

THE IMPACT OF REPUTATION AND TRUST ON WORD-OF-MOUTH IN DANCE TRAINING INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF GUANGXI Y DANCE ART SCHOOL *

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Received 10 July 2026; Revised 15 July 2026; Accepted 17 July 2026

Abstract

This study investigated the predictive relationships of institutional reputation and trust with word-of-mouth (WOM) at Guangxi Y Dance Art School. A quantitative cross-sectional predictive-correlational design was used. The final sample comprised 351 respondents representing enrolled students; adult students responded directly, while parents or guardians provided evaluations for younger students. A five-point questionnaire measured reputation (depth, breadth, and image), trust (competence, integrity, and benevolence), and WOM (intention, content, and Overall levels of reputation ($M = 3.399$, $SD = 0.960$), trust ($M = 3.338$, $SD = 0.973$), and WOM ($M = 3.233$, $SD = 0.989$) were moderate. Regression analysis showed that reputation significantly predicted WOM ($\beta = .314$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .099$) and that trust significantly predicted WOM ($\beta = .474$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .225$). The trust model demonstrated greater predictive strength and explanatory power than the reputation model. These findings indicate that reputation creates initial credibility, whereas trust more strongly encourages

* Huanhuan Tang and Ao Chen. (2026). The Impact Of Reputation And Trust On Word-Of-Mouth In Dance Training Institutions: A Case Study Of Guangxi Y Dance Art School.

Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Development, 4(5), 728-737.;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.>

Website: <https://so12.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/IJSDIADP/>



advocacy based on accumulated service experience. The study recommends transparent policies, consistent teaching and communication, and evidence-based reputation management.

Keywords: reputation, trust, word-of-mouth, dance training institutions, educational services

Introduction

Private education is a high-involvement service because families evaluate teaching quality, safety, student progress, communication, and long-term developmental value. These outcomes are partly intangible and become visible only after repeated participation. Prospective customers therefore rely on institutional signals before enrollment and on relationship experience after enrollment. Reputation reduces uncertainty by summarizing accumulated public evaluations, whereas trust reflects confidence that the institution is competent, honest, and concerned about students' interests (Kotler et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2021).

Word-of-mouth is especially influential in dance training because parents and students often exchange information through close interpersonal networks, parent groups, performances, and social media. Such communication is perceived as more independent than institutional advertising. Contemporary eWOM research similarly shows that trust and the credibility of experience-based information consumers shape' willingness to share and act on recommendations (Anastasiei et al., 2024; Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2023).

Guangxi Y Dance Art School competes with chain schools, community studios, and online learning alternatives. The case is theoretically useful because it distinguishes two related but different mechanisms. Reputation is a market-level signal that may generate awareness and initial confidence; trust is a relationship-level judgment formed through teaching, policy implementation,

and communication. Examining these mechanisms in a regional dance school extends educational service marketing by showing why visibility alone may not produce advocacy. The study therefore evaluates the current levels of reputation, trust, and WOM and estimates their separate predictive relationships with WOM.

Objectives

The objectives were:

- (1) to examine the levels of reputation, trust, and WOM at Guangxi Y Dance Art School;
- (2) to determine whether reputation significantly predicts WOM;
- (3) to determine whether trust significantly predicts WOM.

The following hypotheses were tested.

H1: Institutional reputation has a significant positive relationship with WOM.

H2: Institutional trust has a significant positive relationship with WOM.

Literature Review

Institutional reputation is an accumulated social evaluation derived from experience, communicated information, visibility, and perceived professionalism. In educational services, customers cannot fully inspect teaching outcomes before purchase; reputation therefore functions as a quality signal and assists institutions in entering consumers' consideration sets. However, reputation can remain broad and externally formed. It may attract attention without guaranteeing that customers will advocate for the institution after direct experience (Kotler et al., 2022).

Trust concerns the expectation that a service provider will act reliably. This study treats trust as competence, integrity, and benevolence. Competence

concerns teachers' expertise and curriculum delivery; integrity concerns promise fulfillment, policy fairness, and honest communication; benevolence concerns genuine care for student development. In ongoing educational relationships, trust is repeatedly updated through classes, feedback, safety management, and problem resolution. It is therefore more proximal to advocacy than reputation because it is anchored in experienced conduct rather than general awareness (Wilson et al., 2021).

WOM refers to interpersonal communication about an institution, including willingness to recommend, the substance of shared information, and its perceived influence on others. Digital platforms have expanded WOM beyond face-to-face conversations, but credibility remains central. Research indicates that brand trust can encourage positive eWOM propensity, while cultural context influences how review information is produced and interpreted (Anastasiei et al., 2024; Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2023). For a regional dance school, reputation should support WOM by lowering initial uncertainty, while trust should support WOM by giving customers confidence that their recommendation will not expose others to avoidable risk.

Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional predictive-correlational design was adopted to estimate relationships among naturally occurring experiences without manipulating the service setting (Blair et al., 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Reputation and trust were analyzed as predictors, and WOM was the outcome variable.

The population comprised 3,986 enrolled students at Guangxi Y Dance Art School. The student roster served as the sampling frame, and 351 cases were included through simple random selection. The sampling unit was the enrolled student. Adult students completed the questionnaire themselves; for minors, the

parent or guardian responsible for enrollment decisions completed the service-evaluation items. Only usable questionnaires were retained in the final dataset.

The questionnaire contained demographic items and eighteen five-point Likert items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Reputation was measured by six items covering depth, breadth, and image; trust by six items covering depth competence, integrity, and benevolence; and WOM by six items covering intention, content, and effect. A pilot test with 60 respondents was used to refine the wording and assess internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were .875, .883, and .876, respectively. These coefficients indicated satisfactory internal consistency and supported the use of the instrument in the formal survey.

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the sample, while means and standard deviations summarized the levels of reputation, trust, and WOM. Two simple linear regression models were estimated to test H1 and H2 at $p < .05$. Standardized beta coefficients were used to assess predictive strength, and R^2 was used to determine the proportion of variance in WOM explained by each predictor.

Results

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 351)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	81	23.08
	Female	270	76.92
Age	3-12 years	163	46.44
	13-18 years	119	33.90
	18 years and above	69	19.66
Grade level	Primary school	163	46.44

Secondary school	119	33.90
University	28	7.98
University graduate	41	11.68

The sample was dominated by female users (76.92%). Most users were under 18 years old, with 46.44% in the 3-12 age group and 33.90% in the 13-18 age group. The grade distribution was consistent with the age profile, as primary and secondary school students accounted for the majority. This structure reflects the typical consumer profile of dance training institutions, where parents and young learners jointly shape service evaluation and WOM behavior.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Reputation, Trust, and WOM

Construct	Dimension	M	SD	Level
Reputation	Depth	3.426	1.094	High
	Breadth	3.326	1.050	Moderate
	Image	3.444	1.067	High
	Overall	3.399	0.960	Moderate
Trust	Compet.	3.423	1.084	High
	Integrity	3.248	1.105	Moderate
	Benev.	3.342	1.052	Moderate
	Overall	3.338	0.973	Moderate
WOM	Intention	3.308	1.085	Moderate
	Content	3.256	1.101	Moderate
	Effect	3.135	1.105	Moderate
	Overall	3.233	0.989	Moderate

Reputation was moderate overall ($M = 3.399$, $SD = 0.960$). Image was the strongest reputation dimension, whereas breadth was weaker, indicating that

favorable impressions among current customers were not matched by equally broad visibility. Trust was also moderate ($M = 3.338$, $SD = 0.973$). Competence received the highest trust score, while integrity received the lowest. WOM was moderate ($M = 3.233$, $SD = 0.989$); intention exceeded content and effect, suggesting that willingness to recommend was not always converted into detailed or influential advocacy.

Table 3 Regression Models Predicting WOM

Model	B (SE)	Beta	t	p	R ²	Result
Rep. -> WOM	0.324 (.052)	0.314	6.185	< .001	0.099	H1
Trust -> WOM	0.482 (.048)	0.474	10.053	< .001	0.225	H2

Reputation significantly predicted WOM ($B = 0.324$, $\beta = .314$, $t = 6.185$, $p < .001$), explaining 9.9% of its variance. Trust also significantly predicted WOM ($B = 0.482$, $\beta = .474$, $t = 10.053$, $p < .001$), explaining 22.5% of the variance. Both hypotheses were supported. The larger standardized coefficient and R^2 obtained for trust indicate that trust was the more influential predictor of WOM in this study.

Discussion

The findings support the view that both reputation and trust are associated with positive word-of-mouth, and also clarify their roles at different stages of service evaluation. Reputation provides an external signal that helps families notice an institution and infer its overall quality. Its moderate R^2 value suggests that fame and image alone are insufficient to explain recommendation behavior. In dance schools, families may endorse a well-known institution, but

will still hesitate to recommend it unless they have confidence in its teaching, safety, fairness, and communication. A stronger bivariate relationship exists between trust and word-of-mouth. This model is theoretically significant because dance training is repetitive, relational, and has a profound impact on children. Recommending a school exposes the recommender's social credibility; therefore, parents need evidence that the institution consistently delivers on its promises and protects the student's interests. Trust in competence is relatively high, but trust in integrity and goodwill is only moderate. The results indicate that professional guidance is necessary, but not sufficient. Transparent policies, respectful problem-solving approaches, and visible care can translate technical competence into relational trust, and ultimately into recommendation behavior. The difference between word-of-mouth intention and word-of-mouth effect is also crucial. Respondents may be willing to express positive opinions but lack concrete evidence to persuade others. Students' learning progress records, authentic learning outcomes, and ongoing communication with parents all provide concrete evidence for recommendations. In an information dissemination environment like Guangxi, where information often spreads through parents and community networks, this kind of evidence is particularly important for enhancing the quality and influence of word-of-mouth.

The research results indicate that reputation and trust are complementary foundations for word-of-mouth communication. Reputation builds public recognition and initial trust, while trust enhances the confidence required for personal recommendations. The model's moderate explanatory power also suggests that word-of-mouth communication may be reinforced by other service factors, such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, emotional attachment, service quality, and observable student outcomes. Incorporating these factors into future research will contribute to a more comprehensive explanation of promotional activities in private arts education.

Recommendation

Schools should build their reputation through facts, not propaganda. Official channels should showcase teacher qualifications, curriculum features, student progress, academic achievements, and safety measures in a consistent manner. Since reputation has a weaker reach than image, communication should extend beyond existing families, for example, through community performances, open classes, and reliable local partnerships.

Secondly, management should prioritize integrity and goodwill to earn trust. Tuition fees, make-up classes, refunds, attendance, safety responsibilities, and complaint handling processes should be clear, transparent, and consistently implemented. Teachers and administrators should provide timely progress feedback and document issue resolution. These practices reduce uncertainty and demonstrate the school's reliability and student-centered philosophy.

Thirdly, schools should translate referral requests into valuable word-of-mouth. This can be achieved through voluntary parent testimonials, student showcases, alumni stories, and referral opportunities, provided the participation process is transparent and does not rely on excessive incentives. Management should track renewal rates, referral rates, satisfaction levels, complaint resolution, and the quality of online reviews as relationship metrics.

Future research should extend this model to multiple dance institutions and regions, examining the relationship between reputation and trust and service quality, satisfaction, perceived value, emotional attachment, and student outcomes. Multiple regression or structural equation modeling can provide a more comprehensive assessment of the relationships between these variables. Longitudinal research designs can also elucidate how reputation develops into trust and how both contribute to word-of-mouth communication over time.

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