# The Mediating Effect of E-WOM on the Relationship Between Digital Marketing Activities and Intention to Buy Via Shopee

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the relationship between digital marketing activities and intention to buy among Shopee's customers in Thailand. Digital marketing activities comprise content marketing and electronic promotion (E-Promotion). The online questionnaires of four hundred and twenty-five (425) Shopee's customers in Thailand were employed for the quantitative study through convenience sampling. The collected data were analysed using the SPSS Version 27 and PLS-SEM program. The results show that E-Promotion can explain E-WOM better than content marketing. E-WOM is significantly influencing customers' intention to buy. Moreover, E-WOM is a significant mediator between digital marketing activities (content marketing and E-Promotion) and customers' intention to buy via the Shopee platform in Thailand. Digital marketers should consider content marketing and E-Promotion because these factors significantly influence E-WOM and indirectly affect customers' intention to buy via Shopee. The recommendation is to expand more sampling to study other online marketplaces. Therefore, the customers' intention to buy is related to digital marketing and a growing trend in this sector.

*Keywords*: *content marketing, E-WOM, E-Promotion, intention to buy, Shopee*

## 1. INTRODUCTION
### 1.1. Background of the Research
In this era, digital marketing is currently one of the largest and best markets for connecting with audiences via the internet, digital technologies, and social media platforms to build brands, increase sales, and drive more product or service traffic (Bala & Verma, 2018; Sosanuy et al., 2021). Shopee is one of the most popular e-commerce platforms for selling online with digital marketing capabilities (Abdullah et al., 2020). Shopee has a unique digital marketing strategy that has propelled the company to the top Thai, Malaysia, and Indonesian e-commerce markets. Besides, Shopee is an e-commerce platform widely shared and used on social media (Boon & Fern, 2021; Kongprapunt & Pupat, 2018; Rachmawati & Agus, 2020; Tjongirin et al., 2020).

Furthermore, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has been used to disseminate customer reaction to the information (Pourabedin & Migin, 2015). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and LINE are essential in today's world. Besides, sharing information, like marketing content and promotions, on social media platforms can influence consumer cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Also, customers' purchase behaviour is influenced by E-WOM (Bu et al., 2021; Cao et al., 2014; Limna et al., 2021). Therefore, evaluating the relationship between content marketing, electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), electronic promotion (E-Promotion), and customers' intention to buy via Shopee in Thailand is critical.

## 1.2. Problem Statement
In the rise of the internet and digitisation, the growing number of significant internet users has created a potential market for the development of online business or e-commerce (Phan, 2021). Customers can look for information, make purchases, or request after-sales services on their computers or mobile devices (Camilleri, 2021). Furthermore, many people nowadays shop online using applications and websites (Saprikis & Avlogiaris, 2021). Thus, it is critical to understand individuals' intention to buy online (Chiu et al., 2012; Gao et al., 2018). Several studies support the influencing factors on customers' intention to buy, such as perceived trust and perceived price (Setiawan & Achyar, 2013), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Yulihasri et al., 2011; Phetnoi et al., 2021), brand awareness (Jaroenwanit et al., 2015), trust (Hajli, 2015), and attitude (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Rana & Paul, 2017). Still, few studies support the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the relationship between digital marketing activities (content marketing and E-Promotion) and intention to buy among Shopee's customers in Thailand. It may benefit online business owners and digital marketers to implement the appropriate strategies to increase an online customer's intention to buy via e-commerce platforms in Thailand.

## 1.3. Research Objective
This study investigates the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the relationship between digital marketing activities (content marketing and E-Promotion) and intention to buy among Shopee's customers in Thailand.

## 1.4. Research Question
Is there a mediating role of electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) on the relationship between digital marketing activities (content marketing and E-Promotion) and intention to buy among Shopee's customers in Thailand?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW
### 2.1. Digital Marketing Activities and Shopee
Digital marketing was defined as a set of internet-based techniques used to persuade users to purchase a product or service (Avery et al., 2012). Digital marketing can also refer to the use of digital media to promote a brand in a timely, personal, and relevant manner (Kok et al., 2021). Furthermore, the use of data sciences, which facilitate decision-making and the extraction of actionable insights and knowledge from large datasets in the digital marketing environment, has risen dramatically over the last decade (Saura, 2021). Shopee is one of the most popular e-commerce marketplace platforms with digital marketing capabilities for selling online (Kok et al., 2021; Vapeevuttikorn & Changchenkit, 2021). Shopee offers to purchase services and sells products online, focusing on mobile and social platforms. Users can choose to buy and sell products at any time, with logistical support available. It also has a payment platform that facilitates safe online shopping. Flash Sales promotions, one of the Shopee's digital marketing strategies, are a special promotion that successfully helps increase sales on

the Shopee's application (Boonyah, 2020; Kok et al., 2021; Vapeevuttikorn & Changchenkit, 2021). Thus, digital marketing activities in this study comprise content marketing and E-Promotion via the Shopee platform.

## 2.2. Content Marketing

Content marketing is the process of creating and disseminating information, which must be relevant and valuable to customers. It is an ongoing conversation between brands and consumers (Lou & Xie, 2021; Wang & McCarthy, 2021). Content marketing is a critical strategy that entails creating and distributing content on websites and social media platforms such as videos, blogs, white papers in pdf format, and website articles. A content marketing strategy aims to create content that will reach the target market (Bala & Verma, 2018; Weerasinghe, 2019). Pektas and Hassan (2020) investigated the effect of digital content on tourists' purchase intention. There was a significant effect of digital content on tourists' purchase intention. Moreover, Weerasinghe (2019) supported that content marketing significantly influenced online customers' willingness to buy. Also, Al-Gasawneh and Al-Adamat (2020) identified the mediating role of E-WOM in content marketing and its connection with green purchasing intentions. There was a relationship between content marketing E-WOM. Hirschfelder and Chigada (2020) identified the role of E-WOM in customer perceptions of content marketing. There was a relationship between content marketing and E-WOM. Also, Hidayanto et al. (2017) examined the determinants of customers' intention to engage in online group buying. There was a relationship between content marketing and E-WOM. Therefore, there is a relationship between content marketing and electronic word of mouth.

*H1: Content marketing significantly influences electronic word of mouth.*

## 2.3. Electronic Promotion (E-Promotion)

The fundamentals of E-Promotion or internet marketing have been discussed in various studies (Mahajan & Suresh, 2017). Several methods for modelling e-Promotions for existing customers have been proposed in recent years. Placing electronic promotions can be used to attract both existing and frequent customers and new customers and persuade them not to switch to a competitor. The ease of searching, the information from web content, the product and service, and the effectiveness and quickness are all critical indicators of E-promotion (Nassiri-Mofakham et al., 2009; Pidada & Suyasa, 2021). Nuseir et al. (2010) concluded that e-promotion significantly influenced consumers' intentions to buy online. Furthermore, Hidayanto et al. (2017) examined the determinants of customers' intention to engage in online group buying. There was a relationship between promotion and E-WOM. Randabunga et al. (2021) also confirmed a relationship between promotion and E-WOM. Therefore, there is a relationship between E-Promotion and E-WOM.

*H2: Electronic promotion significantly influences electronic word of mouth.*

## 2.4. Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

Word of mouth (WOM) refers to verbal exchanges between a real or potential customer and others, such as the product or service provider, independent experts, family, and friends. These communications could be positive or negative (Siripipatthanakul, 2021). Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) refers to a type of communication that has evolved from physical or face-to-face communication to electronic word of mouth enabled by the Internet. The E-WOM's role is to encourage consumers to expose their data (Sosanuy et al., 2021). Yusuf et al. (2018) confirmed E-WOM engagement had a significant positive influence on consumer purchase

intention. Besides, Nurhasanah et al. (2020) confirmed that E-WOM positively and significantly influenced purchase intentions. Rahmawati (2022) also confirmed a significant effect of E-WOM on purchase intention among the millennial generation. Furthermore, Miremadi et al. (2021) concluded the role of E-WOM ads in customers' emotions and choices in electronic shops. There was an association between E-WOM, promotion, and customers' intention. Therefore, there is a relationship between electronic word of mouth, electronic promotion, and customers' intention to buy via Shoppe.

*H3: Electronic word of mouth significantly influences customers' intention to buy.*

*H4: Electronic word of mouth is a significant mediator between content marketing, electronic promotion, and customers' intention to buy via Shopee.*

### 2.5. Customers' Intention to Buy

The term "behavioural intention" refers to an individual's conscious plans or the probability that an individual would engage in a particular behaviour or not (Nasir & Yurder, 2015; Zhao et al., 2018; Sitthipon et al., 2022). The desire to buy a specific product or service within a specific time frame is known as the intention to buy (Naseri, 2021). In recent years, customers' purchasing habits have changed due to widespread concern about purchasing goods and services and a reduction in purchasing power (Bootsumran et al., 2021; Nachit & Belhcen, 2020; Sosanuy et al., 2021). The willingness (intend) to purchase the product in the future and the customer's eagerness to buy the product are indicators of customers' intention to buy. Customers' intention to buy refers to the likelihood that a consumer will purchase a product or service based on the factors that motivate and stimulate them (Abou Ali et al., 2020; Nuanchaona et al., 2021). Therefore, customers' intention to buy in this study refers to the willingness to buy the products via the Shopee platform among Thai people. Their intention to buy was based on content marketing, E-Promotion, and E-WOM.

### 2.6. Conceptual Framework

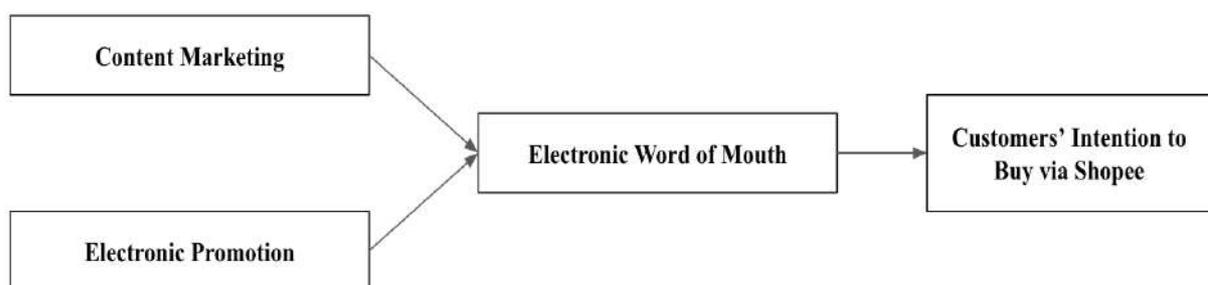The conceptual framework in this study was based on the study of Kajtazi & Zeqiri (2020).



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
### 3.1. Research Method

This study used closed-end questionnaires (Likert's Rating Scale) to collect data. The questionnaire items were developed by the researchers based on previous research. In the reliability of the measurements, the alpha coefficients of Cronbach are needed to overcome all constructs 0.70 (Sitthipon et al., 2022). The main variables in this study were all measured using a five-point Likert Scale, with the following classifications: strongly agree with a value

of 5, agree with a value of 4, neutral with a value of 3, disagree with a value of 2, and strongly disagree with a value of 1. The demographics of the respondents were derived from the study conducted by Sitthipon et al. (2022). The questionnaire items in the constructs of content marketing, electronic promotion (E-Promotion), and customers' intention to buy were based on Pidada & Suyasa (2021). The questionnaire items in electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) were based on Sosanuy et al. (2021). Finally, the questionnaire was proved by five experts for content and criterion validity of the survey questions

### 3.2. Population and Sample
The target population in this study is unknown.  A typical survey has a 95% confidence level. According to collect data, a minimum of 385 cases at p=0.5 must be collected using convenience sampling with a sample error of 5% and a precision level of 95% (Si Dah et al., 2022). The total number of participants in the study was four hundred and twenty-five (425), over the minimum required sample size of 385.

### 3.3. Data Collection
The researchers collected the data using self-administered questionnaires and employed convenience sampling referring to the five regions of Thailand (Northern, Eastern, North-eastern, Central, Southern, and Western). The sample was over 18 years old. Before distributing online questionnaires, the researchers explained the study's objective to the respondents and solicited their participation. The data was collected via the online survey between January 15th, 2022, and February 20th, 2022.

### 3.4. Data Analysis
The collected data were analysed using the SPSS Version 27 and the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model: PLS-SEM, ADANCO 2.3. The respondents' demographic characteristics were investigated using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage). The results of each variable and each item on the questionnaire were analysed using the mean and standard deviation. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was used to determine the consistency and reliability of the data. Factor loadings were calculated to test the instrument's validity. The hypotheses were tested using PLS-SEM (ADANCO 2.3; inferential statistic).

## 4. RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=425).

| Demographics | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 178 | 41.9 |
| | Female | 247 | 58.1 |
| **Region** | Northern | 44 | 10.4% |
| | Eastern | 186 | 43.8% |
| | North-eastern | 37 | 8.7% |
| | Central | 48 | 11.3% |
| | Southern | 66 | 15.5% |
| | Western | 44 | 10.3% |

| Age | 18 - 25 years old | 95 | 22.4% |
| | 26 - 30 years old | 99 | 23.1% |
| | 31 - 35 years old | 81 | 19.1% |
| | 36 - 40 years old | 39 | 9.2% |
| | 41 - 45 years old | 45 | 10.6% |
| | 46 - 50 years old | 36 | 8.5% |
| | 51 years old or over | 30 | 7.1% |
| **Status** | Single | 197 | 46.3% |
| | Married | 149 | 35.1% |
| | Divorced | 79 | 18.6% |
| **Education** | Associated Degree | 89 | 20.9% |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 213 | 50.2% |
| | Master's Degree | 105 | 24.7% |
| | Doctorate Degree | 18 | 4.2% |
| **Occupation** | Civil Servant | 136 | 32.0% |
| | Private Company Employee | 104 | 24.5% |
| | Personal Business | 118 | 27.7% |
| | Freelancer | 42 | 9.9% |
| | Househusband or Housewife | 9 | 2.1% |
| | Student | 16 | 3.8% |
| **Monthly Income** | Less than 10,000 THB | 41 | 9.6% |
| | 10,001 - 20,000 THB | 81 | 19.1% |
| | 20,001 - 30,000 THB | 100 | 23.5% |
| | 30,001 - 40,000 THB | 98 | 23.1% |
| | More than 40,000 THB | 105 | 24.7% |
| | **Total** | 425 | 100% |

Four hundred and twenty-five (425) participants completed online questionnaires. The findings revealed that most respondents were female (58.1%), single (46.3%), aged between 26 and 30 years old (23.1%), from the Eastern part of Thailand (43.8%), and earned a monthly income of more than 40,000 baht (24.7%). Moreover, the respondents were civil servants (32.0%) and held a bachelor's degree (50.2%) education level. Therefore, the demographic profile was represented as the Shopee's customers in Thailand (n=425).

### 4.1. PLS-SEM Results

Table 2. Item Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (n=425).

| Items | Factor Loadings | Cronbach's Alpha | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Content Marketing (CM)** | | 0.8492 | 0.6254 |
| CM1: Content marketing on Shopee is relevant information to my interests. (Mean=4.369, SD.=0.587) | 0.7527 | | |
| CM2: Content marketing on Shopee is accurate information. (Mean=4.233, SD.=0.740) | 0.8404 | | |
| CM3: Content marketing on Shopee is easy to understand. (Mean=4.355, SD.=0.565) | 0.8272 | | |
| CM4: Content marketing on Shopee attracts consumers. | 0.7076 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (Mean=4.339, SD.=0.692) | | | |
| CM5: Content marketing on Shopee benefits customers. (Mean=4.320, SD.=0.619) | 0.8179 | | |
| **Electronic Promotion (EPRO)** | | 0.8493 | 0.7684 |
| E-PRO1: Promotion frequently shown on Shopee is easier to find information. (Mean=4.405, SD.=0.581) | 0.8703 | | |
| E-PRO2: Promotion on Shopee is good information for me. (Mean=4.395, SD.=0.589) | 0.8744 | | |
| E-PRO3: The promotion of products on Shopee is important for me. (Mean=4.329, SD.=0.679) | 0.8849 | | |
| **Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM)** | | 0.8354 | 0.7525 |
| E-WOM1: E-WOM regarding products on Shopee is helpful to me. (Mean=4.336, SD.=0.578) | 0.8906 | | |
| E-WOM2: Online reviews and comments regarding products on Shopee influence my choice. (Mean=4.341, SD.=0.683) | 0.8459 | | |
| E-WOM3: Recommendations regarding products on Shopee would increase my interest in finding out more. (Mean=4.381, SD.=0.590) | 0.8659 | | |
| **Intention to Buy (IB)** | | 0.8439 | 0.7621 |
| IB1: My intention to buy via Shopee is based on content marketing. (Mean=4.315, SD.=0.773) | 0.8700 | | |
| IB2: My intention to buy via Shopee is based on E-WOM. (Mean=4.365, SD.=0.676) | 0.8648 | | |
| IB3: My intention to buy via Shopee is based on E-Promotion. (Mean=4.353, SD.=0.682) | 0.8840 | | |

Table 3. R-Squared (n=425).

| Construct | Coefficient of Determination ($R^2$) | Adjusted $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|
| Electronic Word of Mouth | 0.714 | 0.713 |
| Customers' Intention to Buy | 0.600 | 0.599 |

Table 4. Effect Overview (n=425).

| Effect | Beta | Indirect Effect | Total Effect | Cohen's $f^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Content Marketing → Electronic Word of Mouth | 0.249 | | 0.249 | 0.102 |
| Content Marketing → Intention to Buy | | 0.193 | 0.193 | |
| Electronic Promotion → Electronic Word of Mouth | 0.646 | | 0.646 | 0.680 |
| Electronic Promotion → Intention to Buy | | 0.450 | 0.450 | |
| Electronic Word of Mouth → Intention to Buy | 0.774 | | 0.774 | 1.499 |

Table 5. Total Effects Inference (n=425).

| Effect | Original Coefficient | Standard Bootstrap Results | | | | | Percentile Bootstrap Quantiles | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean Value | Standard Error | T-Value | P-Value (2-Sided) | P-Value (1-Sided) | 0.5% | 2.5% | 97.5% |
| CM → EWOM | 0.2494 | 0.2556 | 0.0544 | 4.5865 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.1182 | 0.1550 | 0.3654 |
| CM → IB | 0.1931 | 0.1981 | 0.0419 | 4.6086 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0903 | 0.1204 | 0.2815 |
| EPRO → EWOM | 0.6455 | 0.6398 | 0.0522 | 12.3586 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.5016 | 0.5329 | 0.7357 |
| EPRO → IB | 0.4999 | 0.4966 | 0.0496 | 10.0711 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.3637 | 0.3967 | 0.5916 |
| EWOM → IB | 0.7744 | 0.7755 | 0.0297 | 26.0616 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.6956 | 0.7124 | 0.8286 |

CM = Content Marketing, EWOM = Electronic Word of Mouth, EPRO = Electronic Promotion, IB = Intention to Buy Via Shopee

Content marketing can predict E-WOM at $\beta=0.249$, $p<0.001$ (two tails at 0.0000 and one tail at 0.0000). E-Promotion can predict E-WOM at $\beta=0.646$, $p<0.001$ (two tails at 0.0000 and one tail at 0.0000). E-WOM can indicate customers' intention to buy via Shopee at $\beta=0.774$, $p<0.001$ (two tails at 0.0000 and one tail at 0.0000). E-WOM is a significant mediator between content marketing, E-Promotion, and customers' intention to buy via Shopee by about 71.4% ($R^2=0.714$). Overall, the relationship phenomenon can be explained by 60 % ($R^2=0.60$).

### 4.2. Assumptions

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing.

| Hypotheses | Results | Actions |
|---|---|---|
| H1: Content Marketing → Electronic Word of Mouth | $\beta=0.249$ at $p<0.001$ | Accepted |
| H2: Electronic Promotion → Electronic Word of Mouth | $\beta=0.646$ at $p<0.001$ | Accepted |
| H3: Electronic Word of Mouth → Intention to Buy via Shopee | $\beta=0.774$ at $p<0.001$ | Accepted |
| H4: Electronic word of mouth is a significant mediator between content marketing, electronic promotion, and customers' intention to buy via Shopee. | $R^2=0.714$ at $p<0.001$ | Accepted. Overall, the relationship phenomenon can be explained by 60.0% ($R^2=0.60$). |

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
### 5.1. Discussion
The study's PLS-SEM model confirmed the proposed conceptual framework. The findings indicate E-Promotion can explain E-WOM better than content marketing. E-WOM is significantly influencing customers' intention to buy. Moreover, E-WOM is a significant mediator between content marketing, E-Promotion, and customers' intention to buy via Shopee, a leading e-commerce platform, in Thailand. The findings supported the previous

research of Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat (2020), Hidayanto et al. (2017), and Hirschfelder & Chigada (2020) that there was a relationship between content marketing and E-WOM. Thus, content marketing significantly influences e-WOM. The findings supported the previous research of Hidayanto et al. (2017) and Randabunga et al. (2021) that there was a relationship between promotion and E-WOM. Thus, E-Promotion significantly influences E-WOM. The findings confirmed the previous research of Miremadi et al. (2021), Nurhasanah et al. (2020), and Sosanuy et al. (2021) that there was a positive and significant relationship between E-WOM and customers' intention to buy. Thus, E-WOM significantly influences customers' intention to buy. The findings supported the previous research of Miremadi et al. (2021) that there was an association between E-WOM, promotion, and customers' intention. Therefore, E-WOM is a significant mediator between content marketing, E-Promotion, and customers' intention to buy via the Shopee platform in Thailand.

### 5.2. Conclusions
It reveals that E-WOM plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between content marketing, E-promotion, and customers' intention to purchase via Shopee in Thailand. E-promotion is a better explanation of E-WOM than content marketing. Through the mediating role of E-WOM, content marketing and e-promotion influence customers' intention to purchase via Shopee. Digital marketers should focus content marketing on the Shopee's content marketing is relevant information to customers' interests. Besides, the marketers should consider E-Promotion, especially in the electronic promotion frequently shown on Shopee is easier to find information for customers. Enhancing electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) is related to the recommendations regarding products on Shopee because it would increase customers' interest in finding out more. The measurement for customers' intention to buy via Shopee could be assessed with the intention to buy should pay attention to content marketing, E-WOM, and E-Promotion. As a result, digital marketers and online brands can devise a strategy to meet the needs and expectations of customers to buy via the Shopee platform and could be applied to any online platform.

### 5.3. Research Implication
The study's findings may assist online business owners, and digital marketers implement the appropriate strategies to increase online customers' intention to buy via any digital platform in Thailand. Furthermore, this study added to the existing literature on the relationship between content marketing, E-WOM, E-Promotion, and online customers' intention to buy. This study's findings may aid academics in broadening their research by incorporating more potential elements. The measurements could be used to guide future research on content marketing, E-WOM, E-Promotion, and online customers' intention to buy.

### 5.4. Limitations and Recommendations
The nature of this study is a self-administered online questionnaire. The relationship phenomenon was explained in Thailand but could not be explained in other countries. Thus, the researchers should expand sampling to other countries for more understanding. Also, qualitative research, such as interviews and focus groups could provide more insight into future results. This study examines customers' intention to buy products via only Shopee. The recommendation is to consider quantitative and qualitative research regarding online marketplaces and their consumer behaviours.

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