# The Impact of Advertising Credibility on Purchase Intentions: An Empirical Study among Iraqi Facebook Users

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## ABSTRACT

With the acceleration of the wave of technological developments, the advertising industry started to abandon its traditional tools adopted in addressing customers. The advertising landscape through social media networks has become the most visible way to communicate and interact with customers. However, the advertising messages launched by marketers on these networks do not receive an adequate response from the target customers. The credibility of the information provided by advertisements on social media networks platforms is still questionable by many customers. Which may reduce the effectiveness of these advertisements and undermine the efforts of marketers to generate sufficient conviction among customers to buy. Therefore, this study seeks to test the impact of advertising credibility on purchase intentions among Iraqi Facebook users. In order to achieve this goal, adopted a quantitative approach by surveying a sample of 487 respondents. The results showed that advertising credibility had a moderately positive effect on purchase intentions. The study recommended that marketers should be keen to provide realistic and honest information about marketing offers in their advertising messages.

**Keywords:** Advertising Credibility, Affirmation, Authenticity, Facebook, Purchase Intentions, Trust.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Technological developments in the world have brought about wide changes in the advertising landscape, as digital communication technologies have topped the interests of marketers in delivering their voices to the largest possible number of customers [1]. Specifically, after the spread of the Internet as a popular communication tool among customers [2], as well as the creation of social media networks that enhanced rapprochement and communication among them [3], [4]. Despite the wide adoption of the Internet as an important source of information in various aspects of life, there are still difficulties that marketers face when using it as a means to attract the attention of customers and influence their purchase behavior [5]. In fact, many customers have described the Internet as a world with unclear horizons when purchase compared to the traditional purchase method that allows the customer to speak orally with the sales representative and directly check product specifications [6]. The unfavorable attitudes of customers towards online purchases are often due to their negative perceptions about the credibility of the information provided by online advertising content [7].

Nowadays, there is an expansion in the scope and amount of spending on online advertising [8]. The fierce competition as the dominant feature in the current business environment has led marketers to believe that the best way to capture the customer's attention is through a massive and repetitive amount of advertising [9]. However, there is little interest by many customers in online advertising, and even a large percentage of these customers choose to hit the block button just by seeing an advertising [10]. Advertisements that adopt unreasonable or exaggerated descriptions of products or brands will certainly get a negative response and Customers will ignore it [11]. As a result, variables such as advertising credibility have become one of the important challenges facing online marketers, and perhaps the difficult obstacle to customer interaction with advertising and the formation of purchase intentions [12]. Credibility is the first step towards effective advertising [13]. Besides, advertising credibility is one of the critical variables and indicators in building customer attitudes towards the source and content of the advertisement [14], [15].

Undoubtedly, competition contributed to the prosperity of markets through the presence of various goods and services with different brands. When there is even the slightest doubt about the real advantages of the products displayed by the online advertisements, customers will inevitably hesitate to make a purchase or even develop an intent to purchase. Thus, in cases where the levels of confusion are high, advertisements are supposed to convey sufficient signals of credibility to customers [16]. Frequently, customers view advertising as an untrustworthy and unreliable source in

making purchasing decisions, as it embodies the tactics of marketers through which they seek to increase sales and profits only [17]. Today, a large percentage of online advertising efforts are far from achieving their goals. As customers are becoming more aware of choosing useful content and interacting with marketing offers that respond better to their requirements than ever before [18]. Hence, there is a need to reconsider the assessment of the impact of online advertising on purchase intentions and customer behaviors [19]. In particular, the issue of the credibility of advertising on social networks [20]-[22].

Through a careful review of the previous literature, it can be inferred that there are few studies that dealt with the credibility of advertising, and most of these studies focused on credibility as a sub-dimensions of the effectiveness or value of advertising [14], [23]-[25]. Consequently, there emerges a knowledge gap about the motives or dimensions involved in advertising credibility [5], [26], [19]. Therefore, the current study seeks to enrich marketing knowledge by building a theoretical framework that shows the main motives/dimensions on which the measurement of advertising credibility depends, and then testing the impact of advertising credibility on purchase intentions among Iraqi customers who are users of the Facebook platform.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### A. Facebook

Social media networks are a good example of the results of technological developments and the growing use of the Internet [27], [28]. These networks are a set of technologies that connect individuals and their friends who have specific interests and enable them to share information and materials over the Internet [29], [30]. Social media networks are incarnate in a number of platforms in which Facebook occupies a leading position [31], [32]. Facebook started as an educational platform for college students by Harvard student, Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 [33], [34]. Over time, Facebook has grown to become the most powerful platform in the world and the most attractive to users and marketers [35], [36]. From the point of view of its users, Facebook is a necessity similar to the need for air, water, and food [37], this platform represents the destination that attracts approximately 2.45 billion users worldwide [38]. Thus, Facebook provides a new place for advertising and opportunities to interact with customers and their requirements [39], [40]. This is what made Facebook occupy a prominent position in the interests of marketers as a point of contact that provides the shortest road to reach existing and target customers [41], [42].

### B. Advertising Credibility

Advertising as a form of marketing communication represents that scene through which marketers seek to stimulate the desires of customers and persuade them to buy products and services [44]-[46]. The main goal of advertisers is to provide customers with the information they need to make purchasing decisions [47], [48]. The undeniable fact is that advertising cannot achieve the objectives set for it without the presence of credibility [13]. In general, credibility is a word that describes an individual's belief in the truth and honesty of information related to a particular aspect or issue

[9], [49]. The credibility in advertising literature means the extent of reassurance that customers show towards the truth and reasonableness of the advertising message [50]. More specifically, advertising credibility expresses "the degree to which the customer believes that statements made about the products in the advertisement are true and can be trusted"[51]. While [52] described the ad credibility as an expression of the level of customers' trust towards the integrity and realism of advertising messages sent by marketers, which ultimately determines the extent to which customers accept or reject the content of the advertisement based on their previous experiences.

### C. Purchase Intentions

Purchasing intention is one of the variables that have been repeatedly studied in many marketing research [53], it is a necessary measure to understand customer behavior [54]-[56]. Not to mention that the purchasing intent is an effective tool for predicting the future buying trends of customers [57]. The term purchase intention refers to the motives that drive customers' preferences and tendencies to buy a brand or deal with a particular marketer [58], [59]. Simply, this term means the possibility for a customer to purchase a product as soon as [60]. Although the actual buying behavior has captured the interest of marketing researchers. Nevertheless, many studies have adopted purchase intention as an alternative variable in the study of actual purchase behavior, due the latter is difficult or impossible to measure in field studies. [61].

### D. Advertising Credibility Drivers\dimensions and Their Impact on Purchase Intentions

When marketers seek to design advertisements that stimulates customers' purchase intentions, exaggeration can occur in many cases [62], but credibility is the guide that guides customers when they associate themselves with an advertisement, and then it is a prerequisite for the success of online marketing [16]. In this regard [10], [63] emphasized that ad credibility will determine the outlines of customers' perceptions and purchase intentions. Based on that, the first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: *advertising credibility has a positive impact on purchase intentions among Facebook users.*

Advertising credibility drivers or dimensions can be determined in this study (trust, authenticity, and affirmation) [10], [64], [65].

#### 1) Trust

In a marketing environment characterized by advertising chaos, showering customers with advertising messages has become a common strategy that marketer's resort to get into the customer's mind [66]. In fact, the effectiveness of advertising is not only achieved through spending money and frequency of appearances, but it is closely related to using the right formats to instill trust in the hearts of customers [67]. Trust is the main starting point for credibility, and it stems from honest and ethical business practices [64]. Trust in advertising describes the customer's perceptions of the truth of the information contained in the advertisement and the extent to which it affects his purchasing decisions [34]. Trust within advertising credibility drivers is a broad concept that reflects dimensions such as honesty, influence, and

information reliability [68].

Managing trust amid high levels of customer skepticism is a critical factor in the success of online advertising campaigns [69], [70]. Naturally, low trust in ads on social networks, coupled with customers feeling that the marketer is unable to deliver on his promises will inevitably lead to reluctance to buy [71]. Trust in the online marketing channels has completely different dynamics than offline trust, as online trust gives alternative signals to the traditional buying process that involves touching the product and talking to salespeople, it is a critical factor to gain customer loyalty [72], [73]. The study [74] indicated that trust affects the purchasing behavior of customers on electronic platforms, especially Facebook. A study [75] reported that customers' trust in the advertising offered by stores on Facebook significantly influences their purchase intentions, this result is consistent with the results of studies [76], [77]. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

H1-1: *Trust in advertising credibility has a positive impact on purchase intentions among Facebook users.*

*2) Authenticity*

Authenticity is not just a dimension or driver of ad credibility, but it is a basic requirement that marketing departments seek to achieve in various directions in response to what customers are looking for on an ongoing basis [78] [79]. Authenticity is one of the most important challenges that marketers face in adopting social networks as platforms for their online stores [80]. Because online customers have additional means they can use to detect fake marketers' claims. [81]. The desire for authenticity has recently increased in conjunction with the improvement of the standard of living and income of many customers [82]. Field evidence confirms that customers are increasingly looking for authenticity in products and brands that achieve their satisfaction and give them happiness in a world full of alternatives and diverse marketing offers [78]. Currently, authenticity ranks high in concerns as a criterion for many customers' purchase decisions. Honestly, authenticity trumps quality, just like quality has outperformed cost in previous periods [83], [84].

Although there is no agreement among marketing researchers on a comprehensive definition of the term authenticity [85]. At the beginning of its use, the term's focus was on the aspect of assuring customers that the products advertised were genuine. Then the knowledge connotations involved in the modern use of the term authenticity expanded to go beyond that narrow view, to include those values that confirm everything that is consistent, sincere, and authentic in the product [64], [86]. Certainly, marketers' keenness to adhere to authenticity in the credibility of advertising through their stores on social networks will inevitably enhance customer confidence and gives the product a unique position compared to other products in the market [71], contributes to a positive impact on their purchase intentions [87], Develop relationships with customers [88], Improving marketing performance under competitive markets [89]. Hence, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H1-2: *Authenticity in advertising credibility has a positive impact on purchase intentions among Facebook users.*

*3) Affirmation*

Affirmation represents the third dimension in advertising credibility, the truth from the perspective of many customers' stems from the consensus and affirmation of others from friends and relatives towards a certain thing or situation [64]. The experiences of other customers are a compass that can help the customer choose the best product [90]. Affirmation is a crucial dimension for marketers with the presence of social media networks that have facilitated access to and benefit from the experiences of others [91]. Inevitably, the nature of the communication systems in these networks is completely different from the communication systems in the traditional channels that used to rely on unilateral communications [92], [93]. More precisely, social networks have enabled customers to express opinions and discussions, and thus those opinions and discussions can make their way to reach a wide range of other customers [55], [94].

According to [89] customers who use social networks are more likely to rely on affirmations and discussions that take place on those networks. While [95] explained that the Internet environment includes some ambiguity or limited knowledge about the real parties behind the advertising messages, and here the affirmation of other customers plays an important role in removing the customer's doubts about advertising content. [96], [97] pointed out that other customers' affirmations on Facebook are an effective factor in influencing purchase intentions. Furthermore, the results of studies [98]-[101] revealed that positive comments, opinions, recommendations, or reviews on Facebook have an impact on purchase intentions. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is:

H1-3: *Affirmation in advertising credibility has a positive impact on purchase intentions among Facebook users.*

Fig. 1 illustrates The Conceptual Model for the study. The independent variables in this study are ads credibility (trust, authenticity, affirmation). The dependent variable of this study is purchase intention.
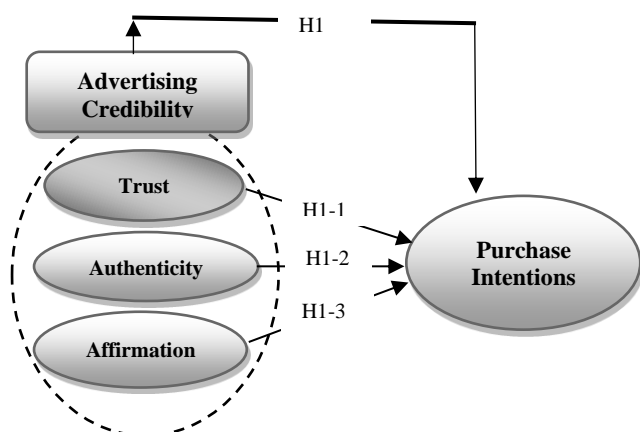


Fig. 1. The Conceptual Model.

III. MYTHOLOGY

*A. Study Design*

This study adopted the quantitative research method in addressing one of the most important challenges facing marketers in the current business environment, which is ad

credibility. Many marketers today rely on social media platforms, especially Facebook, to post their ads about the products and services they are promoting. Due to a large number of ads and the widespread, as well as and the difference of customers throughout the covered area via the Internet, and the spacing between marketers and customers. Questions arise about the ads' credibility in social media and the extent of their impact on the purchasing intent of customers, which may limit the interaction with the ads and make them lose their desired effect. Therefore, the study sought to examine the impact of advertising credibility on purchase intention in the Iraqi business environment through the opinions of a wide range of customers who are users of the Facebook platform.

### B. Sampling

Table I shows the personal characteristics of the members of the sample randomly selected from the academics, and students at the University of Basra, whose ages ranged between 20-40 years. The total number of questionnaire papers distributed was 579, while the papers valid for analysis were only 487.

TABLE I: RESPONDENT PROFILE

| Variables | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 273 | 56% |
| | Female | 214 | 44% |
| Age | 20-25 Years | 112 | 23% |
| | 26-30 Years | 155 | 32% |
| | 31-40 Years | 220 | 45% |
| Education Level | High School Certificate | 74 | 15% |
| | Diploma | 15 | 3% |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 141 | 29% |
| | Master's Degree | 213 | 44% |
| | Doctorate's Degree | 42 | 9% |

n = 487, Sources: Authors' survey.

### C. Data Collection

The data collection tool in the current study consisted of two aspects. The first aspect included a number of questions related to the respondents' personal data, while the second aspect measured the study's two variables (advertising credibility, and purchase intentions) using the five-point Likert scale. Data collection extended for more than two months.

The current study used the previous literature to design and formulate the paragraphs of its questionnaire. The questions used to measure the credibility of the advertisement were from [80] [95]. While the questions used to measure purchase intentions were from [86].

### D. Data Analysis

The current study employed a set of statistical techniques associated with the statistical program (SPSS) in analyzing and extracting the results.

## IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### A. Reliability and Descriptive Analysis

Usually, the first step in the statistical analysis begins with knowing the internal consistency between the paragraphs of the questionnaire by employing the Cornbrash's Alpha scale.

Table II reveals that the variables of advertising credibility and purchase intention have achieved coefficients higher than the recommended value of Cornbrash's Alpha scale (0.70) [102]. The trust driver scored the highest value (0.920) and the lowest value recorded by the authenticity driver (0.813). The results showed that all extracted values of Cornbrash's Alpha scale have a high level of reliability.

Among the scales used to diagnose the extent of variance and dispersion in the answers of the study sample is the measure of central tendency. As shown in Table II. Trust achieved a mean (2.60), and the consistency was with a mean dispersion confirmed by the standard deviation value (0.872), this means that the answers were positive toward Trust. While authenticity got the lowest mean (2.55), the consistency was with an average dispersion confirmed by the value of the standard deviation (.973), which indicates that the answers were positive to some extent toward authenticity. Likewise, affirmation achieved a mean (2.71), and the consistency was with a mean dispersion confirmed by the standard deviation value (0.892), this means that the answers were positive toward affirmation. Whereas, purchase Intentions achieved a mean (2.78), and the consistency was with a mean dispersion confirmed by the standard deviation value (0.926), this means that the answers were positive toward affirmation

TABLE II: RESULTS OF RELIABILITY TEST& DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

| Variables | Number of items | Cornbrash's Alpha | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Independent Variable: Ad Credibility* | | | | |
| 1.Trust | 3 | 0.953 | 2.60 | 0.872 |
| 2. Authenticity | 3 | 0.813 | 2.55 | 0.973 |
| 3. Affirmation | 3 | 0.911 | 2.71 | 0.892 |
| *Dependent Variable: Purchase Intentions* | 4 | 0.859 | 2.78 | 0.926 |

Source: Survey Data.

### B. Correlation Analysis

Table III shows the Pearson analysis that determines the nature of the correlation between the study variables. It is observed that there is a moderate positive relationship between trust driver and purchase intentions (r = 0.285**, p < 0.01), and that the authenticity driver has a weak positive relationship with purchase intentions (r = 0.187 **, p < 0.01), while it was affirmation driver and purchase intentions are moderately positive (r = 0.334**, p < 0.01). This means that there is a positive relationship between advertising credibility and purchase intentions (r = 0.443**, p < 0.01).

TABLE III: VALUES OF PERSON'S CORRELATION ANALYSIS

| Variables | Values |
|---|---|
| Advertising Credibility | 0.443** |
| Trust | 0.285** |
| Authenticity | 0.187** |
| Affirmation | 0.334** |

### C. Hypotheses Testing

Table IV presents the results of testing the influence relationship between the study variables. The results of the regression analysis between the variables of trust and purchase intentions reveal an effect relationship ($\beta$ = 0.303, $R^2$ = 12, T = 11.909). This supports hypothesis (2). It was also found that the authenticity variable had a positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta$ = 0.221, $R^2$ = 9, T = 9.145), which

supports hypothesis (3). Regarding the relationship between the affirmation and purchase intention, there is a positive effect relationship (β = 0. 376, R² = 13, T = 12.545), and this provides support for Hypothesis (4), it means that there is a positive influence relationship between the variables of advertising credibility and purchase intentions. The value of the total correlation coefficient for this relationship was (β = 0.537), and the calculated T (15.427), which is greater than the tabulated T (3.315) at a significant level (0.01), and the advertising credibility was explained (31%) of the change in purchase intentions, and this supports the validity of hypothesis (1).

TABLE IV: RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

| Independent variables | β | R² | T |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advertising Credibility | 0.537 | 0.31 | 15.427 |
| Trust | 0.303 | 0.12 | 11.909 |
| Authenticity | 0.221 | 0.09 | 9.145 |
| Affirmation | 0.376 | 0.13 | 12.545 |

Note. $p<0.01$, (T tabulated = 3.315).

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDS

Credibility has always been a key dimension in the success of any business, but it has recently gained special importance in the field of online marketing and advertising, as it reflects the light that guides the customer in choosing the way he deals with the advertising messages and the truth of their content. Influencing customers in their virtual world within social networks is associated with marketers' efforts to design and broadcast advertising messages that include authentic and trusted content. In other words, marketers' efforts in advertising investment directed to create the desire or intent to buy will not succeed without seeking to create a clear image that enhances the customer's trust levels towards what he hears and sees from the marketing offers. Therefore, this study sought to shed light on the credibility of advertising and the main drivers that depend on it, and the extent to which that credibility affects the purchase intention of Iraqi customers who use the Facebook platform.

The study concluded that there is a moderate positive effect relationship between ad credibility and purchase intentions. Ad credibility drivers had varying effects on purchase intentions. The study showed that positive comments, opinions, recommendations, or reviews on Facebook have a significant positive effect on purchase intention among the respondents. Where many customers resort to verify ad credibility by taking advantage of the affirmations issued by friends and relatives as well as other customers on Facebook. The study also revealed moderate levels of trust in ad credibility and its impact on the intention to buy. Additionally, the authenticity drive had little effect on purchase intent. This means that customers have doubts about the credibility of some of the ads and marketing offers on the Facebook platform. In some cases, the skepticism may be due to the customer's knowledge of negative comments and feedback from other customers through their previous buying experiences. Not to mention the presence of an important factor that may reduce the desire of customers to buy online, which is the absence of laws and legislation that provide protection for them from Cheat and fraud that they may be exposed to by some marketers.

The study recommended that marketers should be aware of the importance of advertising credibility and its main drives that can contribute to reassuring customers about advertising messages and their content. In particular, trust, which is a vital variable in the success of a business in an environment such as the Internet, compared to the traditional purchasing method that allows the customer to see the specifications of the products directly before purchase. on this Point, advertisements related to new products and brands should focus on providing factual and truthful information for customer skepticism. Surely, hiding some information or exaggerating the specifications of the product would weaken the effectiveness of the advertisement and may lead customers to be indifferent towards the content of those advertisements. Furthermore, the advertising message must provide a sufficient guarantee to customers regarding the authenticity of the products promoted, such that this guarantee reflects the presence of a real person or entity behind the advertisement, and it is important for marketers to strive through their stores on Facebook to build an experience that best responds to customer requirements. There is no doubt that this will contribute to generating a good reputation for marketers that customers share with their friends and relatives on social media networks

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