

# Organic vs. paid advertising? Inside the mind of an online browser

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The keyword term a consumer uses in their search engine query can predict the likelihood that they will click on an organic or paid advertisement. That's according to new research by Columbia Business School that takes a unique look at a consumer's behavior between the keyword search and the point-of-click. The new information may give marketers the edge in converting even more consumer clicks on their sites.

The research, "Consumer Click Behavior at a Search Engine: The Role of Keyword Popularity," published in this month's *Journal of Marketing Research* gives advertisers and search engine companies a comprehensive picture of user activity once they arrive on the search results page.

"For example, a consumer looking to buy an automobile may search a popular term like 'car' in a search engine, but a high-involvement consumer would use a less popular keyword that may contain a specific make or model, like Corvette," said Kinshuk Jerath, co-author and professor at Columbia Business School. "Consumers using less popular search terms are more invested and closer to the product they are searching for, making them better targets for sponsored search advertising."

Additional takeaways from the research include:

- Consumers using more popular keyword terms such as 'car' tend

to have lower click activity overall

- Consumers using less popular terms tend to have higher click activity overall and are more targetable for paid advertising
- Consumers using less popular keywords expend more effort and are more invested in the product or service they are searching for
- Day of the week has no impact on the likelihood of clicks by consumers

The study is co-authored by Liye Ma from the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland and Young-Hoon Park from the Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell University. The authors' believe this new insight into consumer click behavior will also help search engines to better optimize their search results landing page for users.

"Learning more about post-search consumer click activity will help search engines design better responses to consumer queries, helping not only the search engine users but advertisers as well," added Jerath.

## **The Research**

The researchers obtained a collection of data on individual consumer click activity after keyword searches from a leading search engine firm in Korea. The layout of the Korean search engine is very similar to United States search engines, such as Google or Bing.

The [search engine](#) provided data on search and click activity for 1,200 keywords over a one-month period. Researchers sampled 120 keywords from the set of 1,200 uniformly at random. Using this data, the team then modeled the number of clicks by a user on the organic and paid lists that they are presented with after a keyword search.

**More information:** *Journal of Marketing Research*,

[journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jmr.13.0099](https://journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jmr.13.0099)

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