INBOUND MARKETING: THE IMPACT OF VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT,
ACTIVE LISTENING, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING
ON PURCHASE INTENTION AND WORD-OF-MOUTH INTENTION

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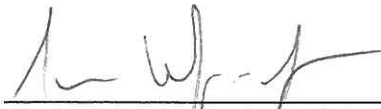P.O. Box 1346
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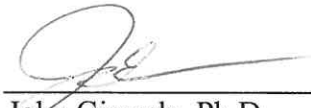
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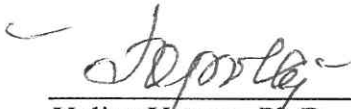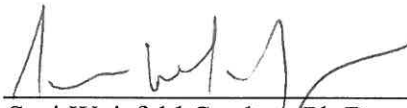
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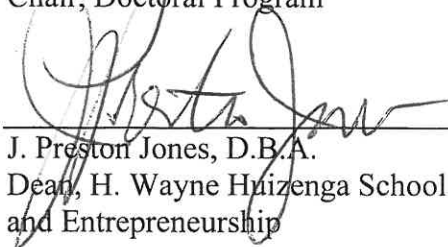
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Luis F. Casas

ABSTRACT

INBOUND MARKETING: THE IMPACT OF VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT,
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The widespread adoption of social electronic communications by consumers has created a marketing paradigm shift: from a traditional *marketing-to*, or *outbound* marketing paradigm, in which companies were focused on sending one-way messages to consumers through traditional media, to a new *marketing-with*, or *inbound* marketing paradigm, in which companies must instead focus on being visible online, attractive, and responsive to customers who are searching the Internet for their market offerings and can easily share their opinions and experiences with friends and strangers alike.

The purpose of this research is to study the impact of a company's inbound marketing practices on its marketing performance. Inbound marketing practices are measured by online visibility management, active listening, and community building. Marketing performance is measured by consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions. Researchers have examined the effect on business performance of some of these variables individually but no one has studied their simultaneous impact, which is what occurs in reality when a consumer searches online for a product or service and finds pages with customer comments and links to social communities.

Results from the empirical research performed in this study reveal that active listening had the largest effect on both purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention, followed by

community building and then visibility management. Consumer word-of-mouth intention was found to be a significant and very important mediator of the effect of perceived visibility management, active listening, and community building on consumer purchase intention, even fully mediating their effect in some cases.

This research contributes to the academic literature by developing and empirically testing a theoretical framework that could lead to a better comprehension, explanation and prediction of the effectiveness of these new tools. It also offers insights for marketers interested in understanding how inbound marketing initiatives and the use of electronic social communication tools affect consumer behavior.

DEDICATION

To Mariana; to our children, Mariana and Jordi, María Elena and Chris, Ana, Gabriela, and Luis; and to our grandchildren, Catalina, Natalia, and Harrison.

You are the reason I embarked on this journey more than five years ago, and the inspiration that kept me going through thick and thin.

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This document marks the culmination of a long and very fulfilling doctoral program. I am deeply grateful to many people who made this possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to study the impact of a company's inbound marketing

practices on its marketing performance. Inbound marketing practices will be measured by (1)

online visibility management, (2) active listening, and (3) community building. Marketing

performance will be measured by (1) consumers' purchase intentions and (2) word-of-mouth

intentions.

Sub Problems

1.   Visibility management: What is the effect of a firm's online visibility management on

     consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions?

2.   Active listening: What is the impact of a company's online active listening on

     consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions?

3.   Community building: What is the effect of a firm's online community building

     initiatives on consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions?

Background and Justification

The last few years have witnessed a revolutionary change in the way that consumers are

gathering information about products and services in order to make purchasing decisions.

Technological advances and breakthroughs in information technology, communications, and

social media, have empowered consumers with the ability to filter marketing messages, search

for information when and where they wish, and engage in electronic two-way conversations with firms as well as with other consumers.

This widespread adoption of social electronic communications by consumers is creating a marketing paradigm shift: from a traditional *marketing-to*, or *outbound* marketing paradigm, in which companies were focused on sending one-way messages to consumers, to a new *marketing-with*, or *inbound* marketing paradigm, in which companies must instead focus on being visible online, attractive, and responsive to customers who are searching the Internet for their market offerings (Halligan & Shah, 2010; Lusch & Vargo, 2009). "With the rise of a network economy, enabled by global telecommunications and ubiquitous computing, customers are part of an extended enterprise and co-producers of the firm's marketing" (Lusch & Vargo, 2009, p. 6).

A first critical aspect of this new inbound marketing paradigm is a company's ability to manage its online visibility: if a firm's product offering is not listed when a consumer is using a search engine, that company and its products do not exist for all practical purposes since they are not visible to searching consumers (Kim, Albuquerque, & Bronnenberg, 2011). Firms must strive to appear on the first page of search results and as close to the top of that first page as possible; this is *visibility management*.

A second critical aspect of inbound marketing is the ability of companies to manage their social media efforts. Larson and Watson (2011) propose a framework for analyzing the effect of social media on business performance by studying the social media-enabled relationships between a company and its stakeholders, specifically the customer/firm social media dyad, or "B@C" dyad (p. 5), in which firms communicate with customers (B2C), customers with firms (C2B), and customers with customers (C2C) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Firm/Customer "B@C" Social Media Dyad*

1. Firm-to-customer: traditional marketing/PR
2. Customer-to-firm: requests, complaints, suggestions
3. Development of community by firm: engagement, WOM marketing
4. Customer-to-customer: recommendations, reviews, collaboration, WOM
5. Firm monitoring of c-to-c content: customer comments, reactions

Note: Adapted from "The Value of Social Media: Toward Measuring Social Media Strategies" by K. Larson and R. T. Watson, 2011, p. 6.

One practical consequence is that companies now have the ability to receive and respond to customer requests, inquiries, and complaints (arrow 2) as well as proactively listen-in on customer-to-customer conversations (arrow 5); this is *active listening*.

The third component of this new paradigm involves the use of social media to promote positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and more easily develop and nurture online product and brand communities (arrow 3); this is *community building*.

This research aims to contribute to the literature in this incipient field by simultaneously exploring the effect of these three fundamental practices of inbound marketing—(1) visibility management, (2) active listening, and (3) community building—on the marketing performance of a business.

Researchers have examined the impact on business performance of some of these variables individually (Dellarocas, 2003; Ghose & Yang, 2009; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009) but no one has studied their simultaneous impact which is what occurs in reality when a consumer searches online for a product or service and finds pages with customer comments and links to social communities. Therefore, it is important to explore and develop theoretical frameworks that can lead to a better comprehension, explanation and prediction of the effectiveness of these new tools (Hunt, 2002).

Inbound marketing and social media are at the intersection of two distinct academic disciplines—marketing and information systems—which, added to the recentness of these developments, might help to explain the scarceness of published research. For example, scholars that study search engine performance tend to focus on the effectiveness of search results and are typically not interested in customer service or eWOM, and vice versa. This study proposes to address this gap in the current literature.

Furthermore, from a managerial point of view, marketing executives are faced with the decision of how to effectively jump on the search marketing and social media marketing bandwagons. Understanding the impact of visibility management, active listening, and community building on consumer behavior can guide companies in their inbound marketing efforts and help make more informed staffing and budget allocation decisions.

Independent Variables

The independent variables through which inbound marketing practices will be measured are (1) online visibility management, (2) online active listening, and (3) online community building.

Visibility Management

In today's digital marketing environment visibility management has become critically important. For instance, many people open their Internet browsers and start all of their online sessions on a search engine as their homepage (e.g., Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.). A recent study reported that 92% of online adults use search engines to find information online, making it one of the top two activities on the web (Purcell, 2011).

Consumers searching the Internet for products and services will naturally favor those that appear prominently in search results over those that don't (Brooks, 2004; Ghose & Yang, 2009; Pan et al., 2007; Rutz, Bucklin, & Sonnier, 2012). It is thus critical for companies to manage their visibility on the Internet through search engine marketing (SEM) to ensure that they are found by consumers who are searching the web using specific terms or keywords.

Active Listening

New technology and social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) enable consumers to reach out and talk directly to firms through electronic communications just like traditional help desk requests, complaints, or suggestions sent through postal mail, email, web-forms, or telephone calls ("Consumers embrace social media for brand feedback," July 14, 2011).

However, the proliferation of social media platforms and the volume of electronic communications presents a challenge for companies to listen actively and respond in a relevant and timely fashion to consumer inquiries, suggestions, and complaints (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). In fact, a recent study showed that many of these messages and questions unfortunately are going

unanswered ("Twitter users want businesses to answer them," June 14, 2011). In an effort to actively listen to consumers and thus be able to provide increased service quality some companies have established "mission control" centers to monitor the social media-sphere (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011) which could in turn lead to favorable behavioral intentions of their customers (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

This capability of companies to monitor C2C exchanges (i.e. actively listen) is one of the main benefits of social media which also extends to conversations regarding a firm's competitors (Larson & Watson, 2011). Since most consumer-generated content is available freely on social media sites across the Internet, companies can gain valuable information by listening-in to what consumers are saying about their competitors' product offerings: likes, dislikes, recommendations, comments, complaints, etc.

Community Building

Community/brand building is associated with numerous benefits. For instance, consumers who are integrated into a brand and/or product community help to spread the brand message, are more forgiving of product or service shortcomings, show higher product loyalty, are motivated to provide feedback to the company, constitute an important market for new products or line extensions, and become emotionally invested in the company's success (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002).

With social media, companies now have powerful communication tools at their disposal to create and nurture product and/or brand communities. Facebook pages, blogs, LinkedIn groups, product-specific wikis, and Ning networks (customized social networks similar to Facebook but with controlled membership), for example, can be used by companies to share

expertise with consumers, which is one of the most effective strategies for creating successful relationships (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006), potentially turning their customers into valuable part-time marketers (Gummesson, 2004).

Consumers exchange information on social media platforms regarding their firm/brand/product related opinions and experiences, which amounts to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), a very important outcome of activity on social media (Dellarocas, 2003; Jansen, et al., 2009; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Utilizing these communication tools, companies now have the capacity to promote and empower this eWOM. Studies have shown that eWOM has an effect on customers' perceptions of product value as well as their likelihood to recommend the product to others (Gruen, et al., 2006), and can have a significantly larger and longer lasting effect on customer acquisition than traditional marketing activities (Trusov, et al., 2009).

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables through which marketing performance will be measured are (1) consumer purchase intention and (2) consumer word-of-mouth intention.

Purchase Intention

This research's main objective is to study the impact of inbound marketing practices on a firm's marketing performance. In this respect, a consumer's increased purchase intention—an antecedent to actual purchases—is one of the main expected outcomes of successful marketing initiatives.

Word-of-Mouth Intention

The second dependent variable, word-of-mouth intention—an antecedent to actual word-of-mouth behavior—is an increasingly important outcome of marketing in the social media ecosystem since it very quickly spreads and amplifies marketing messages through eWOM.

Definition of Terms

Visibility Management

Visibility management are the actions that a company takes in order to manage its online visibility to customers so that its product offerings are found when consumers are browsing and searching the Internet. The most common visibility management practice is search marketing which firms use to ensure visibility of their brand/product when consumers type specific keywords into search engines. For the purposes of this research, search marketing will be used as a proxy for visibility management.

Active Listening

Active listening is the ability of a firm to listen and respond in a timely fashion to customer activity on the Internet—questions and comments—regarding its product offerings. The most common manifestation of active listening is customer service, i.e. "responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customer inquiries quickly" (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003, p. 193). This study will use customer service as a representation of active listening.

Community Building

Community building encompasses a company's online initiatives to engage customers with its products/brands, to nurture or create online communities (e.g., Facebook pages, product wikis, blogs, etc.). The most common community building practice is word-of-mouth marketing, "the intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing techniques" (Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010, p. 71), which firms use in order to promote positive electronic word-of-mouth. This research will use word-of-mouth marketing as a proxy for community building.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the inclination of a consumer to buy a certain product or service.

Word-of-Mouth Intention

Word-of-mouth intention is the inclination of a consumer to say positive things, recommend, and encourage others to buy a certain product or service, both offline and/or online.

Delimitations

This research will be limited to online electronic communications. The study will only include one product/service category and will use undergraduate students as subjects. This research will not measure actual consumer purchasing and word-of-mouth activity, only their intentions. This research will only examine positive WOM and positive WOM intention. The study will analyze communications regarding the focal company's product/service and not include communications regarding its competition. This research will measure consumers' perceptions of the focal company's inbound marketing practices, not the firm's actual inbound

marketing activities. Visibility management will be limited to search marketing. Active listening will be limited to customer service. Community building will be limited to WOM marketing.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that undergraduate students will have a tendency to, and knowledge of how to, use the Internet for making purchasing decisions.

The second assumption is that consumers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions are measurable.

The third assumption is that a firm's visibility management, active listening, and community building activities can be perceived by their customers, and that this perception can be measured.

The fourth assumption is that a company's visibility management, active listening, and community building activities will have an effect on customers' purchase intentions and word-of-mouth intentions.

The rest of this research is structured as follows: Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework, including a review of the relevant literature and an introduction to the research model and specific hypotheses; Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to empirically test the model and hypotheses; Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analyses and hypotheses tests; and Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of implications, contributions, and limitations of the study, as well suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter develops the conceptual framework which constitutes the basis for this research by presenting (1) a review of the relevant literature related to inbound marketing, (2) the proposed research model, and (3) a delineation and development of the specific research hypotheses investigated in the study.

Literature Review

Inbound Marketing

Traditional marketing communications have usually consisted of one-way outbound messages from companies to consumers through the use of TV, radio, print, outdoor, direct mail, telemarketing, web banners, and e-mail among others. Overwhelmed by unsolicited marketing messages, consumers are increasingly finding ways to block or filter them: digital video recorders such as TiVo, satellite radio or mobile music apps like iTunes and Spotify, do-not-call and do-not-email registries, web browser and ad pop-up blockers, email spam filters, etc. (Goldstein & Lee, 2005; Halligan & Shah, 2010). This "points to an important shift in the balance of power – away from marketers and towards consumers, most of whom want better to control when, how and from whom they receive marketing offers" (Goldstein & Lee, 2005, p. 216).

All of this has occurred in parallel with a revolutionary change in the way that people shop for goods and services: the Internet, search engines, the blogosphere, and social media now

allow consumers to electronically and conveniently look for information, establish two-way communications with companies, and converse among themselves—friends as well as strangers—regarding product/brand experiences before making a purchasing decision (Halligan & Shah, 2010).

The resulting challenge for marketers is to move from the traditional interruption-driven, outbound, marketing-to disengaged consumers world, to a new consumer-initiated, inbound, marketing-with engaged consumers paradigm (Goldstein & Lee, 2005; Halligan & Shah, 2010; Lusch & Vargo, 2009). The objective for firms is to make their market offerings visible and attractive to consumers when they are most receptive (Goldstein & Lee, 2005), namely when they are in 'search mode' and looking to fulfill a particular need. Halligan and Shah (2010) coined the term 'inbound marketing' to describe this new paradigm, a term that has become popular among practitioners. They posit that inbound marketing consists of *pulling* consumers to a firm's website through the use of search engines, blogs, and social media. Chaffey and Smith (2013) describe the inbound marketing process as a combination of search marketing, content marketing, and social media marketing.

A review of the extant literature resulted in scarce inbound marketing articles, with equivocal uses of the term. Table 1 presents a review of relevant inbound marketing related research. For instance, Lusch and Vargo (2009) denote inbound marketing as "customer-to-business (C2B) activities" and also as "co-produced marketing" (p. 6), focusing on the collaboration between customers and firms in the co-creation of value, and arguing that this is the essence of service-dominant logic. However, they primarily refer to existing customers and do not address the issue of how to attract new ones. Belz, Höfeler, and Schagen (2009) argue that monitoring consumer activity (comments, questions, praise, complaints, etc.) and responding

accordingly (targeted offers, feedback, thanks, apology, etc.) through different channels (phone, email, snail mail, Internet, in person, etc.) are central to inbound marketing, but also fail to address how to draw new customers. Goldstein and Lee (2005) propose that firms must adopt "right-time" marketing in order to engage with consumers when it is the consumers who initiate a contact. Lu, Ba, Huang, and Feng (2013), without making an explicit reference to inbound marketing, empirically examined the effect of sponsored search, WOM, and promotional coupons on sales using data from a popular restaurant review website in China and found a complementary relationship between WOM volume and sponsored search, as well as a substitute relationship between WOM volume and promotional coupons.

Table 1: *Overview of Relevant Inbound Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Belz, Höfeler, and Schagen (2009)	Case Study	What does successful inbound marketing consist in?	Monitoring consumer activity and responding accordingly through different channels are central to inbound marketing.
Chaffey and Smith (2013)	Conceptual	What processes constitute inbound marketing?	Inbound marketing is a combination of search marketing, content marketing, and social media marketing.
Goldstein and Lee (2005)	Conceptual	What can companies do to compete in markets with increasing consumer privacy concerns and regulations?	Firms should adopt 'right-time' marketing to engage consumers when consumers initiate a contact.
Halligan and Shah (2010)	Conceptual	What is inbound marketing?	Inbound marketing is about 'pulling' consumers to your website through the use of search engines, blogs, and social media.

Table 1 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Inbound Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Larson and Watson (2011)	Conceptual	What activities do social media enable between customers and firms?	In addition to the traditional firm-to-customer and customer-to-firm activities, social media enable customer-to-customer activity, firm monitoring of c-to-c activity, and firm-to-customer community building activity.
Lu, Ba, Huang, and Feng (2013)	Empirical	What is the effect of sponsored search, WOM, and promotional coupons on sales?	WOM volume is positively related to sales. WOM volume and sponsored search have a complementary relationship.
Lusch and Vargo (2009)	Conceptual	How does inbound marketing relate to the service-dominant logic?	Service-dominant logic should serve as a guiding framework for inbound marketing. Inbound marketing is more effective when consumers are viewed as co-creators of value.

Taking into account the search marketing aspect of inbound marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2013; Goldstein & Lee, 2005; Halligan & Shah, 2010), and both the customer service (Belz, et al., 2009; Larson & Watson, 2011) and WOM marketing (Halligan & Shah, 2010; Larson & Watson, 2011; Lusch & Vargo, 2009) aspects of social media marketing, it becomes apparent that firms must (1) effectively manage their online visibility (i.e. search marketing); (2) actively listen and respond in a timely fashion to online consumer comments, requests, and complaints (i.e. customer service); and (3) promote positive eWOM by fostering and nurturing online

brand/product communities (i.e. WOM marketing).

Consequently, for the purposes of this study, inbound marketing will be defined as consisting of: (1) visibility management or search marketing (i.e. a company's ability to be highly visible online when consumers are searching), (2) active listening or customer service (i.e. a firm's ability to listen and respond to consumers), and (3) community building or WOM marketing (i.e. a company's ability to engage consumers and promote positive eWOM).

<u>Proposed Research Model</u>

As stated previously, the purpose of this research is to study the impact of a company's inbound marketing practices on its marketing performance. Inbound marketing practices will be measured by online visibility management, active listening, and community building. Marketing performance will be measured by consumers' purchase intentions and WOM intentions.

Figure 2 depicts the proposed research model and shows the hypothesized relationships between the model's various constructs.

Figure 2: *Proposed Research Model of Inbound Marketing Practices*
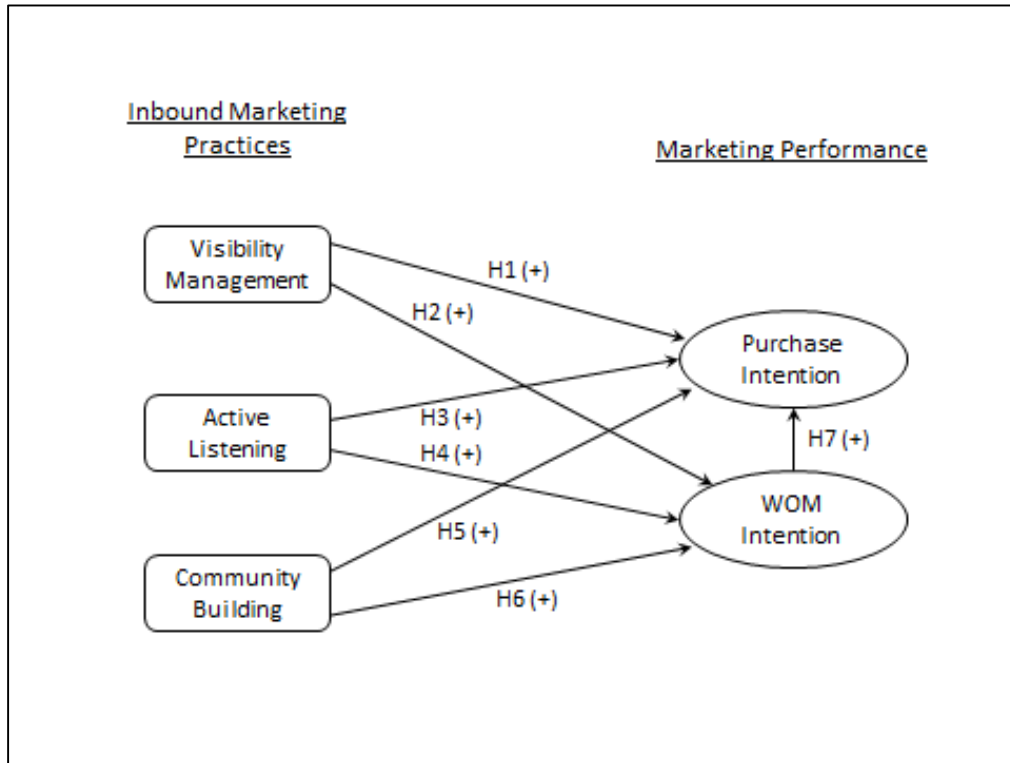
Research Hypotheses

Visibility Management

In today's marketing environment, visibility management has become critically

important. Consumers searching the Internet for products and services will naturally favor those

that appear in the search results over those that are absent since those search results will

effectively limit a consumer's consideration set (Kim, et al., 2011). Companies have the ability

to manage the online visibility of their products/brands through search engine marketing (SEM)

which can consist of search engine optimization (SEO) and/or paid search advertising to ensure

that their product offerings are found by consumers who are searching the web using specific

terms or keywords. A 2012 survey of 883 advertisers and agencies from 36 countries revealed

that 88% of them engaged in search engine optimization (SEO) and 84% purchased sponsored

links (Econsultancy, 2012). Table 2 shows a review of relevant visibility management/search

marketing research.

Table 2: *Overview of Relevant Visibility Management/Search Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Baye, Gatti, Kattuman, and Morgan (2009)	Empirical	What determines clicks on a price comparison site?	All things equal, a company receives 17% less clicks for every competitor listed above it in search results.
Ghose and Yang (2009)	Empirical	How does sponsored search advertising affect consumer search and purchasing behavior on the Internet?	Conversion rates are highest at the top and decrease with rank as one goes down the search engine results page.
Kim, Albuquerque, and Bronnenberg (2011)	Empirical	Develops product search maps: a new method to visualize consumer search patterns and obtain insights into the competitive structure of online markets.	Search results limit a consumer's consideration set.
Pan, Hembrooke, Joachims, Lorigo, Gay, and Granka (2007)	Empirical	What is the relative contribution of search results relevance and position to consumer decisions?	Consumer decisions were strongly biased towards search results in higher positions even when the abstracts were less relevant due to trust in the search engine.
Rutz and Bucklin (2011)	Empirical	What is the relationship between generic and branded search results?	Generic search activity positively affects future branded search activity through awareness of relevance.
Rutz, Bucklin, and Sonnier (2012)	Empirical	What is the purchase conversion performance of individual keywords in paid search advertising?	Higher positions in search results increase both the click-through and the conversion rates.

Studies have shown that click-through and conversion rates are higher at the top of search engine results pages and that they decrease as one goes down the list of results (Brooks, 2004; Ghose & Yang, 2009; Pan, et al., 2007; Rutz, et al., 2012). To this effect, Baye, Gatti, Kattuman, and Morgan (2009) calculated a 17% average decrease in clicks for every position that a company is listed lower on a search result screen. Therefore, firms that are more effective at this 'visibility management' should be able to have their product/brands appear in more prominent positions, thus generating more click-throughs and conversions or purchases. Since purchase intention is an antecedent to actual purchases, the following hypothesis is proposed:

>   *H1*: **A firm's online visibility management (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to consumers' purchase intention.**

Firms that are effective at visibility management can also affect consumers' WOM intentions by having their product offering appear more prominently in search result. Rutz and Bucklin (2011) found that a brand's appearance on generic search results has a spillover effect that positively affects subsequent searches for that brand due to an increase in awareness of relevance. If a consumer in "search mode" believes that a certain product/brand is relevant due to its high visibility, he/she might be motivated to engage in WOM behavior to let other people know about this finding because of his/her desire for social interaction, concern for other consumers, and/or the potential to enhance his/her own self-worth (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

>   *H2*: **A firm's online visibility management (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to WOM intention.**

Active Listening

Consumers are increasingly using new technology to reach out and talk directly to firms ("Consumers embrace social media for brand feedback," July 14, 2011) as well as among themselves (Larson & Watson, 2011) regarding their product/brand experiences. These new two-way communication tools allow companies to proactively listen to consumers and respond to their requests/inquiries/complaints in a relevant and timely fashion (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Jansen, et al., 2009; Kietzmann, et al., 2011), thus improving the responsiveness and potentially the reliability, empathy, and assurance dimensions of SERVQUAL or the quality of the service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) they provide to consumers through this 'active listening'. In a study designed to develop a scale comparable to SERVQUAL but specifically for online retail experiences, Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) define the customer service dimension of their eTailQ scale as "responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customer inquiries quickly" (p. 193). This definition of customer service is synonymous with the concept of active listening proposed above and will be used as such for the purpose of this study. Table 3 shows a review of the relevant active listening/customer service research.

Table 3: *Overview of Relevant Active Listening/Customer Service Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, and Zeithaml (1993)	Empirical	How do consumers develop perceptions of a firm's service delivery over time? What are the relationships between expectations, perceptions, and intended behavior of consumers?	Perceived service quality is positively related to consumer repurchase intention.
de Matos and Rossi (2008)	Meta-Analysis	What are the antecedents and moderators of WOM when considering WOM as a central construct?	There is a significant positive effect of trust and service quality on WOM activity.

Table 3 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Active Listening/Customer Service Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Fournier and Avery (2011)	Conceptual	How has brand management changed with the advent of the social web?	Two-way communication platforms allow brands to listen and respond to consumers. In open source branding, to gain resonance brands paradoxically must relinquish control.
Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009)	Empirical; Case Study	What are the overall trends, characteristics, and patterns of brand microblogging communications between companies and consumers?	Microblogging platforms are an excellent vehicle for customer relations, branding, and eWOM activities for companies.
Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011)	Conceptual	How can companies better understand and take advantage of social media?	Firms have the ability to initiate and/or participate in conversations with consumers through social media.
Larson and Watson (2011)	Conceptual	What activities do social media enable between customers and firms?	In addition to the traditional firm-to-customer and customer-to-firm activities, social media enable customer-to-customer activity, firm monitoring of c-to-c activity, and firm-to-customer community building activity.
Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991)	Empirical	Follow up study to refine the SERVQUAL scale.	Perceived service quality is positively related to consumer WOM intention.

Table 3 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Active Listening/Customer Service Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003)	Empirical	Development of a scale for the measurement of etail quality.	eTailQ is composed of four factors: fulfillment/reliability, website design, customer service, and security/privacy. Customer service is responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customer inquiries quickly. Customer service is positively related to consumer purchase intention.

Companies have the ability to affect consumers' purchase intention by the level of customer service that they provide. In this respect, Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, and Zeithaml (1993) found a positive relationship between perceived service quality and repurchase intention. In their above mentioned study, Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) confirmed this positive relationship and showed that it holds true for the customer service dimension of their scale. Since customer service is synonymous with active listening as defined for the purposes of this study, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: A firm's active listening (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to consumer purchase intention.

Firms that achieve a higher level of customer service by actively listening and responding to consumers can also affect the latter's word-of-mouth intention. In a follow-up study to refine the SERVQUAL scale, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1991) showed that higher perceived service quality by consumers resulted in an increased intention to recommend the firm to a

friend. This positive relationship between service quality and WOM activity was confirmed in a

meta-analysis by de Matos and Rossi (2008) and, in their study, Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003)

also showed a positive relationship between customer service (i.e. active listening) and WOM

intention. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H4*: **A firm's active listening (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to**
>
> **consumer WOM intention.**

Community Building

Community building has always been an important marketing objective, even before the

advent of electronic communication and social media. Consumers that are engaged and

participate in a product/brand community become part-time marketers for the firm (Gummesson,

2004) by generating positive WOM, providing feedback to the company, showing high

product/brand loyalty, and becoming emotionally invested in the firm's success (McAlexander,

et al., 2002). Social media platforms have become a natural place for the proliferation of eWOM

as consumers exchange information regarding their opinions and experiences related to a

product/brand/firm (Dellarocas, 2003; Jansen, et al., 2009; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In fact,

one of consumers' motivations to participate in social networking sites is to be able to engage in

WOM activities such as letting others know that they like or use a certain brand as well as

seeking other consumers' opinions (Gironda & Korgaonkar, 2014). Through the proactive use of

social media, companies now can more easily create and nurture these communities to promote

positive WOM. For instance, Kozinets, et al. (2010) found that WOM marketing, "the

intentional influencing of consumer-to-consumer communications by professional marketing

techniques" (p. 71), resulted in the coproduction of WOM on consumer networks. This WOM

marketing with the objective of promoting positive eWOM is precisely what is defined as

community building for the purpose of this study. Table 4 presents a review of the relevant

community building/WOM marketing research.

Table 4: *Overview of Relevant Community Building/WOM Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2010)	Empirical, Mixed Methods	What is the impact of consumer-to-consumer communication in an online brand community on consumer purchase behavior?	Online brand communities have a positive impact on immediate purchase intentions and sales, regardless of whether they reside on company-owned or independently-owned websites.
Amblee and Bui (2012)	Empirical	What is the effect of eWOM on sales in an online community?	eWOM plays a significant role as a signal of reputation generated by the members of an online community and is positively related to sales.
Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006)	Empirical	What is the effect of WOM on sales in electronic commerce sites?	Favorable WOM results in an increase in sales.
Dellarocas (2003)	Conceptual	How do online feedback mechanisms affect the digitalization of WOM?	Online feedback mechanisms harness the bidirectional communication capabilities of the Internet to create large-scale WOM networks.

Table 4 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Community Building/WOM Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Gironda and Korgaonkar (2014)	Empirical, Mixed Methods	What motivates consumers to use social networking sites?	In the qualitative study, users said that one of the motivators to participate in social networking sites is to engage in WOM activities such as letting others know that they use/like a brand as well as seeking other consumers' opinions.
Godes and Mayzlin (2009)	Empirical	What kind of WOM drives sales? Which agents are most effective at creating this kind of WOM?	Companies can create eWOM that drives sales. The persuasiveness of a message is highest when sent by a loyal consumer to friends or family, but the increased breadth of awareness is highest when sent by a less loyal consumer to acquaintances or strangers.
Gruen, Osmonbekov, and Czaplewski (2006)	Empirical	What is the impact of consumer-to-consumer online know-how exchange on customer value and loyalty?	Consumer-to-consumer know-how exchange has a positive effect on likelihood to recommend the product.
Gummesson (2004)	Conceptual	Does relationship marketing pay?	Successful relationships make customers valuable part-time marketers who give referrals and spread positive WOM.
Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009)	Empirical, Case Study	What are the overall trends, characteristics, and patterns of brand microblogging communications between companies and consumers?	Microblogging platforms are an excellent vehicle for customer relations, branding, and eWOM activities for companies.

Table 4 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Community Building/WOM Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury (2009)	Empirical, Case Study	What are the overall trends, characteristics, and patterns of brand microblogging communications between companies and consumers?	Microblogging platforms are an excellent vehicle for customer relations, branding, and eWOM activities for companies.
Keller (2007)	Conceptual	How much WOM is generated, what drives it, and what are the market outcomes?	Positive WOM is a powerful force in driving consumer recommendations and purchase intent. Marketers must gain insights into the dynamics of how their brands are being discussed in consumer-to-consumer communications to be able to engage in meaningful two-way dialogue.
Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010)	Empirical, Qualitative	How do WOM marketing processes unfold in an interconnected consumer-to-consumer electronic WOM communications world?	WOM marketing results in the coproduction of WOM on consumer networks. WOM marketing operates through a complex process that transforms commercial information into cultural stories relevant to the members of particular communities.
Lee and Youn (2009)	Empirical	How do different online platforms to which eWOM communication is posted influence consumers' judgments of reviewed products?	Participants exposed to the review on the brand's website or an independent review website were more likely to recommend the product to a friend than those exposed to the review on a personal blog.

Table 4 (continued): *Overview of Relevant Community Building/WOM Marketing Research*

Authors	Study Type	Research Question/Theme	Main Findings/Arguments
Lu, Ba, Huang, and Feng (2013)	Empirical	What is the effect of sponsored search, WOM, and promotional coupons on sales?	WOM volume is positively related to sales.
Mangold and Faulds (2009)	Conceptual	Proposes that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix and discusses consequences for companies.	Firms must actively manage social media and include it in their promotion mix in order to influence and shape consumers' discussions.
McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002)	Empirical, Mixed Methods	What characterizes brand communities and how can companies build and strengthen them?	By proactively providing the context for relationships to develop, firms can cultivate communities in ways that increase customer loyalty.
Olbrich and Holsing (2011)	Empirical	What affects consumer purchasing behavior in social shopping communities?	High consumer ratings have a positive effect on sales. Community members are more likely to purchase than ordinary users.
Weisfeld-Spolter, Sussan, and Gould (2014)	Empirical	What is the simultaneous effect of eWOM and marketing communications on consumer persuasion when presented in a B2C-versus a C2C-sponsored SNS?	The persuasiveness of one-to-many and many-to-many eWOM added to MC does not differ between B2C- and C2C-sponsored SNS.

Positive WOM is a driver of purchase intent: Keller (2007) showed that 50% of WOM receivers were highly likely to make a purchase based on the information they received via WOM. Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2010) concluded that WOM in an online brand community reduces uncertainty in a product/brand/firm which results in an increase in purchase intention.

The extant literature broadly supports a positive relationship between favorable WOM and increased sales (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lu, et al., 2013; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011) of which purchase intention is an antecedent. Godes and Mayzlin (2009) showed that firms can proactively create WOM (i.e. community building) that drives sales, and Weisfeld-Spolter, Sussan, and Gould (2014) found that the persuasiveness of eWOM (one-to-many and many-to-many) added to marketing communications was not different for company- versus independently-sponsored social networking sites.   Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: A firm's community building (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to consumer purchase intention.

Favorable WOM also drives recommendations: in the previously cited study, Keller (2007) found that 49% of WOM receivers were highly likely to pass on the information received to someone else. On electronic platforms, studies have also shown that eWOM is positively related to consumers' willingness to recommend a product/brand (Gruen, et al., 2006; Lee & Youn, 2009). Given that community building seeks to generate positive WOM, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: A firm's community building (as perceived by consumers) is positively related to consumer WOM intention.

Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention

As was discussed in the previous section, positive WOM has been shown to be positively related to both purchase intention as well as WOM intention. But what about the relationship between a subject's purchase intention and his or her WOM intention? One could argue that

someone who is willing to recommend a product will probably have a stronger inclination to buy it than someone who is not willing to recommend it. In fact, Petrescu, Korgaonkar, Mangleburg, and Root (2012) found that a consumer's intention to forward an advertisement for a product positively influenced the consumer's intention to purchase that product. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

   H7: **A subject's WOM intention is positively related to his or her purchase intention.**

The next chapter discusses the methodology undertaken to empirically test the proposed research model and these hypotheses.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used in order to empirically test the research model and the hypotheses proposed in this study by presenting (1) the experimental design, (2) independent variables, (3) pretest and manipulation checks, (4) dependent variables, (5) sample and procedure, and (6) statistical analyses used to examine the data.

Experimental Design

The study performed was a 2 (visibility management: high vs. low) x 2 (active listening: high vs. low) x 2 (community building: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment. The scenario, undergraduate university students picking a restaurant, was chosen because restaurants is a category that is familiar to the subjects and lends itself to online search as well as to questions, comments, and conversations on the web. In addition, undergraduate university students represent a homogenous and convenient population for a study like the present one (Peterson, 2001). Moreover, homogenous samples such as the one tested here have been shown to reduce error variance, which represents a stronger test of theory (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1982; DuFrene, Engelland, Lehman, & Pearson, 2005; Malhotra & King, 2003).

Data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire using Qualtrics in which each participant was presented with one of the eight possible scenarios (high or low visibility management, active listening, and community building) while being asked to respond to a number of questions about a hypothetical "Restaurant ABC". This will be further explained in the sample and procedure section below.

Independent Variables

The three independent variables are (1) visibility management, (2) active listening, and (3) community building. Appendix A shows all of the scales that were used in the final survey along with their individual items. Scales that were not found in the extant literature were developed for this study; seven-point scales were used for increased reliability (Lietz, 2010) and consistency with those which were adapted from previous studies.

Visibility management measures the effectiveness with which a firm is able to influence the appearance and positioning of its brand in search engine results when consumers type relevant keywords into search engines. For this study, it was operationalized as the visibility management of a firm as perceived by consumers and was measured using three items developed for this research on a seven-point semantic differential scale. In search engine results, a top position in the list corresponds to high visibility management, whereas a position in the bottom of the list corresponds to low visibility management. Appendices B and C show the high and low visibility management scenarios, respectively, corresponding to "Restaurant ABC" used in the study.

Active listening measures the extent to which a firm listens and responds in a timely fashion to consumers' questions and comments posted on the Internet. For this research, it was operationalized as active listening by a firm as perceived by consumers and was measured using three items adapted from Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) with a seven-point semantic differential scale. On a web page, timely responses by a firm to questions and comments posted by consumers corresponds to high active listening, whereas low active listening corresponds to a

firm that has not responded in a timely manner. Appendices D and E show the high and low active listening scenarios, respectively, used in the experiment.

Community building measures a company's initiatives to engage consumers in order to promote positive eWOM. For this study, it was operationalized as community building by a firm as perceived by consumers and measured using three items developed for this research on a seven-point semantic differential scale. A web page with invitations to join company-sponsored communities (e.g., social networking sites) corresponds to high community building, whereas a web page without these invitations corresponds to low community building. Appendices F and G show the high and low community building scenarios, respectively, used in the study.

Pretest and Manipulation Check

In order to assess the preliminary quality of the measurement instrument, a pretest was performed with two marketing faculty members and four undergraduate students. The initial questionnaire and scenarios were reviewed for clarity, and improvements were made which addressed their comments and suggestions.

The effectiveness of the independent variables' manipulation was assessed by comparing the responses given by the subjects who were presented with the low visibility management, active listening or community building scenarios versus those who were presented with the scenarios corresponding to high visibility management, active listening, or community building. Responses for the items of each variable were averaged and then compared using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Table 5 confirms proper manipulation of all three independent variables: the low versus high scenarios for each one are in fact statistically different at a $p < .001$ significance level.

Table 5: *Manipulation Check - ANOVA*

Scenarios		Visibility Management	Active Listening	Community Building
Low	Mean	4.15	2.93	3.94
	N	123	122	132
	Std. Dev.	1.50	1.70	1.84
High	Mean	5.38	6.15	5.67
	N	116	117	107
	Std. Dev.	1.47	1.02	1.16
ANOVA	F value	41.398	311.866	71.420
	P value	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Significance	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$

Dependent Variables

The two dependent variables are (1) consumer purchase intention and (2) consumer word-of-mouth (WOM) intention.

Purchase intention was assessed using three items adapted from Venkatesh, Morris, Gordon, and Davis (2003). The items measure agreement, using a seven-point Likert scale, with statements concerning plans, prediction, and intention of going to the restaurant.

WOM intention was evaluated using three items adapted from Babin, Lee, Kim, and Griffin (2005), also with a seven-point Likert scale. The items measure agreement with statements regarding the intentions to say positive things about the restaurant to others, recommending it to someone else, and encouraging friends and relatives to visit the restaurant.

Control Variables

The study controlled for the following variables: age, gender, ethnicity, and frequency of the use of search for selecting restaurants.

Sample and Procedure

A sample of 239 undergraduate students from US universities (excluding those that were in the pretest) participated in the study through convenience sampling (Malhotra, 2007). Characteristics of the sample can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: *Sample Characteristics*

	N	%
Gender		
Male	101	42.3%
Female	138	57.7%
Age		
18-24	140	58.6%
25-34	58	24.3%
35-44	25	10.5%
45-54	13	5.4%
55-64	1	0.4%
65 or older	2	0.8%
Ethnicity		
White - not Hispanic	85	35.6%
Black - not Hispanic	41	17.2%
Hispanic or Latino	72	30.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	23	9.6%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	0.4%
Other	17	7.1%
Use of Online Search to Choose Restaurants		
1 - Never	7	2.9%
2	16	6.7%
3	16	6.7%
4	40	16.7%
5	45	18.8%
6	48	20.1%
7 - Always	67	28.0%

As mentioned earlier, data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire using Qualtrics. The complete survey can be seen in Appendix B.

Participants were informed that the research was being performed solely for academic purposes and that their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were ensured. After giving their consent, subjects were asked to imagine the following scenario: "You are searching online for a local restaurant to go out with your friends over the weekend. When you type "*best local restaurants*" into your favorite search engine, you get the results shown in the next screen." after which they saw either the high (Appendix C) or the low (Appendix D) visibility management scenario, randomly presented to them by Qualtrics. They were then told that "*Restaurant ABC* captures your attention. Please look at its position in the search results." and then, in the following screen, were asked to answer the three questions related to Visibility Management "based on the search engine results you just saw".

On the next screen, participants were told that "When you click on Restaurant ABC's link, you are taken to a page where customers post questions and comments. Please take a moment to read the customer posts and restaurant's responses." and were shown either the high (Appendix E) or low (Appendix F) active listening scenario, randomly presented by Qualtrics. In the following screen, they were asked to respond to the three questions related to Active Listening "based on the page you just saw where customers posted comments/questions and the restaurant responded to them".

The next screen in the survey said that "When you continue browsing through the restaurant's site, you find this page where Restaurant ABC invites you to connect with them. Please take a moment to look at the page." and showed either the high (Appendix G) or low (Appendix H) community building scenario, again randomly presented by Qualtrics. Subjects

were then taken to a screen where they were asked to respond to the three questions related to community building "based on the page you just saw where the restaurant invites visitors to connect with them".

The survey then asked participants to answer the questions related to purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention "based on the pages that you previously saw: the search engine results, the restaurant's response to customer comments and questions, and the restaurant's invitation to connect with them."

Finally, subjects were asked to answer some demographic questions at the end of the survey (Lietz, 2010): age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as how often they used online search to decide what restaurant to go to.

The design of this study reduces the potential effects of demand artifacts in several ways: the high vs. low scenarios for each independent variable were established in a pretest and not made explicit to the subjects of the experiment, the students that participated in the pretest were excluded from the sample for the experiment, anonymity was ensured, and the study was a between-subjects experiment (Sawyer, 1975).

Additional precautions were taken to improve data quality and decrease the possibility of response and common method bias, subject fatigue and inattention. Among other things, the survey took only 5-10 minutes to complete; both Likert and semantic differential response formats were used in the survey; questions were presented immediately following the relevant manipulations; and items were grouped in a way in which screens did not require additional scrolling to answer each question.

An assessment of possible common method bias was performed using Harman's single factor test (Gaskination, 2011) with IBM SPSS Statistics 23. The single factor accounted for

46.5% of the total variance explained, below the 50% threshold and therefore supporting the absence of common method bias.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed through structural equation modelling (SEM) via partial least squares (PLS) using the software package SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). The PLS algorithm was used to assess the outer measurement model, and then the bootstrapping technique was utilized to assess the internal path model and test the hypotheses.

PLS was selected instead of a covariance-based structural equation modelling approach (e.g., AMOS) fundamentally because the objective of this research is prediction and theory development as opposed to theory testing and confirmation (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

The next chapter discusses the results of the data analyses and hypotheses tests.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSES AND RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of the data analyses and hypotheses testing which were performed using partial least squares (PLS) by presenting (1) an evaluation of the measurement model, followed by (2) an evaluation of the structural model and empirical testing of the hypothesized relationships.

Measurement Model Evaluation

SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, et al., 2015) was used to analyze the measurement (outer) model and to assess its reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The resulting model after the PLS algorithm run can be seen graphically in Figure 3, where the numbers correspond to factor loadings (outer model), path coefficients (inner model), and R square (constructs).

The criteria used to gauge the adequacy of the psychometric properties of the measurement model were: (1) composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alphas of the constructs exceed .70; (2) loadings between observed variables and their corresponding latent constructs exceed .70; (3) loadings are greater than cross-loadings; and (4) the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, et al., 2010; Srite & Karahanna, 2006).

Figure 3: *Measurement Model – PLS Algorithm Run*
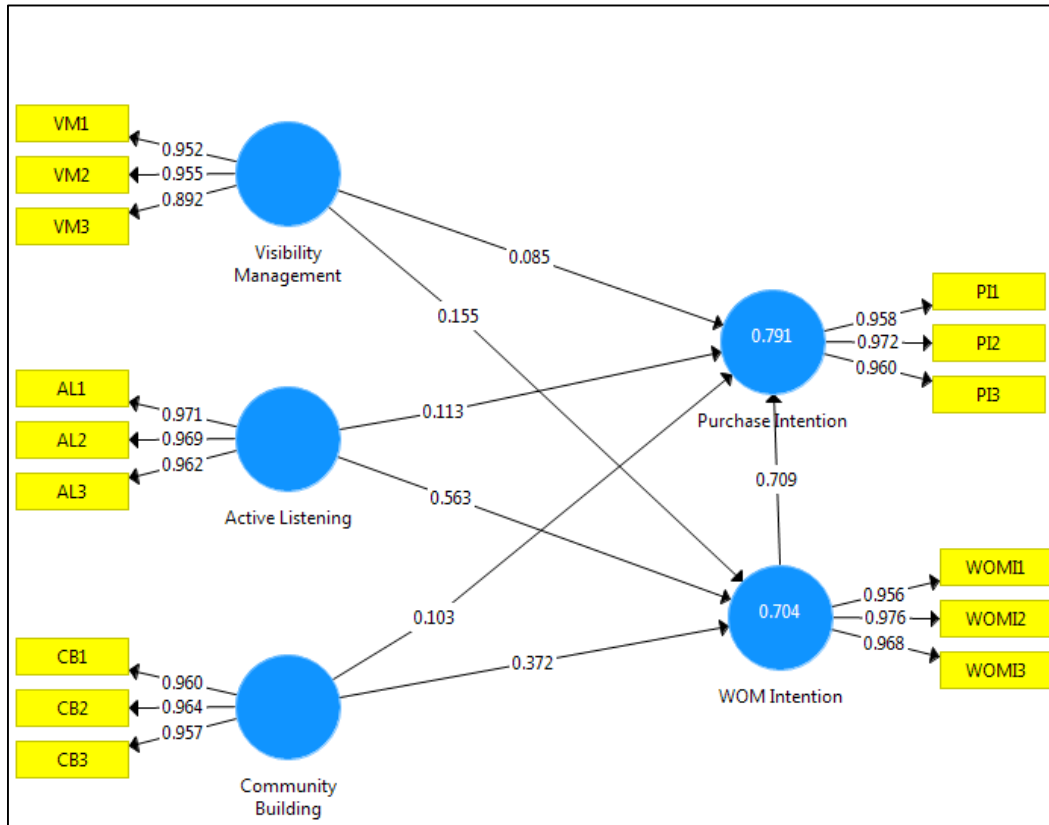
Table 7 shows that the composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alphas are all greater than .70 which confirms the reliability of the measurement model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, et al., 2010). It also shows that the average variances extracted (AVE) are well above the 0.50 recommended level (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The R squares for the two dependent variables indicate that the model explains more than 70% of their variation, representing a very good result (Hair, et al., 2010).

Table 7: *Overview of the Measurement Model*

Constructs	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted	R Square
VM	0.953	0.926	0.871	-
AL	0.978	0.966	0.936	-
CB	0.973	0.958	0.922	-
PI	0.975	0.961	0.975	0.791
WOMI	0.977	0.965	0.977	0.704

Note. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention

Table 8 shows that the factor loadings of the observed variables on their respective latent constructs all exceed the recommended .70 value (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) which, together with the results for reliabilities and AVEs, confirm the convergent validity of the measurement model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, et al., 2010).

Table 8: *Factor Loadings and Cross-Loadings*

Constructs/Variables	VM	AL	CB	PI	WOMI
VM1	**0.952**	0.091	0.084	0.248	0.215
VM2	**0.955**	0.064	0.059	0.261	0.212
VM3	**0.892**	0.026	0.040	0.193	0.179
AL1	0.073	**0.971**	0.470	0.696	0.731
AL2	0.039	**0.969**	0.463	0.658	0.730
AL3	0.082	**0.962**	0.478	0.691	0.730
CB1	0.049	0.461	**0.960**	0.607	0.617
CB2	0.079	0.450	**0.964**	0.568	0.612
CB3	0.065	0.488	**0.957**	0.636	0.660
PI1	0.252	0.673	0.608	**0.958**	0.842
PI2	0.238	0.684	0.611	**0.972**	0.850
PI3	0.242	0.680	0.601	**0.960**	0.855
WOMI1	0.203	0.732	0.633	0.829	**0.956**
WOMI2	0.222	0.729	0.638	0.864	**0.976**
WOMI3	0.206	0.728	0.634	0.862	**0.968**

Note. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention

Table 8 also shows that the factor loadings of the observed variables on their corresponding latent constructs are greater than the cross-loadings on other constructs. This, together with the fact that the square roots of the AVEs are greater than the inter-construct correlations as can be seen in Table 9, confirms the discriminant validity of the measurement model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, et al., 2010).

Table 9: *Inter-Construct Correlations*

Constructs	VM	AL	CB	PI	WOMI
VM	**0.933**				
AL	0.067	**0.967**			
CB	0.067	0.487	**0.960**		
PI	0.253	0.705	0.630	**0.964**	
WOMI	0.218	0.755	0.657	0.881	**0.967**

Notes. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active
Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase
Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention.
Diagonal elements in bold are the square roots of average
variances extracted (AVE).

These results—reliabilities, factor loadings, convergent validity, and discriminant

validity— suggest that the scales used in the measurement model for this study have adequate

psychometric properties.

Structural Model Evaluation and Hypotheses Tests

The structural, internal, or path model was analyzed using the bootstrapping technique in

SmartPLS 3 in order to determine the paths' significance and to test the research hypotheses.

The resulting model after bootstrapping with 500 iterations can be seen graphically in Figure 4 in

which the numbers correspond to T-statistic values.

Figure 4: *Structural Model – Bootstrapping Run*
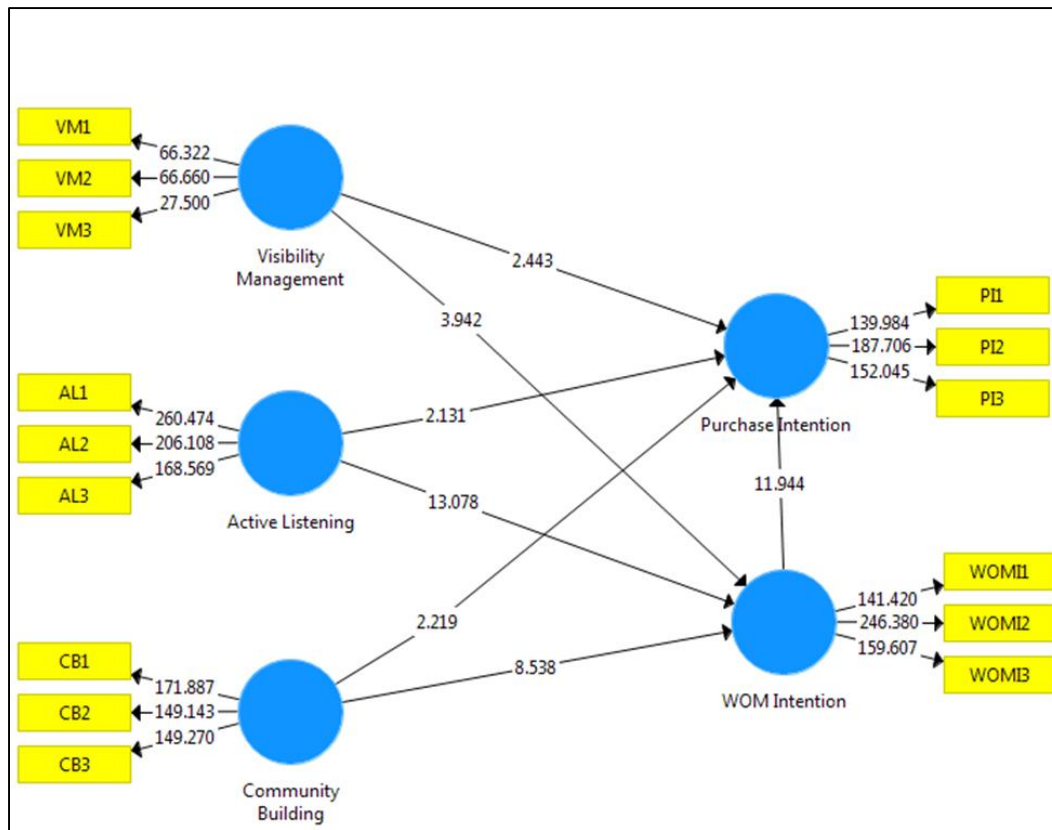
The results of the bootstrapping run can be seen in Table 10 which shows that all

hypotheses were supported. Path coefficients were in the predicted directions and significant at

the $p < .05$ (H1, H3, H5) and $p < .001$ (H2, H4, H6, H7) levels.

Table 10: *Hypotheses Testing – Path Coefficients and T-Statistics*

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Significance	
H1	VM => PI	0.085	2.443	0.015	$p < .05$	Supported
H2	VM => WOMI	0.155	3.942	0.000	$p < .001$	Supported
H3	AL => PI	0.113	2.131	0.033	$p < .05$	Supported
H4	AL => WOMI	0.563	13.078	0.000	$p < .001$	Supported
H5	CB => PI	0.103	2.219	0.027	$p < .05$	Supported
H6	CB => WOMI	0.372	8.538	0.000	$p < .001$	Supported
H7	WOMI => PI	0.709	11.944	0.000	$p < .001$	Supported

*Notes* . VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention.
T-statistics were calculated with a bootstrapping technique and are significant at a .05 level if the value is greater than 1.96

Table 11 displays the direct, indirect, and total effects of the independent variables on the

dependent variables in the study.

Table 11: *Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects*

Effect	Direct	Indirect	Total
VM => PI	0.085*	0.110**	0.195**
VM => WOMI	0.155**	-	0.155**
AL => PI	0.113*	0.400**	0.513**
AL => WOMI	0.563**	-	0.563**
CB => PI	0.103*	0.264**	0.367**
CB => WOMI	0.372**	-	0.372**
WOMI => PI	0.709**	-	0.709**

Notes. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Visibility Management has a positive and significant direct effect on both Purchase

Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention, with 56% of its total effect on PI being indirect,

positive, and significant through WOMI.

Active Listening also was found to have a positive and significant direct effect on Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention, with 78% of its total effect on PI being indirect, positive, and significant through WOMI.

Community Building likewise has a positive and significant direct effect on both Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention, with 72% of its total effect on PI being indirect, positive, and significant through WOMI.

Finally, Word-of-Mouth Intention was found to have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

Overall, Table 11 shows that Active Listening is the independent variable with the largest effect on both dependent variables, Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention, followed by Community Building and then Visibility Management. It also shows that the largest effect on Purchase Intention comes from Word-of-Mouth Intention, and that Word-of-Mouth Intention partially and strongly mediates the effect of all three independent variables on Purchase Intention: the independent effects on PI mediated through WOMI are significant and larger than the direct effects on PI in all three cases.

To test for potential effects of the control variables, the structural model was run adding paths from the control variables Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Use of Search to Purchase Intention. None of the hypothesized relationships were altered, and Table 12 shows that these variables did not have a significant effect on Purchase Intention.

Table 12: *Effects of Control Variables*

Control Variable	Path Coefficient to Purchase Intention	T-Statistic	P-Value
Age	-0.021	0.666	0.506
Gender	-0.048	1.519	0.129
Ethnicity	0.007	0.207	0.836
Use of Search	0.036	1.130	0.259

Since the study performed was a 2 (Visibility Management: high vs. low) x 2 (Active

Listening: high vs. low) x 2 (Community Building: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment, it

is interesting to see if any of the results change in the hypothesized relationships when the model

is run controlling for each of the independent variables' high and low conditions. The structural

equation model was therefore run using subsets of data for Low VM, High VM, Low AL, High

AL, Low CB, and High CB.

Table 13 displays the results for the structural models run with subsets of low and high

Visibility Management data.

Table 13: *Model Results – Low vs. High Visibility Management*

Effect	Low VM N = 123 Mean = 4.15			High VM N = 116 Mean = 5.38		
	Direct	**Indirect**	**Total**	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**
AL => PI	0.127	**0.412**[**]	**0.539**[**]	0.096	**0.410**[**]	**0.506**[**]
AL => WOMI	**0.584**[**]	-	**0.584**[**]	**0.580**[**]	**-**	**0.580**[**]
CB => PI	0.066	**0.243**[**]	**0.308**[**]	**0.148**[**]	**0.261**[**]	**0.409**[**]
CB => WOMI	**0.344**[**]	-	**0.344**[**]	**0.369**[**]	-	**0.369**[**]
WOMI => PI	**0.706**[**]	-	**0.706**[**]	**0.707**[**]	-	**0.707**[**]

Notes. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

As can be seen, in the case of Low VM the CB => PI path becomes non-significant, indicating that Word-of-Mouth Intention fully mediates the effect of Community Building on Purchase Intention when Visibility Management is low. The AL => PI path is not significant in any of the two cases, showing that Word-of-Mouth Intention fully mediates the effect of Active Listening on Purchase Intention in both instances.

The results for the structural models run with subsets of low and high Active Listening data are summarized in Table 14 below.

Table 14: *Model Results – Low vs. High Active Listening*

	Low AL N = 122 Mean = 2.93			High AL N = 117 Mean = 6.15		
Effect	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**
VM => PI	0.086	**0.088**[*]	**0.174**[**]	0.091	**0.174**[**]	**0.265**[**]
VM => WOMI	**0.134**[*]	-	**0.134**[*]	**0.251**[**]	**-**	**0.251**[**]
CB => PI	**0.152**[**]	**0.310**[**]	**0.463**[**]	0.051	**0.227**[**]	**0.278**[**]
CB => WOMI	**0.471**[**]	-	**0.471**[**]	**0.327**[**]	-	**0.327**[**]
WOMI => PI	**0.658**[**]	-	**0.658**[**]	**0.694**[**]	-	**0.694**[**]

Notes. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

In the case of High AL, Word-of-Mouth Intention fully mediates the effect of Community Building on Purchase Intention since the CB => PI path is non-significant when Active Listening is high. The path VM => PI is not significant in either case, indicating that Word-of-Mouth Intention fully mediates the effect of Visibility Management on Purchase Intention in both cases.

Table 15 shows the results for the structural models run with subsets of low and high

Community Building data.

Table 15: *Model Results – Low vs. High Community Building*

	Low CB N = 132 Mean = 3.94			**High CB** N = 107 Mean = 5.67		
Effect	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**
VM => PI	**0.120**[*]	0.051	**0.171**[**]	0.062	**0.197**[**]	**0.259**[**]
VM => WOMI	0.066	-	0.066	**0.292**[**]	-	**0.292**[**]
AL => PI	0.082	**0.475**[**]	**0.556**[**]	**0.144**[*]	**0.374**[**]	**0.519**[**]
AL => WOMI	**0.615**[**]	-	**0.615**[**]	**0.557**[**]	-	**0.557**[**]
WOMI => PI	**0.772**[**]	-	**0.772**[**]	**0.672**[**]	-	**0.672**[**]

Notes. VM = Visibility Management; AL = Active Listening; CB = Community Building; PI = Purchase Intention; WOMI = Word-of-Mouth Intention
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

In the case of Low CB, the path VM => WOMI and the indirect effect of VM on PI

through the mediation of WOMI are not significant, indicating that Visibility Management does

not have a direct effect on Word-of-Mouth Intention and that Word-of-Mouth Intention does not

mediate the effect of Visibility Management on Purchase Intention in the case of low

Community Building. However, in the case of High CB, Word-of-Mouth Intention fully

mediates the effect of Visibility Management on Purchase Intention as can be seen by the fact

that the VM => PI path becomes non-significant. Also in the case of Low CB, the AL => PI

path is not significant, indicating that Word-of-Mouth Intention fully mediates the effect of

Active Listening on Purchase Intention when Community Building is low.

Finally, to search for further potential insights into the results of the proposed research

model, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each of the independent variables—

Visibility Management, Active Listening, and Community Building—in order to gauge the effect

of their low vs. high scenarios on Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention. The results

are shown in Table 16 below.

Table 16: *ANOVAs of Low vs. High Scenarios – Effects on Dependent Variables*

Scenarios		Purchase Intention	Word-of-Mouth Intention
Visibility Management **Low**	Mean	4.34	4.30
	N	123	123
	Std. Dev.	1.55	1.52
	Mean	4.93	4.93
High	N	116	116
	Std. Dev.	1.63	1.75
	F value	7.98	8.69
ANOVA	P value	0.005	0.004
	Significance	*p* < .01	*p* < .01
Active Listening **Low**	Mean	3.90	3.74
	N	122	122
	Std. Dev.	1.58	1.56
	Mean	5.38	5.50
High	N	117	117
	Std. Dev.	1.27	1.25
	F value	64.18	92.34
ANOVA	P value	0.000	0.000
	Significance	*p* < .001	*p* < .001
Community Building **Low**	Mean	4.33	4.31
	N	132	132
	Std. Dev.	1.69	1.71
	Mean	4.99	4.97
High	N	107	107
	Std. Dev.	1.43	1.53
	F value	10.47	9.84
ANOVA	P value	0.001	0.002
	Significance	*p* < .01	*p* < .01

As can be seen, both Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention are consistently

and significantly higher for the high versus the low scenarios of all three independent variables:

Visibility Management (*p* < .01), Active Listening (*p* < .001), and Community Building (*p* <

.01). This analysis additionally shows that the largest effect on both dependent variables (differences in means) comes from the high versus low scenarios of Active Listening; this is consistent with the finding in the structural equation model that Active Listening is the independent variable with the largest effect on both Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention.

The next chapter discusses the implications of these findings, summarizes the contributions and limitations of this study, as well as offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This final chapter presents a summary of the research's findings along with a discussion of their implications for marketing theory and practice. It also reviews the limitations of the study, presents some suggestions for future research, and concludes with a discussion of its contributions.

Research Findings and Implications

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of a firm's inbound marketing practices (visibility management, active listening, and community building) on its marketing performance (consumers' purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention). The following is a summary of the key findings and their implications.

Purchase Intention and Word-of-Mouth Intention

As hypothesized, consumers' word-of-mouth intention was found to have a positive and significant effect on their purchase intention. This finding is consistent with numerous studies of the effect of positive WOM on sales (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lu, et al., 2013; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011) as well as that of WOM intention on purchase intention (Petrescu, et al., 2012).

The study found that Word-of-Mouth Intention is the variable with the strongest direct effect on Purchase Intention and, most interestingly, that it is a significant and substantial partial mediator between the independent variables—Visibility Management, Active Listening, and

Community Building—and Purchase Intention: all their indirect effects through the mediation of Word-of-Mouth Intention are larger than their direct effects on Purchase Intention. Even more, in some of the models that were run with subsets of data, Word-of-Mouth Intention *fully* mediates the effect on Purchase Intention of some of the independent variables.

This finding is extremely relevant to marketing practitioners because it indicates that one of the best ways—and in some cases in this study, the *only* way—to affect potential consumers' purchase intentions is indirectly by way of their word-of-mouth intention. This increasing importance of eWOM marketing was recently confirmed in a meta-analysis which showed that the impact of eWOM on product sales is greater than that of most other marketing-mix elements (You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015).

Visibility Management

As hypothesized, a company's perceived visibility management was shown to have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention. This finding is consistent with studies that have analyzed click-through and conversion rates based on search engine results (Baye, et al., 2009; Brooks, 2004; Ghose & Yang, 2009; Pan, et al., 2007; Rutz, et al., 2012). A company that is able to have its market offering listed more prominently in search results will have a better chance of consumers wanting to purchase their product/service.

Consumer word-of-mouth intention was also shown to be positively and significantly affected by perceived visibility management. If a consumer in "search mode" believes that a certain product/brand is relevant due to its high visibility, he/she might be motivated to let other people know about this finding because of his/her desire for social interaction, concern for other consumers, and/or the potential to enhance his/her own self-worth (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004).

This finding constitutes an original contribution of this research to the literature: to the best of the author's knowledge there are no previous studies that have empirically examined the effect of search engine results or other visibility management outcomes on consumers' word-of-mouth intentions. This result is even more important because of the fact that consumers' word-of-mouth intention is a significant and substantial mediator of the effect of a firm's perceived visibility management on consumers' purchase intention, even becoming a full mediator in some cases (Low AL, High AL, and High CB).

In an online world, being visible to consumers is a necessary (Kim, et al., 2011) but not a sufficient condition: companies must develop and implement measures to ensure that their market offerings are *highly* visible online when consumers are both searching and simply browsing. In addition to search engine marketing (SEM), firms can increase their online visibility, for example, through the use of blogs (Halligan & Shah, 2010) and the dynamic retargeting of consumers with served ads (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2013), among other currently available visibility management tools. The findings of this study indicate that marketers should prioritize their company's visibility management initiatives based on their potential for promoting word-of-mouth among potential consumers in order to maximize the marketing impact of these activities.

Active Listening

A firm's perceived active listening was found, as hypothesized, to have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention, which is consistent with the customer service literature (Boulding, et al., 1993; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Consumers will be more inclined

to want to purchase a product/service if they perceive that the company is listening and responding to their questions, concerns, or comments.

Consumer word-of-mouth intention was also shown to be positively and significantly affected by perceived active listening. This finding is consistent with studies that have examined the impact of customer service on WOM intention (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Parasuraman, et al., 1991; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Consumers who perceive that a firm is highly engaged with its customers will have a higher tendency to recommend its products to a friend. The relevance of this finding for practitioners is highlighted by the fact that consumer word-of-mouth intention is always a significant and substantial mediator of the effect of a company's active listening on consumer purchase intention, even fully mediating this effect in some cases (Low VM, High VM, and Low CB).

The critical importance of active online listening for companies can be seen in the fact that AL was the variable with the largest impact on both PI and WOMI in this study. The findings of this research suggest that inbound marketing practitioners should consider allocating an important part of their resources to active listening as a means of optimizing the impact of their marketing investments. Firms not only need to be responsive to consumers on their own websites as was shown in this study, but must also develop mechanisms to monitor the web in order to actively listen to consumer conversations wherever they are taking place (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) and to be able to respond in a strategic and timely manner (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

Community Building

As hypothesized, a company's perceived community building was shown to have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention. This finding is consistent with studies that have examined the relationship between positive WOM and a firm's sales (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Lu, et al., 2013; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011; You, et al., 2015). Consumers who perceive that a company is active in social media and promotes online communities will tend to have an increased intention to buy its products or services.

Perceived community building was also found to have a positive and significant effect on WOM intention which is consistent with the eWOM literature (Gruen, et al., 2006; Lee & Youn, 2009), confirming that word-of-mouth drives consumer recommendations. In this case as well, consumer word-of-mouth intention was always a significant and substantial mediator of the effect of perceived community building on consumer purchase intention, even becoming a full mediator in some instances (Low VM and High AL).

Fostering online communities is another critical inbound marketing activity: CB was the variable with the second largest effect on both PI and WOMI in this study. Companies can influence consumer-to-consumer communications and promote positive eWOM by creating and nurturing online communities with resources such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, product wikis, and blogs, among others.

One interesting and unexpected finding was in the interaction between community building and visibility management. Specifically, when community building was low, visibility management had no significant effect on word-of-mouth intention. In other words, the search engine results affected purchase intention but not word-of-mouth intention when the restaurant was not actively promoting social online communities, indicating perhaps that consumers would prefer to "hold their judgement" and not recommend a socially inactive restaurant to friends until

after trying it out themselves. This was the only instance in which there was a non-significant effect on word-of-mouth intention which, as has been seen, plays an important mediating role in the model to purchase intention. Firms should take this into consideration when considering promoting online communities.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be noted.

First, the experiment was performed with a sample of undergraduate university students. Even though a student sample is appropriate for theory testing, it reduces the external validity or generalizability of the results to other populations (Calder, et al., 1982; Peterson, 2001). Future empirical studies could use samples from other non-student populations in order to compare findings and gauge the robustness of the research model.

Second, this research was limited to one product/service category: restaurants. Future research could extend the study to other categories to see if there are differences, for example, between low involvement and high involvement products or services.

Third, this study used a questionnaire that presented hypothetical screens to the subjects with a very basic design which made it obvious that it was not asking questions about a real restaurant. More sophisticated measurement instruments with realistic web pages could be used in future studies to compare with the results of this research.

Fourth, the subjects were all students of US universities. Future research could study a broader population that includes subjects from various countries and/or cultures.

This research analyzed consumers' perceptions of a company's visibility management, active listening, and community building; future studies could analyze these same variables from

an organization's perspective by surveying marketing managers, measuring actual activities that they perform in these areas, and perhaps comparing them with consumer's perceptions of the firm's actions.

Future studies could also expand the proposed research model by including other variables known to affect consumer behavior such as trust and attitude, among others.

Finally, future research could explore Inbound Marketing Practices as a higher order construct consisting of Visibility Management, Active Listening, and Community Building.

Contributions and Conclusion

This research provides several contributions to marketing academics and practitioners alike.

The concept of inbound marketing, though popular with practitioners, has surprisingly not been the object of academic research. Scholars have examined the effect on business performance of some of the inbound marketing practices individually but no one has studied their simultaneous impact which is what occurs in reality when a consumer searches online for a product or service and finds pages with customer comments and links to social communities. An important contribution of this research is that it is one of the first studies to conceptualize inbound marketing and to empirically assess the effect that a firm's inbound marketing practices have on consumers' behavioral intentions.

The inbound marketing framework developed here could help to explain and predict why some companies are more successful than others in today's network economy fueled by social electronic communications, as well as offer actionable areas to managers for improving their company's competitive position. This framework could also be used as a diagnostic tool to

identify specific areas for improvement, as well as to benchmark against competitors, track changes over time, and detect areas for investments, hiring needs for specific expertise, and potential opportunities for training and development.

Another contribution of this research is its study of the impact of online visibility management—specifically online search results—on consumer word-of-mouth intention. As previously noted, it appears to be the first empirical study to assess this important relationship, thus extending the extant online search literature.

This study also extends previous literature in the areas of online search, online customer service, social media, and eWOM by looking at a firm's activities in these areas from the consumer's perspective and analyzing how the consumer's perception of these activities or lack thereof affect his or her behavioral intentions.

The digital communication revolution of the last decade has changed the way in which consumers gather information and make decisions about products and services. Enabled by search engines and social media, people are using the Internet to learn about, shop for, purchase, and share comments on all kinds of products and services. This increased power of information in the hands of consumers has created a marketing paradigm shift. The traditional paradigm of outbound marketing, in which companies sent one-way promotional messages to consumers, has been replaced by a new inbound marketing paradigm in which companies must focus on being visible and attractive to customers who are searching and surfing the web.

Understanding the impact of these inbound marketing practices—online visibility management, active listening, and community building—on consumer behavior can guide companies in their inbound marketing efforts and help them make better informed strategic decisions.

This research has addressed a gap in the literature by developing and empirically testing a theoretical framework that can lead to a better comprehension, explanation and prediction of the effectiveness of digital marketing tools in the new era of inbound marketing. It is the author's hope that it will be a starting point for future academic research and serve as a guide for marketing practitioners.

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APPENDIX A

MEASUREMENT ITEMS

Visibility Management (VM) – developed for this study

1. How good a job do you think that Restaurant ABC does at managing their presence on the Internet?

   (1 for *Not very good* to 7 for *Very good*)

2. In your opinion, how effective is Restaurant ABC at handling their visibility on the web?

   (1 for *Not very effective* to 7 for *Very effective*)

3. How much do you think that Restaurant ABC is concerned about being found online by potential customers?

   (1 for *Not concerned* to 7 for *Very concerned*)

Active Listening (AL) – adapted from Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003)

1. How willing and ready do you think that Restaurant ABC is to respond to their customers?

   (1 for *Not willing and ready to respond to customers* to 7 for *Extremely willing and ready to respond to customers*)

2. How sincerely interested do you think that Restaurant ABC is in solving their customers' problems?

   (1 for *Not interested in solving customers' problems* to 7 for *Extremely interested in solving customers' problems*)

3. How promptly do you think that Restaurant ABC answers its customers' inquiries?

   (1 for *Not promptly* to 7 for *Extremely promptly*)

Community Building (CB) – developed for this study

1. How good do you think that Restaurant ABC is at connecting with its customers?

   (1 for *Not good at connecting with its customers* to 7 for *Very good at connecting with its customers*)

2. How good do you think that Restaurant ABC is at encouraging communication among its customers?

(1 for *Not good at encouraging communication* to 7 for *Very good at encouraging communication*)

3. In your opinion, how good is Restaurant ABC at building communities among its customers?

   (1 for *Not good at building communities among its customers* to 7 for *Very good at building communities among its customers*)

Purchase Intention (PI) – adapted from Venkatesh, et al. (2003)

1. I would intend to go to Restaurant ABC in the near future.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

2. I would plan to go to Restaurant ABC in the near future.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

3. I predict I would dine at Restaurant ABC in the near future.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

Word-of-Mouth Intention (WOMI) – adapted from Babin, et al. (2005)

1. I would say positive things about Restaurant ABC to other people.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

2. I would recommend Restaurant ABC to someone who seeks my advice.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

3. I would encourage friends and relatives to visit Restaurant ABC.

   (1 for *Strongly disagree* to 7 for *Strongly agree*)

APPENDIX B

STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

<u>Page 1</u>

NSU NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

My name is Luis Casas and I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University who is conducting research about inbound marketing and consumer behavior. Thank you for helping me with this important study. I value your feedback and by participating you will help increase the understanding of how consumers react to companies' online activities.

Procedures

You will be presented with some scenarios to create a simulated situation in which you are searching online for a restaurant to go out with your friends for dinner. You will then be asked to answer some questions regarding what you saw in those scenarios and how you would behave in this simulated situation based on your past experience. The questionnaire consists of 29 questions and will take approximately 5-10 minutes or less. This questionnaire will be conducted with an online survey created on a platform called Qualtrics.

Risks/Discomforts

There are no known risks for participating in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, it is hoped that through your participation, researchers will learn more about how businesses can better address the needs of consumers online.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants are anonymous, will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than then primary investigator and assistant researchers listed below will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

Compensation

There is no direct compensation; however, participants may earn extra academic credit, at the discretion of their professors.

Participation
Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your academic status, GPA or standing with the university. If you desire to withdraw, please close your internet browser and notify the principal investigator at this email: lc1092@nova.edu.

Questions about the Research
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Luis Casas at lc1092@nova.edu.

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions that you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Suri Weisfeld-Spolter at sw887@huizenga.nova.edu.

I have read and understood the above consent form, and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Please click the arrow in the right corner of the bottom of the screen to continue.

`>>`

Page 2

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Imagine the following scenario:

You are planning on going out to dinner with your friends over the weekend, so you decide to search online for a local restaurant. When you type *"best local restaurants"* into your favorite search engine, you get the results shown in the next screen.

`>>`

Page 3

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"**Restaurant ABC**" catches your attention. Please look at its position in the search results.

Click the arrow in the right corner of the bottom of the screen to continue.

best local restaurants

- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- **Restaurant ABC**
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation

>>

Page 4

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Based on the search engine results you just saw, please answer the following questions.

How good a job do you think that Restaurant ABC does at managing their presence on the Internet?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not very good   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very good

In your opinion, how effective is Restaurant ABC at handling their visibility on the web?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not effective   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very effective

How much do you think that Restaurant ABC is concerned about being found online by potential customers?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not concerned   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very concerned

>>

Page 5

When you click on Restaurant ABC's link, you are taken to a page where customers post questions and comments. Please take a moment to read the customer posts and the restaurant's responses.

Click the arrow in the right corner of the bottom of the screen to continue.

Restaurant ABC

Questions or Comments?

- **JBR12:** Do I need to make a reservation? *May 30, 2018*
  - **ABC:** *No reservation is needed. We'll be happy to seat your party when you arrive!* *May 30, 2018*

- **MFP99:** Great service! I absolutely love this place :) *May 21, 2018*
  - **ABC:** *Thanks!! We love to please our customers :)* *May 22, 2018*

- **VPJ87:** Do you have lunch specials? *April 13, 2018*
  - **ABC:** *Absolutely! We have daily lunch specials with smaller portions and great prices.* *April 13, 2018*

- **BDRR:** My soft drink was flat and watered down! Not happy... *March 7, 2018*
  - **ABC:** *Sorry to hear that! Please let us know when/if that happens again and we'll refill it to your satisfaction... on us!* *March 8, 2018*

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Page 6

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UNIVERSITY

Based on the page you just saw where customers posted comments/questions and the restaurant responded to them, please answer the following questions.

How willing and ready do you think that Restaurant ABC is to respond to their customers?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not willing and ready to respond to customers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely willing and ready to respond to customers

How sincerely interested do you think that Restaurant ABC is in solving their customers' problems?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not interested in solving customers' problems	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely interested in solving customers' problems

How promptly do you think that Restaurant ABC answers its customers' inquiries?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not promptly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely promptly

>>

Page 7

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When you continue browsing through the restaurant's site, you find this page where Restaurant ABC invites you to connect with them. Please take a moment to look at the page.

Click the arrow in the right corner of the bottom of the screen to continue.

Restaurant ABC

Get social...

f Become a fan of ABC on Facebook.

Follow ABC on Twitter.

Share your favorite pics on Instagram.

Check out some mouthwatering boards on Pinterest.

- Click *here* to receive our monthly specials.

>>

Page 8

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Based on the page you just saw where the restaurant invites visitors to connect with them, please answer the following questions.

How good do you think that Restaurant ABC is at connecting with its customers?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Not good at connecting with its customers   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very good at connecting with its customers

How good do you think that Restaurant ABC is at encouraging communication among its customers?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Not good at encouraging communication   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very good at encouraging communication

In your opinion, how good is Restaurant ABC at building communities among its customers?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Not good at building communities among its customers   ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   Very good at building communities among its customers

>>

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And now, based on the pages that you previously saw: the search engine results, the restaurant's response to customer comments and questions, and the restaurant's invitation to connect with them, please imagine that this is a real life situation and answer the following questions.

I would intend to go to Restaurant ABC in the near future.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I would plan to go Restaurant ABC in the near future.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

I predict I would dine at Restaurant ABC in the near future.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

>>

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Again, based on the search engine results, the restaurant's response to customer comments and questions, and the restaurant's invitation to connect with them, please imagine that this is a real life situation and answer the following questions.

I would say positive things about Restaurant ABC to other people.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly agree

I would recommend Restaurant ABC to someone who seeks my advice.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly agree

I would encourage friends and relatives to visit Restaurant ABC.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	Strongly agree

>>

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Finally, please tell us a few things about yourself.

What year were you born?

| 1990 ▼ |

What is your gender?

○ Male

○ Female

How do you describe yourself?

○ White - not Hispanic

○ Black - not Hispanic

○ Hispanic or Latino

○ Asian or Pacific Islander

○ American Indian or Alaskan Native

○ Other

How often do you use online search to decide what restaurant to go to?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Never	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	All the time

>>

Page 12

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Thank you for your time and responses. If your professor has offered you extra credit for responding to this survey, would you like to receive it per your professor's instructions?

○ Yes, I would like to receive extra credit.

○ No, I am done.

>>

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We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

APPENDIX C

SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGE – HIGH VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT

best local restaurants

- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant ABC
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
    - Address, Phone, Hours of operation

APPENDIX D

SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGE – LOW VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT

best local restaurants

- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant ABC
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation
- Restaurant xxx
  - Address, Phone, Hours of operation

APPENDIX E

RESTAURANT WEB PAGE – HIGH ACTIVE LISTENING

APPENDIX F

RESTAURANT WEB PAGE – LOW ACTIVE LISTENING

APPENDIX G

RESTAURANT WEB PAGE – HIGH COMMUNITY BUILDING

APPENDIX H

RESTAURANT WEB PAGE – LOW COMMUNITY BUILDING