# TO STUDY THE IMPORTANCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH AND TRUST ON ONLINE SELLERS IN SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG THE FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KANYAKUMRI DISTRICT

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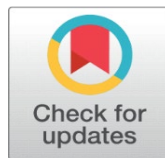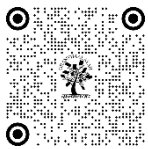
ABSTRACT

Nowadays, social media platforms are widely used by people of all ages for various purposes. However, it is observed that the younger generation is mainly utilizing these platforms for both educational and entertainment purposes. As a result, my research focuses on young individuals who use social media for online shopping. My investigation focuses on how positive conversations, also known as EWOM, influence consumers to trust retailers, and how this trust subsequently impacts consumers' decisions to shop online. Most existing literature emphasizes the direct impact on consumer online shopping behavior. This study concentrates on young users of social media users. The data were collected from Agastheeswaram taluk in Kanyakumari district (Nagercoil and Chungankadai) with the help of survey instruments by adopting simple random sampling method of 150 sample respondents. Therefore, the findings of this study will assist online sellers in understanding the level of trust that users have in online transactions and their willingness to use social media platforms for such purposes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms provide people with the opportunity to express their opinions about retailers products and services through electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM). Many of the largest online retailers like Walmart, Amazon, Costco, Home Depot enabling customers to leave online reviews of the products they sell. Trust forms the foundation of online shopping and is established through the credibility and reliability demonstrated by e-retailing companies. In traditional brick-and-mortar stores, consumers have the opportunity to examine products, interact with salespeople, and assess the overall credibility of the establishment. However, in online transactions, these elements of personal interaction and physical inspection are absent. EWOM on the internet, such as online consumer reviews, offers some advantages over

traditional word-of-mouth. One of the key differences is that EWOM is measurable since comments and reviews are written and available on websites, making it easier to track and analyze. Furthermore, marketers have more control over certain types of EWOM messages. For example, in platforms like Amazon.com, marketers can decide whether to allow consumer reviews to be displayed or not. They can also offer specific review formats or guidelines to guide consumers in posting their opinions in a desired way. This level of control provides marketers with opportunities to strategically manage and shape the EWOM surrounding their products or services. By encouraging positive reviews, addressing negative feedback, and guiding the overall sentiment of EWOM, marketers can leverage EWOM as part of their marketing strategies. They can also analyze the content of EWOM messages to gain insights into consumer perceptions, preferences, and areas for improvement. However, it's important to note that while marketers have some control over EWOM, it is ultimately a dynamic and organic form of communication. Consumers have the freedom to share their opinions and experiences, and their authentic feedback can significantly impact the perception and reputation of a product or brand.

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The landscape of marketing has significantly shifted with the advent of EWOM in online shopping, disrupting the traditional profit generation model reliant on advertisements and discounts. As social media gains global prominence, online sellers face the daunting task of establishing a reputable presence to attract customers. To achieve success in the online marketplace, retailers must specifically target the ever-growing population of active young adult netizens. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that female consumers exhibit higher engagement and purchasing behavior in the online realm compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, my study centers on understanding the online shopping preferences and Behaviors of Young College Students.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

To investigate the influence of EWOM on female college students in Kanyakumari district, a study was conducted using a simple random sampling method. A self-constructed questionnaire was designed to collect data aligned with the research objective. The questionnaire utilized a Likert five-point scale, allowing respondents to express their agreement or disagreement on various statements. The target group consisted of 150 participants, including undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students, who had varying levels of experience in online shopping. All 150 valid responses were included in the analysis, which was performed using the SPSS package. The collected data will provide insights into the influence of EWOM on the online shopping behavior of female college students in the study area.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To find out the demographic profile of the social media users.

To analyse whether the users are trust the online sellers for the subsequent use of online shopping.

To inculcate the various components of electronic word of mouth commonly used by the users of the social media.

1.4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

WOM has been consistently found to exert a considerable influence on consumer decision-making (Katz and Lazarfeld, 1955). In line with the findings on WOM, studies have demonstrated that eWOM (electronic Word-of-Mouth) tends to possess greater credibility, empathy, and relevance for customers compared to information generated by marketers on the Web (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Trust is established when buyers have certain expectations that the seller will act in a reliable, ethical, and socially appropriate manner, without taking advantage of the situation. It involves the seller fulfilling their commitments and behaving in a dependable way, even in situations where the buyer may be vulnerable or dependent on the seller (Gefen et al., 2003). Indeed, consumers' perceptions of trustworthiness play a significant role in shaping their ultimate purchasing decisions when interacting with sellers (Gupta et al., 2009). Trust plays a crucial role in online commerce. In order to encourage consumers to make purchase decisions and complete transactions, sellers must establish a level of trust that surpasses the threshold for trustworthy behavior. When consumers trust a seller, they are more likely to feel confident in buying their products and transferring money. By focusing on these trust-building factors, sellers can create an environment where consumers feel confident and comfortable making purchase decisions and transferring money online. Building trust is an ongoing process, and

consistently delivering on promises and maintaining a positive reputation are key to fostering long-term customer trust and loyalty (Bente et al., 2012).

1.5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
1.5.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPOINDENTS

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. Understanding their profile is essential for interpreting the results, as demographic factors may influence perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes related to the research topic. The respondents were described in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, income level, and other relevant characteristics.

Table 1

Demographic profile of the respondents			
Variables	**Particulars**	**No. of Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	Less than 18	11	7.3
	18-25	131	87.3
	26-30	3	20
	31-35	5	3.3
	Over 35	-	-
	Total	**150**	**100**
Education	Basic/secondary	85	56.7
	Undergraduate	62	41.3
	Graduate/Master degree	3	2
	Total	**150**	**100**
Frequency of buying (PER MONTH)	None/one time	41	27.3
	2-3 times	81	54
	4-5 times	15	10
	Over 5 times	13	8.7
	Total	**150**	**100**
Experience of buying (Years)	Less than 1	4	2.7
	01-Feb	26	17.3
	03-Apr	31	20.7
	Over 5	89	59.3
	Total	**150**	**100**
Social media platforms used frequently	Facebook	3	2
	Whats App	61	40.7
	Twitter	1	0.7
	Instagram	85	56.7
	Total	**150**	**100**

Source: Statistical Analysed Data

Table 1.1 shows the demographic profile and online shopping behaviors of the respondents provide useful insights into the study population. The majority of participants (87.3%) are aged between 18 to 25 years, indicating a predominantly young consumer base. Only a small fraction falls into the 26–30 (2%) and 31–35 (3.3%) age brackets, with no respondents above 35 years. Regarding educational background, most respondents have a basic or secondary level education (56.7%), followed by undergraduates (41.3%), and a small minority (2%) holding graduate or master's degrees. In terms of shopping frequency per month, over half of the respondents (54%) purchase online 2–3 times, while 27.3% do so only once or not at all. A smaller percentage shop online more frequently, with 10% purchasing 4–5 times, and 8.7% buying products more than 5 times per month. When considering experience with online shopping, the largest proportion of respondents (59.3%) have been shopping online for over five years, which suggests a high level of familiarity and comfort with e-commerce platforms. Meanwhile, 20.7% have 3–4 years of experience, and only 2.7% are relatively new shoppers with less than a year of experience. Regarding social media usage, Instagram is the most frequently used platform (56.7%), followed by WhatsApp (40.7%), while Facebook (2%) and Twitter (0.7%) are used far less often. This highlights Instagram and WhatsApp as the dominant platforms for engagement and potentially for exposure to electronic word of mouth (eWOM), especially among younger consumers.

Trust in online retailers and frequency of buying

Trust is a key factor that influences consumers' online shopping intentions and behaviors. When consumers trust an online platform or retailer, they are more likely to engage in online shopping and make repeated purchases. Building trust can be achieved through transparent policies, secure payment systems, reliable customer service, and positive customer reviews. Prioritizing trust-building efforts is crucial for online businesses to attract and retain customers.

Table 2

Trust in online retailers and frequency of buying

Statements	None or one time	2-3 times	2-3 times	Over 5 times	F Value	P Value
If I required help, the seller would do his/her best to help me	2.95	3.01	3.50	4.08	3.804	.012
I expect that the seller's intentions are benevolent	2.93	3.26	3.25	3.92	2.605	.054
I do not doubt the honesty of the vendor	2.85	3.25	3.17	3.92	2.836	.040
The vendor is sincere and genuine.	2.80	3.21	3.50	3.83	3.285	.023
I expect that the vendor will keep promises he/she make	2.90	3.48	3.67	3.67	2.861	.039

Source: Statistically Analyzed Data

Note: ** Denotes significance at 1 per cent level.

The table 2 shows that the respondents who purchased products over 5 times reported the highest levels of trust across all statements. Their belief that the seller would offer help when needed was the highest (mean = 4.08), with a statistically significant difference among the groups (F = 3.804, p = .012). The perception of the vendor's sincerity and genuineness also increased with purchase frequency, with a notable difference across groups (F = 3.285, p = .023). The belief that the vendor will keep promises scored consistently higher among those shopping more frequently (mean = 3.67), again reaching statistical significance (F = 2.861, p = .039). The expectation of the seller's benevolent intentions showed a rising trend (from 2.93 to 3.92), it narrowly missed statistical significance (p = .054). Trust in the honesty of the vendor, however, did reach significance (F = 2.836, p = .040), with frequent shoppers showing the strongest agreement (mean = 3.92). These findings suggest that consumer trust in online vendors builds with experience—those who shop more often online are more likely to perceive sellers as helpful, honest, and reliable.

Electronic word of mouth and social media platforms used frequently

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube have become key facilitators of EWOM, enabling content to spread rapidly across diverse networks. Unlike traditional word of mouth, EWOM on social media is more visible, far-reaching, and enduring, significantly influencing consumer attitudes and purchase decisions. As social media usage continues to rise, understanding the dynamics of EWOM within these platforms is essential for businesses seeking to build trust, reduce perceived risk, and enhance their influence over consumer behavior.

Table 3

Particulars	Facebook	WhatAapp	Twitter	Instagram	F value	P value
I often read other consumer's online review to purchase product from online retail store.	5.00	3.71	4.06	3.7	1.481	.222*
To make sure I usually purchase product from online retail store after viewing the consumer's review.	4.00	4	4.09	3.91	.433	.730*
I often consult other consumer's product review to help choose right online retail store for product.	3.00	3.86	3.88	3.84	.263	.852*
I frequently gather information from online consumer's product reviews before I purchase product from online retail store.	4.00	3.79	4.15	4.03	1.187	.317*
When I purchase product from online retail store, consumer's online reviews make me confident whether purchase the product or not.	3.00	3.69	3.42	3.7	0.787	.503*
Source: Statistically Analyzed Data						

Table 3 shows that The analysis reveals that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) plays a role in influencing consumer purchasing behavior across all four social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram. Although Facebook users reported the highest mean score (5.00) for reading other consumers' online reviews before purchasing from online retail stores, followed by Twitter (4.06), WhatsApp (3.71), and Instagram (3.70), the differences were not statistically significant (p = .222). Similarly, when asked whether they make purchases only after viewing consumer reviews, responses were fairly consistent across platforms, with Twitter (4.09) slightly ahead, but again no significant variation was found (p = .730). Regarding consulting reviews to choose the right online store, Facebook users showed the lowest engagement (3.00), while users on other platforms hovered around 3.86 to 3.88, yet this too was not statistically significant (p = .852). In terms of gathering information from online reviews before purchasing, Twitter users showed the highest tendency (4.15), though this was not significantly different from other platforms (p = .317). Finally, the degree to which consumer reviews instill confidence in purchase decisions was fairly uniform across platforms, with no statistically meaningful difference (p = .503). Overall, while the mean scores suggest that some platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, may slightly lead in EWOM engagement, the lack of statistically significant differences indicates that consumers across all platforms similarly rely on EWOM when making online purchasing decisions.

2. FINDINGS

- During the online consumer buying behavior journey, it has been observed that retailers play a vital role in ensuring customer satisfaction. One of the key ways retailers can achieve this is by actively engaging with customer recommendations and feedback in the form of comments and reviews on their official website or within the shopping environment.

- It is found that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) plays a crucial role for retailers in aligning their product launches with the needs and demands of consumers. This is achieved through the continuous flow of information provided on the retailer's website.

3. SUGGESTIONS

- Retailers should actively engage with consumers through social media platforms, online reviews, and customer feedback to shape and influence EWOM.

- It is important to conduct retailer-initiated EWOM campaigns, such as influencer marketing or brand ambassador programs, on consumer buying behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the significance of EWOM and trust in online sellers operating on social media platforms, particularly among female college students in the Kanyakumari district. The findings have emphasized the growing influence of social media in shaping consumer behaviors and purchase decisions. The study has highlighted that EWOM plays a pivotal role in building trust and influencing the online buying behavior of female college students. The power of recommendations, reviews, and endorsements shared through social media platforms has proven to be instrumental in shaping their perceptions and preferences. Furthermore, trust has emerged as a crucial factor in establishing a successful online seller-customer relationship. Trust is cultivated through factors such as secure transactions, transparent communication, reliable product information, and prompt customer support. When online sellers can establish trust with female college students, it leads to increased engagement, repeat purchases, and positive brand advocacy. In summary, this study has underscored the importance of EWOM and trust in online sellers operating on social media platforms. It has revealed the influential role of these factors on the online buying behavior of female college students in the Kanyakumari district.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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