

Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt
Faculty of Computer Science and Business Information Systems

Bachelor's Thesis

The Impact of AI Transparency on Advertising Credibility

**Submitted to the Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt
at the Faculty of Computer Science and Business Information Systems
for the completion of the degree program in E-Commerce.**

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Abstract

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Motivation	1
1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap	1
1.3 Research Question and Objectives	1
1.4 Thesis Outline	1
2 Theoretical Foundations and Hypothesis Development	2
2.1 Artificial Intelligence in Digital Advertising	2
2.2 Conceptualizing Perceived Advertising Credibility	5
2.2.1 Source vs. Message Credibility	5
2.2.2 A Multi-dimensional Framework for Credibility	5
2.3 AI Transparency, Disclosure, and Labeling	5
2.3.1 Defining AI Transparency in Advertising	5
2.3.2 Consumer Response to AI-Generated Content	5
2.4 Synthesis of Current Research	5
2.5 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development	5
2.5.1 The Effect of AI Transparency on Perceived Credibility	5
2.5.2 The Moderating Effect of General AI Attitude	5
3 Research Methodology	6
3.1 Experimental Design	6
3.2 Stimulus Material Development and Pre-testing	6
3.3 Sampling Strategy and Data Collection Procedure	6
3.4 Measurement Instruments	6
3.4.1 Independent Variable: AI Transparency Manipulation	6
3.4.2 Dependent Variable: Perceived Credibility	6
3.4.3 Moderating Variable: General AI Attitude	6
3.5 Data Analysis Strategy	6
4 Results	7
4.1 Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics	7
4.1.1 Sociodemographic Profile	7

4.1.2	Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables	7
4.2	Manipulation and Confound Checks	7
4.3	Hypothesis Testing	7
4.4	Exploratory Analyses	7
5	Discussion	8
5.1	Summary and Interpretation of Findings	8
5.2	Theoretical Implications	8
5.3	Managerial and Practical Implications	8
6	Conclusion	9
6.1	Concluding Summary	9
6.2	Limitations and Future Research Directions	9
	Appendix	10
	References	11
	Erklärung zur Verwendung von KI-Systemen	13
	Zustimmung zur Plagiatsüberprüfung	14
	Eidesstattliche Erklärung	15

List of Figures

1.1 User-Flow-Diagramm des tollen Algorithmus. 1

List of Tables

1 Introduction

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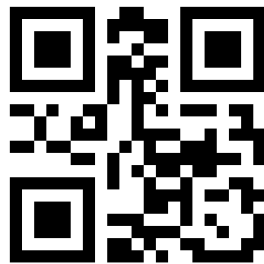


Figure 1.1: User-Flow-Diagramm des tollen Algorithmus.

1.1 Background and Motivation

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

1.4 Thesis Outline

2 Theoretical Foundations and Hypothesis Development

The following chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for the present thesis and summarizes the current state of research. The objective is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the central constructs, critically review existing knowledge, and identify the research gaps that necessitate this study.

First, the core concepts of AI are defined within the context of digital advertising (Section 2.1). Following this, a detailed conceptualization of perceived advertising credibility, the central dependent variable of this study, is provided (Section 2.2). Subsequently, the independent variable—AI transparency, disclosure, and labeling—is examined, along with current findings on consumer responses to such disclosures (Section 2.3).

A synthesis of current research (Section 2.4) will then consolidate relevant findings and highlight existing gaps in the literature. Finally, based on these gaps, the conceptual framework for the study is developed, from which the hypotheses, including the moderating role of general AI attitude, are derived (Section 2.5).

2.1 Artificial Intelligence in Digital Advertising

The field of digital marketing is increasingly permeated by terms such as AI, Machine Learning (ML), and Big Data Analytics. Despite their frequent use, the definitions of these terms are not yet standardized, and there is a lack of clear, universally accepted delineations.

AI is the central concept of this thesis. A universally valid definition remains elusive, in part because the concept of “intelligence” itself is not precisely settled [1, 2]. For example, the German dictionary Duden [3] defines intelligence as “the ability [of humans] to think abstractly and rationally and to derive purposeful actions from it” [author’s translation]. According to Amazon [4], AI is a field of computer science focused on solving cognitive problems normally associated with human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, and pattern recognition. A more functional definition considers

AI to be a machine employing algorithms or statistical models to carry out tasks associated with the human mind, including perception, cognition, and conversation [5]. This technology enables the development of self-learning systems that can interpret data to acquire knowledge, which can then be applied to solve new tasks. AI can, for example, respond meaningfully to human conversation, create images and texts, and make decisions based on real-time data inputs. When integrated into a firm, AI can improve business processes, optimize customer experiences, and drive innovation [4].

The concept of AI is not new; it has been in development since the 1950s [1]. Its “birth” is widely attributed to the “Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence” at Dartmouth College in 1956. While this conference established the field, it was followed by a period of stagnation in the 1980s, often referred to as the “AI winter,” as the technology of the time failed to produce tangible business success [1, 2]. Today’s AI boom is driven by a fundamental shift: the availability of abundant, low-cost computing power and the exponential growth of customer data available for marketing. While the world’s largest companies were once primarily in the oil industry, today they are organizations that possess and analyze massive data sets [1]. These companies collect customer data, image data, and purchase data, often leveraging sources like user-generated content [4]. In this environment, data quality is a primary driver of competitive advantage. AI provides the means to analyze this data faster and more effectively than humanly possible, making the combination of high-quality data and AI a significant competitive tool [1]. This growing volume of data, in turn, fuels the development of larger and more capable models, making their outputs increasingly realistic and sophisticated [6].

From an economic perspective, AI can be seen as a contributor to the productivity of the classical production factors of labor and capital, or even as an independent production factor in its own right, leading to new growth effects [7]. However, the full extent of AI’s impact on economic growth remains unclear, with different research findings pointing to varied outcomes [2].

According to Bunte [1], marketing and sales are considered primary beneficiaries of AI, as these departments focus on the often costly interaction with customers. As early as 2018, 80% of marketing managers recognized the enormous importance of AI for business success [1]. In marketing, AI can be used to reduce time expenditure and increase efficiency, particularly in creative endeavors like advertising, which traditionally requires significant human effort [8]. By enabling targeted customer engagement, AI can also foster long-term customer loyalty [2]. In a rapidly changing market, AI allows for the cost-effective and rapid modification of products and campaigns [2].

A particularly transformative subset of AI is AI-Generated Content (AIGC). AIGC utilizes generative AI techniques to create digital content such as images, videos, music, and natural language [9]. In marketing, this is applied to create blog posts, articles, product descriptions, and other materials efficiently and at high quality [9].

This capability is primarily powered by Large Language Models (LLMs), such as the one underpinning ChatGPT, which can understand and respond meaningfully to human language [9, 10]. Users provide a prompt, and the system completes the request with a desired output. This process is continually refined through human feedback, which improves the quality of the output and its alignment with user intent [11]. However, these models must be used with caution, as they are trained predominantly on internet data, which can lead to errors and biased information [11]. Simultaneously, generative image models like DALL-E allow users without specialized skills to generate unique images, or modify existing ones, in seconds [9]. For advertisers, this means that creating a new logo, poster, or campaign visual is no longer a bottleneck.

This shift moves AI from a background tool for data analysis to a visible, active participant in the creation of the advertising message itself. However, for this technology to be effective, its use must be aligned with the brand's values and personality. This alignment is essential for building a foundation of credibility, which in turn has a positive effect on brand perception [12, 13].

2.2 Conceptualizing Perceived Advertising Credibility

2.2.1 Source vs. Message Credibility

2.2.2 A Multi-dimensional Framework for Credibility

2.3 AI Transparency, Disclosure, and Labeling

2.3.1 Defining AI Transparency in Advertising

2.3.2 Consumer Response to AI-Generated Content

2.4 Synthesis of Current Research

2.5 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

2.5.1 The Effect of AI Transparency on Perceived Credibility

2.5.2 The Moderating Effect of General AI Attitude

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Experimental Design

3.2 Stimulus Material Development and Pre-testing

3.3 Sampling Strategy and Data Collection Procedure

3.4 Measurement Instruments

3.4.1 Independent Variable: AI Transparency Manipulation

3.4.2 Dependent Variable: Perceived Credibility

3.4.3 Moderating Variable: General AI Attitude

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

4 Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Sociodemographic Profile

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

4.2 Manipulation and Confound Checks

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

4.4 Exploratory Analyses

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary and Interpretation of Findings

5.2 Theoretical Implications

5.3 Managerial and Practical Implications

6 Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Summary

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Appendix

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Erklärung zur Verwendung von KI-Systemen

Als Hilfsmittel zur Erstellung der vorliegenden Bacheloararbeit wurde generative KI verwendet. Die Nutzung dieser generativen KI diente der Unterstützung bei der Recherche und Ideenfindung sowie deren Formulierung. Alle wissenschaftlichen Analysen, Interpretationen und Schlussfolgerungen basieren auf eigener Arbeit und wurden lediglich durch den kritischen Umgang mit den von der KI generierten Vorschlägen ergänzt.

Fabian Frank Werner; November 5, 2025

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Eidesstattliche Erklärung

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