosen for testing, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The hypothesis of an association is confirmed if statistical H_0 is rejected – there is no statistically significant difference between user choices.

In all cases, user choices vary statistically significantly depending on the form of content sought. Even though search engines dominate almost all searches for content forms, it is clear that the perceived purpose of content channels depends on the format of content sought by users. It should be noted that search engines are the only channel for search and not for content consumption, so this necessitates understanding how different content delivery channels relate to a particular form of content. To access textual content, users most expect it to be found

Table 1. Cochran’s Q test evaluating content search channels distribution

Indicator	SVS*	AP*	VRS*	SN*	SIS*	SE*	OW*	SKN*	TW*
N	336	336	336	336	336	336	336	336	336
Cochran’s Q	858.670	232.115	307.962	105.883	205.916	706.618	68.113	242.617	66.535
df	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Note: *evaluates channel selection in the context of VD, AU, TXT, IG, IN, MX, VR content search.

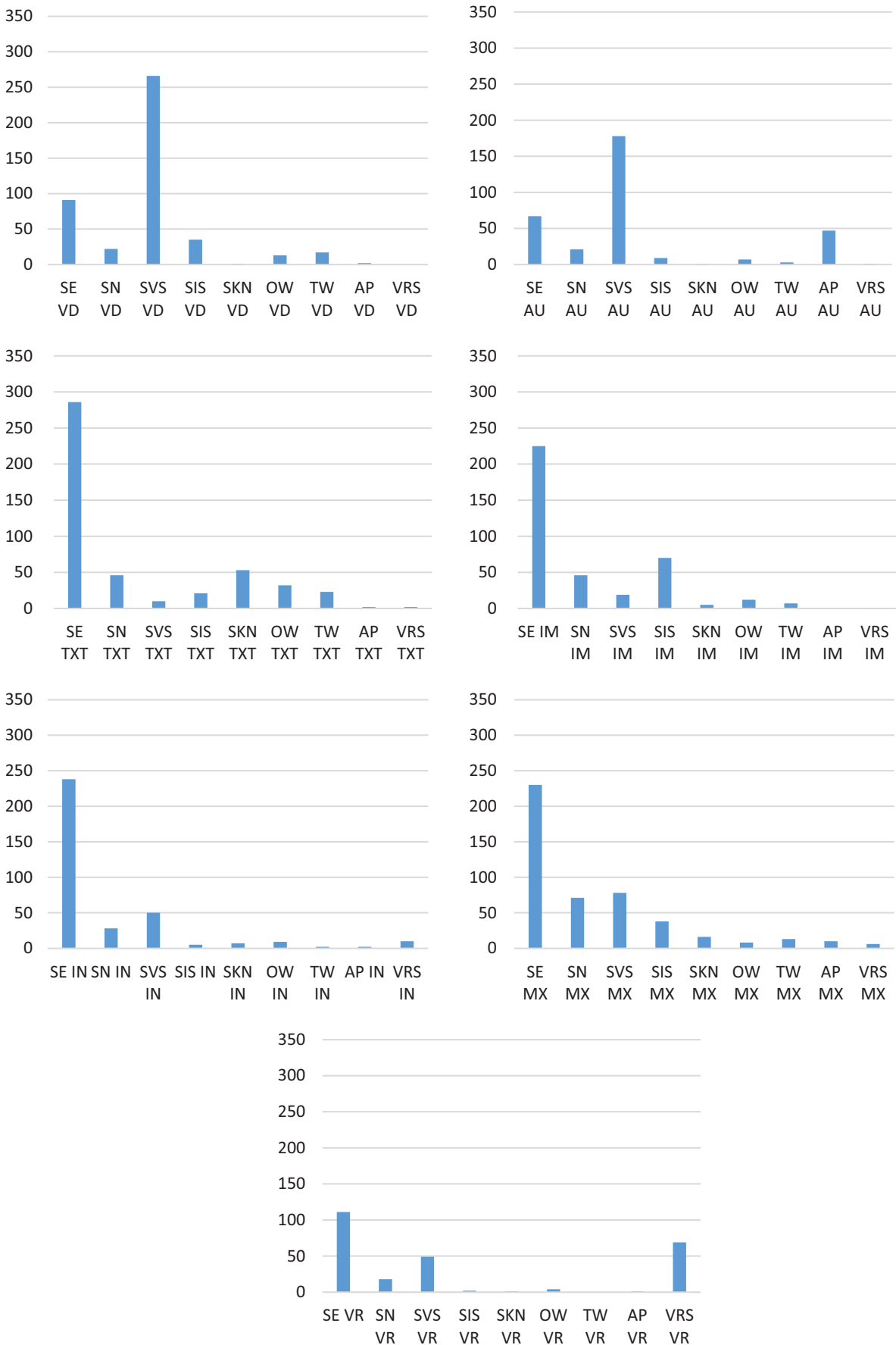


Figure 2. Distribution of preferences towards channels in the context of content formats

on the organization's websites, third-party websites, and social knowledge platforms such as wikis. In order to access video content or images, most users will expect them on appropriate specialized platforms for social streaming of videos or images, such as Youtube, Vimeo, Instagram, and Pinterest. It should be noted that mixed content is also most associated with social media, both on social networks and on social broadcasting platforms.

It can be stated that consumers' expectations regarding the content format also determine the choice of the content search channel, and hypothesis H1 has been confirmed. This is likely related to experience in finding and using content in the appropriate format in the most suitable environment. Regardless of the reasons, it is clear that organizations need to consider consumer preferences to create efficient content delivery ecosystems without neglecting the fact that the content format is closely linked to the function of the content expressed in its purpose.

5. Conclusions

In order to solve the problem, an analysis of the theoretical aspects was performed. The research identified the concept of inbound marketing and its main tactical activities, such as content marketing, social media marketing, and search engine marketing. Tactical inbound marketing activities define a set of channels for delivering content to consumers, consisting of business organizations and third-party websites, search engines, and social media. From the totality of social media, social networks, social broadcasting platforms, and social knowledge platforms were selected for the study. The analysis of the concept of content marketing allowed to refine the totality of the content formats, which resulted in the use of basic content formats – text, audio, video, and images, as well as formats such as interactive content, mixed content and VR content. A scientific hypothesis was put forward, which was tested using a survey method for data collection and Cochran's Q test to identify the links between the intended content format and the choice of content search and consumption channels in the context of inbound marketing.

Empirical research has found that there are links between the content format sought and the choice of content search and consumption channels. Research has shown that in most cases, search engines are the most commonly used search engine for content, except for video and audio content. Paradoxically, in the context of inbound marketing, social media, which falls into the category of social video broadcasting, is the most prominent source of audio content search. The role of an organization's website is best defined as a channel for delivering textual content.

The study's limitations are defined by the fact that no user behavior related to search engine functionalities directed at specialized content search has been studied. Also, the fact that only consumer browsing behavior in the context of durable goods has been studied.

Further research to extend the knowledge of content search peculiarities should be expanded to markets of other product categories and countries.

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