

## CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ATTRIBUTES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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### Abstract

The rapid growth of online communication through social media, websites, blogs and other platforms has increased consumer awareness of electronic word of mouth. Consumers' desire for social contact, financial rewards, caring about other consumers, and the potential value of endorsements have all been highlighted as major motivators that affect how they behave when using electronic word-of-mouth. The main objective of the present study is to investigate consumer perceptions regarding the attributes of electronic word of mouth in Cuddalore district. The primary data for the study was collected using a multistage sampling technique. Five of the seven taluks of Cuddalore district have been selected for the first stage. For the second stage, convenience sampling was used to select 90 respondents from each taluk. A survey method was used to carry out this empirical investigation. The primary data, which forms a crucial part of the study, was collected from 450 respondents using the schedule method. The objectives of the study were taken into consideration when a schedule was developed using the Likert scale technique. 25 consumers participated in a pre-test of the schedule to assess the relevance of the questions. Considering the results of the pre-test, necessary changes were made to the revised schedule. Theses, journals, periodicals and unpublished publications were the secondary data sources. The top five attributes of electronic word of mouth, according to consumers, are that reviews and comments are up to date, that people can rely on EWOM to determine the effectiveness of a product, EWOM information about a product is convincing, the opinions and comments shared by others online are convincing, and the reviews and opinions shared online are reasonable. The study made recommendations on how to make electronic word of mouth more effective.

**Keywords:** Electronic Word of Mouth, Online Reviews, Word of Mouth.

### INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of Internet platforms, electronic word of mouth has gained particular importance and is now one of the most powerful sources of information on the Web. Due to the influence that these new forms of communication allow consumers to exert on each other by allowing them to access or exchange information about companies, products or brands, technological advances have led to changes in consumer behaviour. Consumers around the world can now post reviews that other users can use to learn more quickly about products and services. Electronic word-of-mouth gives businesses an advantage over conventional word-of-mouth in that it allows them to gauge the impact of those comments on other people and try to understand what drives consumers to publish their reviews online. By creating virtual areas on their own websites where consumers can post comments and express their opinions about the company's products and services, companies are trying to better manage online customer

reviews. In the mid-1990s, as the Internet began to change the way consumers communicated with each other, the idea of electronic word-of-mouth was first proposed. Information can spread quickly and internationally through electronic word of mouth. Electronic word of mouth is considered an important social effect that affects how consumers perceive the product and service adoption process.

### **Electronic Word of Mouth**

Online reviews of products or businesses, whether favourable or unfavourable, are called electronic word of mouth. This is a situation that occurs primarily online, where the majority of associated commenters maintain anonymity. Modern consumers can evaluate the opinions of others about products and services, regardless of their geographic boundaries, through the extensive use of electronic word of mouth. The idea of electronic word-of-mouth and traditional word-of-mouth differ significantly in several ways. In terms of coverage, this is one of the main distinctions between the reach and speed of electronic word of mouth. Since electronic word of mouth is easily accessible on the Internet, it quickly reaches millions of people in a short period of time. However, early on, the electronic word-of-mouth format was primarily text-based; however, over time, several electronic word-of-mouth formats began to emerge, and individuals could now post reviews in both image and video form.

### **Significance of the Study**

Electronic word of mouth has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, but it can have both positive and negative effects. Although few studies have examined electronic word of mouth, little is known about its attributes. As a result, this study will shed important light on the attributes of electronic word-of-mouth. Government, companies and academia will receive the majority of the contribution. With its in-depth analysis of electronic word-of-mouth attributes, the study will significantly advance academic research in the field of electronic word-of-mouth marketing. For consumer durable goods companies, especially their marketers, the effectiveness of electronic word of mouth is crucial to understanding consumer behaviour as it relates to how they perceive their products, typically recognized by their brand, based on negative or positive feedback. In this regard, efforts have been made to study how consumers perceive the attributes of electronic word of mouth in Cuddalore district.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the present study is to investigate customer perceptions regarding the attributes of electronic word of mouth in Cuddalore district. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the socio-economic characteristics of durable goods consumers of Cuddalore district.
2. To determine the extent to which electronic word of mouth features are accepted by consumers in Cuddalore district.

## Testing of Hypothesis

To study the consumer acceptability of electronic word of mouth attributes in Cuddalore district, the following null hypothesis was developed and tested.  $H_{01}$ : Consumers' acceptance of electronic word-of-mouth attributes will not be influenced by their socio-economic background.

## Scope of the Study

The objective of the present study is to determine the extent to which consumers accept electronic word-of-mouth attributes in Cuddalore district. The study covers only the five taluks of Cuddalore district: Chidambaram, Cuddalore, Kattumannarkoil, Panruti and Kurinjipadi. The present study mainly focuses on consumer profiles and electronic word-of-mouth attributes.

## Sampling Design

The scope of the study is limited to investigating consumer acceptance of electronic word of mouth attributes in Cuddalore district. In Cuddalore district, there were 7 taluks as on December 31, 2022. The primary data of the study was collected using multistage sampling technique. Five of the seven taluks of Cuddalore district have been selected for the first stage. For the second stage, convenience sampling was used to select 90 respondents from each taluk. The table below presents the distribution of the study sample.

**Table 1: Sampling Distribution**

TALUK	No. of Samples
CHIDAMBARAM	90
Cuddalore	90
Panruti	90
Kattumannarkoil	90
KURINJIPADI	90
TOTAL	450

## Tools for Data Collection

A survey method was used to carry out this empirical study. The primary data of the study, which is a crucial part, was collected from 450 respondents using a schedule. The objectives of the study were taken into consideration as a schedule was developed using the Likert scale technique. 25 consumers participated in a pre-test of the schedule to assess the relevance of the questions. In light of the pre-testing, necessary changes have been made to the modified schedule. Theses, journals, periodicals and unpublished publications were the secondary data sources.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected was edited, quantified, categorized and logically assembled to produce the results. To analyze the data, the researcher used statistical techniques, such as t-test, analysis of variance, coefficient of variation, multiple regression, and percentage analysis.

**Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic Profile		No. of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	354	78.67
	Female	96	21.33
Age (Years)	Upto 30	133	29.56
	31-40	121	26.89
	41-50	151	33.56
	Above 50	45	10.00
Education	Up to SSLC	38	8.44
	H.Sc	122	27.11
	Degree	221	49.11
	PG and above	69	15.33
Occupation	Agriculturist	288	64.00
	Business	62	13.78
	Employed	45	10.00
	Profession	11	2.44
	Others	44	9.78
Monthly income (Rs.)	Upto 10000	72	16.00
	10001-20000	108	24.00
	20001-30000	189	42.00
	Above 30000	81	18.00
Marital status	Married	367	81.56
	Unmarried	269	18.44
Family pattern	Joint family	75	16.67
	Nuclear family	375	83.33
No. of family members	Upto 3	332	73.78
	4 and 5	96	21.33
	6 and above	22	4.89

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 indicates that of the 450 consumers in the sample, 78.67% are male and 21.33% are female. Consumers aged 41 to 50 are the majority (33.56%). 29.56% of consumers are under 30 years old, 26.89% between 31 and 40 years old and 10% are over 50 years old. 8.44% of consumers have completed their SSLC, 27.11% have completed their H.Sc, 49.11% are graduates and 15.33% have completed their postgraduate or higher studies. Concerning occupation, 10% of consumers are employed, 2.44% are professionals and 9.78% exercise other occupation. Farmers represent 64% of the population. Consumers represent 42% of those whose monthly income is between Rs.20,001 and Rs.30,000. 16% of respondents had a monthly income of less than Rs.10,000, 24% had a monthly income between Rs.10,001 and Rs.20,000 and 18% had monthly income above Rs.30,000. Of the 450 consumers, 81.56% are married and 18.44% are unmarried. In terms of family pattern, 16.67% of the respondents are part of a joint family, while 83.33% have a nuclear family. In terms of the number of family members, respectively 73.78%, 21.33% and 4.89% of the respondents have up to 3, 4 and 5, and 6 and more.

**Table 3: Relationship between Respondent Demographics and Electronic Word-of-Mouth Attributes: F Test**

Demographics	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F Value	Result
Age	Between groups	186.554	3	62.185	1.872	Ns
	Within groups	14813.643	446	33.214		
	Total	15000.198	449			
Education	Between groups	109.751	3	36.584	1.096	Ns
	Within groups	14890.446	446	33.387		
	Total	15000.198	449			
Occupation	Between groups	419.933	4	104.983	3.204	*
	Within groups	14580.264	445	32.765		
	Total	15000.198	449			
Monthly income	Between groups	17.805	3	5.935	0.177	Ns
	Within groups	14982.392	446	33.593		
	Total	15000.198	449			

Source: Primary Data

\* Significant at 5% level \*\* Significant at 1% level

At the 5% significance level, the calculated F value for age is (1.872) less than the table value (2.625), with 3, 446 degrees of freedom. As a result, there is no significant relationship between consumer age and electronic word of mouth attributes. At the 5% significance level and 3, 446 degrees of freedom, the calculated F value for education is (1.096) lower than the table value (2.625). As a result, there is no significant relationship between consumers of different education status groups and electronic word of mouth attributes. At the 5% significance level, the calculated F value for occupation is 3.204, which is higher than the table value of 2.392 at 4, 445 degrees of freedom. As a result, there is a significant relationship between consumer occupations and electronic word of mouth attributes. At the 5% significance level with 3, 446 degrees of freedom, the calculated F value for monthly income is (0.17) less than the table value (2.625). As a result, there is no significant relationship between consumers of different monthly income groups and electronic word of mouth attributes. As a result, there is no significant relationship between electronic word of mouth attributes and consumer demographics (age, education, and monthly income). The null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is therefore accepted. There is, however, a significant correlation between consumers' occupation and electronic word of mouth attributes. The null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is therefore rejected.

**Table 4: Relationship between the Electronic Word of Mouth Attributes and Respondent Demographics: t Test**

Demographics	Calculated t Value	Table Value at 5 % Level	DF	Result
Gender	0.279	1.966	448	Not significant
Area of residence	1.009	1.966	448	Not significant

Source: Primary Data

At the 5% significance level and 448 degrees of freedom, the calculated t-value for gender is (0.279) lower than the table value (1.966). As a result, there is no significant difference between male and female consumers' acceptance of the attributes of electronic word of mouth. At the 5% significance level and 448 degrees of freedom, the calculated t-value for the area of residence is (1.009) lower than the table value (1.966). Therefore, there is no significant difference in the level of consumer acceptance of electronic word of mouth attributes. The null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ), that there is no significant difference between consumer demographics (such as gender and area of residence) and electronic word of mouth attributes, is therefore accepted.

**Table 5: Consistency in Respondents' Acceptance of the Attributes of Electronic Word of Mouth**

Respondent Demographics		No. of Respondents	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation
Gender	Male	354	75.08	5.67	7.55
	Female	96	74.90	6.20	8.28
Age (Years)	Upto 30	133	74.17	6.40	8.63
	31-40	121	75.05	5.20	6.93
	41-50	151	75.48	5.74	7.60
	Above 50	45	76.16	5.27	6.92
Education	Up to SSLC	38	73.82	6.28	8.51
	H.Sc	122	74.84	5.60	7.48
	Degree	221	75.48	5.87	7.78
	PG and above	69	75.58	5.91	7.82
Occupation	Agriculturist	288	75.08	5.58	7.43
	Business	62	73.87	5.21	7.05
	Employed	45	77.33	6.39	8.26
	Profession	11	76.55	4.08	5.33
	Others	44	73.75	6.85	9.29
Monthly income (Rs.)	Upto 10000	72	74.69	5.85	7.83
	10001-20000	108	74.96	5.77	7.70
	20001-30000	189	75.08	6.05	8.06
	Above 30000	81	75.36	5.12	6.79
Area of residence	Rural	300	75.24	6.01	7.99
	Urban	150	74.65	5.28	7.07

Source: Primary Data

Male consumers had the highest score on average (75.08), followed by female consumers (74.90). This indicates that male consumers are more accepting of electronic word of mouth attributes. Consumers over 50 receive a score of 76.16, while those aged 41 to 50 receive a score of 75.48. Consumers under 30 had the lowest average score (74.17). Therefore, consumers over 50 are more accepting of electronic word-of-mouth attributes.

The highest average score was achieved by consumers with a PG degree or higher qualification (75.58), followed by consumers with a degree (75.48). Consumers with an academic level up to SSLC received a poor average score (73.82). Therefore, consumers with a PG degree or above are more accepting of electronic word of mouth attributes.

The average score for employed consumers is 77.33, followed by 76.55 for professionals.

Consumers in other occupations had a low average score (73.75). As a result, employed consumers are more accepting of the attributes of electronic word of mouth. Consumers with monthly income above Rs 30,000 had the highest average score (75.36), followed by those between Rs 20,001 and Rs 30,000 (75.08).

Consumers who earn less than Rs. 10,000 per month have a low average score (74.69). The attributes of electronic word of mouth are therefore more accepting by the consumers who earn more than Rs. 30,000 per month. There is consistency in the level of acceptance of male consumers (7.55%), consumers over 50 years old (6.92%), consumers with H.Sc education (7.48%), professionals (5.33%), and consumers with monthly income above Rs. 30,000 (6.79%) and urban consumers (7.07%) with regard to electronic word of mouth attributes.

**Table 6: Effect of Consumer Demographics on Electronic Word-of-Mouth Attributes**

Customer Demographics	Regression Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	73.556	1.677	-	-
Gender	-0.316	0.664	-0.476	Ns
Age	0.696	0.277	2.510	*
Education	0.271	0.329	0.823	Ns
Monthly income	0.245	0.285	0.862	Ns
Area of residence	-0.800	0.581	-1.375	Ns

Source: Primary Data

\* Significant at 1% level

### Multiple Correlation Coefficients between Consumer Demographics and Attributes of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

R	R Square	F	Result
0.139	0.019	1.744	Ns

According to the above analysis, there is a low correlation (0.139) between the attributes of electronic word of mouth and the demographic characteristics of the chosen consumers. Consumer demographics collectively explain 1.90% of the variation in electronic word of mouth attributes, based on R-square.

The multiple correlation coefficient is not significant, according to the F value. Electronic word of mouth attributes do not significantly influenced by gender, education, monthly income or area of residence. In contrast, consumer age has a significant impact on electronic word-of-mouth attributes.

**Table 7: Acceptance of the Electronic Word of Mouth Attributes by Respondents**

Statements	Number of Respondents	Mean Score
Electronic word of mouth reviews and comments are up to date	450	3.54
People can rely on electronic word of mouth to determine a product's effectiveness	450	3.53
Electronic word of mouth information about a product is persuasive	450	3.48
The reviews and comments shared online by others are convincing	450	3.48
Reviews and opinions shared online are reasonable	450	3.44
Electronic word of mouth reviews and comments are desirable	450	3.44
Reviews and comments shared online by others are trustworthy	450	3.40
A customer's choice is influenced by the reliability of electronic word-of-mouth reviews	450	3.40
Electronic word of mouth reviews and comments from others are comprehensive	450	3.39
The views and opinions shared online by others are essential	450	3.36
Online reviewers and commenters typically express satisfaction with a product or service	450	3.36
Reviews and comments from online forums are helpful	450	3.34
Positive electronic word of mouth encourages the purchase of a product	450	3.34
Electronic word of mouth reviews of products are perceived as neutral by people	450	3.33
Reviews and comments from online sources are credible	450	3.33

The table above shows a list of electronic word of mouth attributes. Consumers cite the following top five attributes of electronic word of mouth: Reviews and feedback are current; people can rely on EWOM to evaluate the effectiveness of a product; EWOM information about a product is convincing; other people's online reviews and comments are convincing; and the views and opinions shared online are reasonable. The least significant attributes, on the other hand, are: positive EWOM promotes product purchase, EWOM product reviews are considered unbiased by consumers, and reviews and comments from Internet sources are reliable.

## CONCLUSION

Technology has changed people's lifestyles in the modern world. Technology influences all of our daily behaviour, including consumer behaviour. Consumers want information to be available when they need it and to have access to more information than ever before. They access and use this information for various reasons and through various channels. The attributes of electronic word of mouth were studied. The analysis revealed that reviews and feedback are current; people can rely on EWOM to evaluate the effectiveness of a product; EWOM information about a product is convincing; other people's online reviews and comments are convincing; and the views and opinions shared online are reasonable are the top five attributes of electronic word of mouth. The study made recommendations on how to make electronic word of mouth more effective. The researcher will be amply rewarded if the study motivates policy makers and practitioners to make genuine efforts to improve it.



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