

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AND
CONSUMER PATRONAGE OF SME PRODUCTS**

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ABSTRACT

This study cantered on examining the relationship between social media advertising and consumer patronage of SME products. The study aimed to examine the relationship between content credibility, influencer authenticity and consumer patronage of SME product in Aba, Abia State Nigeria. Primary data was collected from 312 respondents in Aba using structured questionnaire. Correlation analysis in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was employed to analyze and test the hypotheses of the study. The findings of the study revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between social media advertising credibility and consumer patronage. Likewise social media influencer authenticity has no significant relationship with consumer patronage. Therefore, the study concluded that Social media advertising credibility has a significant relationship with consumer patronage. The paper recommended that SME's or businesses should focus on creating honest, transparent, and reliable advertising content to strengthen customer trust and improve patronage outcomes, also that SME's or businesses should not rely entirely on influencer authenticity as a strategy for increasing customer patronage. Frms should combine authentic influencer marketing with quality products, competitive pricing, strong customer service, and effective brand positioning to achieve better marketing outcomes.

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Keywords: Social Media
Advertising Customer
Patronage, advertising
credibility, influencer
authenticity

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INTRODUCTION

It is now an over-flogged fact that advertising and social media are currently two elements working speedily with the synergy of actualizing organizational goals (Odule & Ogunye, 2023). Before now, traditional media have enjoyed the monopoly as a medium of advertising. But lately, a significant new version of Worldwide Web after the dot-com bubble burst (also refer to as the dot-com boom) in 2001, Web 2.0 brought an unprecedented change in the online users' behaviour (Chan & Guillet, 2011). Cho, Cannon, Lopez & Li (2024) explained social media as digital environments that support communication, information sharing, and user engagement, while also requiring users to develop literacy skills to evaluate content credibility. Due to its wide reach, low cost, and interactive communication features, social media has emerged as one of the most effective modern advertising methods (Tuten & Solomon, 2021). The term "social media marketing" refers to the use of internet-based platforms for creating, sharing, and promoting content to specific audiences for marketing purposes. Social media advertising has become a major component of modern marketing communication, especially among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Businesses can use sponsored posts, online videos, influencer marketing, and interactive communication in social media advertising to directly engage customers. The rapid growth of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp has transformed how businesses promote products and interact with customers. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and Tuten & Solomon (2002), these platforms enable SMEs to engage customers through interactive and targeted advertising strategies while simultaneously allowing them to reach large audiences at relatively low costs. Despite increased use of social media advertising, many small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Nigeria continue to struggle with low customer patronage despite their vital role in economic growth and the creation of jobs. According to the circumstances, simply being present on social media does not suffice to guarantee customer conversion. One key factor

influencing the effectiveness of social media advertising is content credibility.

Content credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive social media advertisements as truthful, trustworthy, and reliable (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Furthermore, many SMEs rely on informal advertising strategies, including influencer promotions and user-generated content, without proper verification or consistency. While these tactics may boost visibility, they may also undermine credibility if customers believe that they are biased or misinformed. According to Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler. (2004) credible advertisements that include transparent information, authentic reviews, and consistent messaging tend to build stronger customer trust and increase patronage behavior. Therefore, the effectiveness of social media advertising on customer patronage of SMEs is not determined only by exposure or engagement but also by the credibility of the advertising content. Small and medium-sized Enterprise (SMEs) are more likely to attract customers if their marketing portrays them as trustworthy, dependable, and honest.

This study therefore examines the relationship between social media advertising and consumer patronage of SME products, with particular emphasis on content credibility and influencer authenticity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

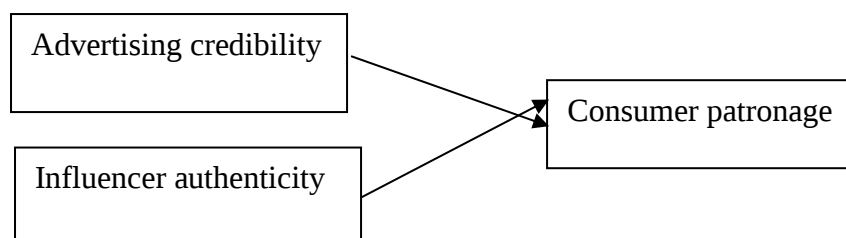
The foundation of this work was Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM). Fred Davis (1989) came up with the Technology Acceptance Theory (TAM) to explain how people accept and use technology. Perceived Usefulness (PU), or the degree to which a person believes that a technology will improve performance, and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), or the degree to which a technology requires no effort, are two key factors, according to the theory (Davis, 1989). TAM describes how consumers respond to advertising messages on social media platforms in the context of social media advertising. Consumers are more likely to engage with

social media advertisements when they perceive the platforms as useful and easy to use. The theory is particularly relevant to social media advertising credibility and influencer authenticity because both factors influence consumers' perception of the usefulness of advertising information. The degree to which consumers perceive advertising content as trustworthy, accurate, and dependable is known as social media advertising credibility. Consumers are more likely to trust the information provided when advertisements are credible, which raises the perceived usefulness of social media platforms for purchasing decisions. In a similar vein, the measure of influencer authenticity is the degree to which influencers are regarded as genuine, open, and honest. Since authentic influencers make the information more valuable and acceptable, they increase consumers' confidence in advertising messages.

Hence, TAM suggests that credible advertisements and authentic influencer endorsements increase consumers' acceptance of social media advertising, leading to higher engagement, trust, and customer patronage. The theory provides a useful framework for comprehending how consumer behavior and SME patronage in a digital environment are influenced by the credibility of influencers and advertising on social media.

Therefore, the conceptual framework linking the relation between social media advertising and consumer patronage is shown in fig 1 below:

Fig 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Researcher 2026

For purpose of the study, the hypotheses were stated in null for thus:

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between social media advertising credibility and consumer patronage.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between social media influencer authenticity and

consumer patronage.

Conceptual framework

Social Media as an Advertising Tool

In recent years, social media has evolved into a full-fledged tool for branding and advertising businesses worldwide. On this note, Okorie et al. (2021), avert that in today's technology driven world, social media has become an avenue where business operatives can extend their marketing campaigns to a wider range of consumers. Nowadays, consumers trust more user reviews and online consumer recommendations on social media websites rather than traditional media before making a purchase decision or patronising a given product or service (Kwakya, 2016).

In the meantime, the rising prominence of social media has unquestionably resulted in a paradigm shift in the methods by which marketers and advertisers attempt to promote their products and influence the purchasing decisions of their customers and targets (Otugo, et al., 2015). Additionally, businesses all over the world are increasingly utilizing social media platforms for advertising. Today, there are numerous corporate blogs, official Facebook pages, and X accounts. All these are signs that social media has become a vital part of consumers' daily lives as well as the day-to-day operations of corporate organisations (Ohajionu et al., 2015).

In further description, Ohajionu et al. (2015), note that social media serve as a general stage where individuals worldwide relate and offer information and experiences about products. Social media allows companies, business organisations and industries to interact with their customers. This does not only allow them to advertise their products but it gives them the opportunity to share information with their customers as well. They gain their understanding and rapport with them in this way. Therefore, using social media, companies have had the ability to build relationships with existing as well as new customers and form communities that

interactively collaborate to identify problems and develop solutions for them.

In essence, social media marketing has shifted the power from advertisers to consumers, because regarding to the democracy allowed in social media all users as consumers can now be in contact with each other exchanging information about products and services, which push advertisers changing their old methods to match the new needs of consumers, and contact them individually as soon as possible, especially in their level of patronage by using social media as a marketing waterway in both free as word-of-mouth and paid as social media advertising.

Social media advertising credibility

The degree to which consumers perceive advertisements on social media platforms as believable, trustworthy, reliable, and convincing is referred to as the concept of social media advertising credibility (Tuten & Solomon, 2021). It explains how much people believe the information in online ads to be true and trustworthy enough to change their attitudes, intentions, and purchasing decisions. Credible social media advertising can boost customer confidence, brand loyalty, and patronage in the context of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). Customers are more likely to trust a company and maintain long-term relationships with it if it consistently provides accurate information, responds promptly to inquiries from customers, and employs ethical advertising practices (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Social media influencer authenticity

The concept of social media influencer authenticity refers to the extent to which followers perceive influencers as genuine, honest, transparent, and trustworthy in their online interactions, recommendations, and content creation (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020). It explains how audiences believe that influencers truly reflect their real personalities, values, experiences, and opinions rather than merely promoting products for financial gain. In the context of digital marketing, influencer authenticity has become increasingly important because social media users are becoming more skeptical of exaggerated advertising messages

and fake endorsements. Brands therefore prefer collaborating with influencers who possess authentic relationships with their audiences, as authenticity can improve brand image, customer engagement, and purchase intention (Tuten & Solomon, 2021).

Consumer Patronage

Consumer patronage refers to the consistent and repeated purchasing behavior of customers toward a particular brand, product, service, or business over time (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2020). Advertising aims to draw in customers and keep them coming back. A consumer is a person or organisation that buys a product or service. Consumers are usually the end-users in the distribution chain of products and services. They do this for personal use. Thus, they do not buy for them to manufacture or resale. They are the key figures in the marketplace as all the activities of the manufacturers and sellers are focused on consumers (Nordqvist 2016).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on social media advertising have extensively examined its influence on consumer behavior, particularly in relation to consumer patronage of SMEs.

Ghosh, Parven, and Sakib (2024) examined the interaction effects of social media-driven advertising on consumers' purchase intention. The study adopted a quantitative research design and collected data from 240 active social media users through purposive sampling. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that advertising informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and interactivity significantly influenced consumers' purchase intention. The study concluded that well-designed social media advertisements positively affect consumer patronage by increasing purchase intention and customer engagement.

Oliha and Obaika (2024) investigated the factors of social media advertising influencing consumers' buying intention. The study employed a survey research design involving 364

respondents comprising university students, employees, and entrepreneurs. Data were analyzed using covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM). The results indicated that advertisement informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and perceived value significantly influenced consumers' buying intention. The researchers concluded that credible and informative social media advertising enhances consumer patronage.

Sadom, Mat Yusoff, and Sauh (2024) investigated the relationship between social media marketing, trust, reputation, and purchase intention in the fast-food industry. The researchers adopted a quantitative research design and analyzed data using Structural Equation Modelling. The findings revealed that social media marketing significantly improved consumer trust and brand reputation, which in turn positively influenced purchase intention. The study concluded that effective social media advertising enhances consumer patronage by strengthening trust and brand reputation.

Hosain and Mamun (2023) examined the nexus between social media advertising and customers' purchase intention across three South Asian countries. The study adopted a quantitative research design and employed Structural Equation Modelling for data analysis. The findings revealed that perceived relevance, perceived informativeness, and perceived credibility of social media advertisements had significant positive effects on customers' purchase intention. Brand consciousness also partially mediated the relationship between social media advertising and purchase intention. The study concluded that businesses should focus on developing relevant and credible advertisements to improve consumer patronage.

Eze and Nkamnebe (2022) investigated the relationship between social media advertising and consumer patronage among retail businesses in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design and administered structured questionnaires to consumers. Data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis. The findings revealed that social media advertising significantly and positively influenced consumer patronage through increased customer

engagement, trust, and purchase intention. The study recommended that Nigerian businesses invest in consistent and interactive social media advertising to improve customer retention and sales performance.

Ihechu, Madu & Onwuzuruigbo (2022) investigated the influence of social media advertising on the buying behaviour of electronics consumers in South-East Nigeria. Using a survey design, the researchers collected data from 384 respondents and analyzed the responses with descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The results showed that exposure to social media advertisements significantly influenced consumers' trial, purchase, and referral behaviour for electronic products. The study concluded that social media advertising is an effective strategy for increasing consumer patronage.

Okorie, Nwaizugbo, Okeke, & Nnedum (2022) examined the relationship between social media advertising and the patronage of electronic products among consumers in Southern Nigeria. A survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 383 respondents using structured questionnaires. The study employed mediation analysis and SPSS for hypothesis testing. The findings indicated that social media advertising variables such as accessibility, cost, and time significantly influenced consumer patronage of electronic products. The researchers recommended that businesses invest more in social media advertising to improve customer patronage.

From the reviewed empirical literature, it is evident that social media advertising positively influences customer patronage among SMEs in Nigeria. However, many studies focus broadly on social media marketing, with limited attention to specific factors such as content credibility and influencer authenticity, which remain critical gaps addressed in this study.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology guides the course of study. It provides the basis and serves as a bed rock for the study through which the research was conducted to gather responses that provided factual

result. This created an avenue for further research. Considering the nature of this paper, survey research design was adopted for the field work. Survey research design was used because it allows the researcher to gather information directly from respondents. The population of this study comprised customers of selected small scale businesses in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. These customers include individuals who regularly patronize small scale businesses such as retail shops, food vendors, fashion outlets, cosmetics stores, and other service-oriented small enterprises within Aba metropolis. The choice of this population is based on the fact that customers are the direct beneficiaries and decision-makers in purchasing activities, and therefore possess relevant information needed to assess the effect of social media advertising on customer patronage. The population of customers in Aba is large and cannot be precisely determined, hence, it is considered an infinite population. Therefore, the sample size was determined using Cochran Formula giving a sample size of 384. On sampling procedure, the study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, Aba metropolis was purposively selected as the study area because it is a commercial hub in Abia State with a high concentration of small scale businesses actively using social media advertising strategies. In the second stage, customers of the selected businesses were identified as the sampling frame. Only customers who had prior interaction or patronage experience with these businesses were considered eligible respondents. Source of data was primary data. Primary data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire administered to respondents, designed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Neutral (1). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity through expert review by specialists in marketing and research methodology. Out of 384 questionnaire distributed 312 were properly filled and returned. Data collected are analyzed using inferential statistic like correlation analysis.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses were projected for this study and were tested as follows:

Test of Hypothesis 1

Test 1 is based on hypothesis 1 projected in null form thus:

H0₁: There is significant relationship between social media advertising credibility and consumer patronage.

This test was executed using the Pearson correlation model. The result is shown on table 1 below.

Table 1: Pearson correlation analysis between social media advertising credibility and consumer patronage

Variable	Statistics	Advertising Credibility	Consumer Patronage
Advertising Credibility	Correlation Coefficient		0.721**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	312	312
Consumer Patronage	Correlation Coefficient	0.721**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	312	312

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

The result presented in Table 1 revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between social media advertising credibility and consumer patronage, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.721. This indicates that as the credibility of social media advertisements increases, consumer patronage also increases. The finding suggests that consumers are more likely to patronize products and services advertised on social media when they perceive the advertisements as trustworthy, believable, and reliable. Furthermore, the significance value of the correlation is less than 0.01, indicating that the relationship between advertising credibility and consumer patronage is statistically significant. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which states that social media advertising credibility has no significant relationship with consumer patronage is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Test of Hypothesis ii

Test ii is based on hypothesis ii projected in null form thus:

H0₂: There is significant relationship between social media influencer authenticity and

consumer patronage.

This test was executed using the Pearson correlation model. The result is shown on table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis between social media influencer authenticity and consumer patronage.

Variable	Statistics	Advertising Credibility	Consumer Patronage
Influencer authenticity	Correlation Coefficient		0.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)		. 0.318
	N	312	312
Consumer Patronage	Correlation Coefficient	0.087	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.318	
	N	312	312

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2026.

The result presented in Table 2 revealed that there is a very weak positive relationship between social media influencer authenticity and consumer patronage, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.087. The coefficient value indicates that influencer authenticity has little or no meaningful association with consumer patronage among the respondents studied.

Furthermore, the significance value ($P = 0.318$) which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer patronage is not statistically significant. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which states that social media influencer authenticity has no significant relationship with consumer patronage is accepted, while the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of findings

The result presented in Table 1 revealed that social media advertising credibility has a significant relationship with consumer patronage. The implication of this finding is that credible advertisements help to build consumer trust and confidence, thereby encouraging purchase decisions and customer loyalty. Consumers tend to respond positively to advertisements that provide accurate information, honest product descriptions, and transparent communication. When this occurs, consumers are more likely to be influenced by

advertisements on social media, and as a result, they are more likely to make purchasing decisions. According to Raja, Karthikeyan, Sharathkumar, Gokul, Fiariantsoa, and Thiruchelvi (2026), social media advertising credibility significantly predicts purchasing behavior, which supports this finding. It is also in line with Tuten and Solomon (2021), who explained that credibility is a major determinant of consumer trust and engagement in social media marketing. Similarly, Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) argued that consumers are more likely to develop positive purchase intentions toward advertisements they perceive as credible and trustworthy. Also, the result is in line with Ohanian's Source Credibility Theory from 1990, which argues that reliable communication sources have a significant impact on consumer attitudes and behavior intentions.

According to the data presented in Table 2, there is no significant correlation between consumer patronage and the authenticity of social media influencers. This finding suggests that the perceived authenticity of social media influencers may not necessarily influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Customer satisfaction, price, brand reputation, product quality, and peer recommendations may all play a larger role in influencing patronage behavior. Evans, Phua, Lim, and Jun (2017), who observed that influencer disclosures and authenticity may increase audience awareness and recognition of advertisements, but they do not always translate into actual purchase behavior, back up this finding. The authors explained that consumers are becoming increasingly skeptical of sponsored social media content, thereby reducing the direct influence of influencer authenticity on patronage decisions. In a similar vein, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) observed that, despite the fact that influencers on social media have the ability to influence consumer perceptions and attitudes, actual patronage decisions are frequently influenced by a number of additional factors in addition to just authenticity. If the products fail to meet their personal needs, financial capacity, or quality expectations, consumers may still refuse to purchase promoted products despite their appreciation for

genuine influencers. The conclusion also agrees with Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Theory, which argues that expertise, product relevance, and persuasive communication are all necessary for trustworthiness to influence consumer behavior. This suggests that authenticity may only have a greater impact on customer loyalty when backed up by other significant marketing factors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis of primary data from 312 respondents, this study draws the following conclusions:

- i. Credibility in social media advertising is closely linked to customer loyalty.
- ii. Social media influencer authenticity has no significant relationship with consumer patronage.

Based on the result we recommended that:

- i. To strengthen customer trust and improve patronage outcomes small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and businesses should concentrate on creating content for their advertising that is trustworthy, honest, and open.
- ii. SME's or businesses should not rely entirely on influencer authenticity as a strategy for increasing customer patronage rather they should combine genuine influencer marketing with high-quality products, competitive pricing, excellent customer service, and efficient brand positioning to achieve better marketing outcomes.

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