Iraqi Journal of Applied Art (IJAA)

Journal homepage:

https://ijaa.mtu.edu.iq

The Image of E-Commerce Applications in Iraq: A Field Study on Consumer Attitudes and Trust

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Article Info.	Abstract
	The research aims to identify the mental image held by people who make purchases through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, and to determine their acceptance of online shopping. A random sample of 400 respondents was selected, all of whom had previously purchased various goods from digital platforms during 2025. The sample was subjected to a questionnaire to reach results within the framework of descriptive research, and the researcher adopted the survey method as the research approach. The study reached several key findings, the most prominent of which are that the durability and quality of the offered product, as well as the variety of options in the services provided, determine the consumer's perceived strength of the application or platform. Additionally, the extent to which the application or platform adheres to providing products that exactly match what is displayed in terms of appearance and quality, along with the speed of response, determines the reliability of the application or platform.

1. Introduction

The technological and technical development witnessed worldwide has led 3rd world developing countries to enter the field of e-commerce, which in turn has resulted in the creation of applications that rely on internet connectivity, primarily aimed at personal sales, and have become similar to many profit-oriented companies and institutions around the world. Like other developing countries and its neighbors, Iraq has recently entered the field of e-commerce and the establishment of sales platforms, relying on technological advancements driven by science, including the widespread use of social media. The rapid adoption of sales platforms for online purchases has prompted researchers to study the mental image formed in consumers' minds regarding these platforms. A user's impression of a particular platform plays a crucial role in their purchasing decision, and this impression is shaped by several factors, including quality, trust, ease of use, and others. This research focuses on studying the impressions held by the Iraqi public regarding e-commerce platforms on social media, and analyzing the factors influencing the formation of these impressions. This study aims to identify the mental image held by individuals who purchase through active e-commerce platforms on social media and to determine whether the image is positive or negative.

1.1. Research problem

Selecting and defining the research problem depends on the researcher's ability to delineate the problem within its system [1]. Subsequent research steps are based on accurately identifying the problem, including determining the scientific method, research techniques, and tools to be used, as well as the type and nature of information to be collected [2], in order to find appropriate solutions to overcome it [3], this represents a challenge for the researcher. What is the nature of the mental image of e-commerce applications among Iraqi consumers, and what factors influence its formation and its relationship with consumers' attitudes and trust? From the main question, the following sub-questions arise:

- What are the fundamental dimensions that form the mental image of e-commerce applications among Iraqi consumers?
- What attitudes do Iraqi consumers hold toward e-commerce applications in terms of usage and satisfaction?
- What level of trust do Iraqi consumers have toward e-commerce applications?

1.2. Research hypotheses

- There is no statistically significant relationship between the mental image of e-commerce applications and Iraqi consumers' attitudes toward their use.
- There is no statistically significant relationship between consumers' trust in e-commerce applications and their attitudes toward using them or purchasing decisions.
- There is no statistically significant effect of the mental image, attitudes, and consumers trust on purchasing decisions through e-commerce applications in Iraq.

1.3. Significance of the research

The importance of this research lies in the objectives the researcher seeks to achieve [4]. The significance of this study lies in its focus on applications related to selling products and goods via cardboard boxes and on social media platforms, and in determining whether the mental images held by individuals who purchased online are positive or negative. This research focuses on e-commerce platforms and the perceptions of Iraqi consumers towards these platforms. In doing so, it contributes to developing a comprehensive knowledge framework that helps in understanding the relationship between merchants and consumers on the one hand, and professional companies operating in this field on the other.

1.4. Research objectives

The importance of this research lies in the following:

- Enriching academic libraries concerned with studies in e-marketing and promotion.
- Integrating brand image with building trust among buyers.
- Understanding the impressions formed by users to improve brand image.

1.5. Research methodology, tools, and sample

This research is descriptive, employing the survey method as it is well-suited to descriptive research, quantitative variable measurement, and statistical testing. A questionnaire was used as the primary research tool for data collection. A purposive sample of 400 users who had made purchases from electronic applications during 2025 was selected. Research Population and Boundaries:

- Spatial Limitations: The research is confined to Iraq, as the population is distributed across the country's governorates.
- Temporal Limitations: The study was conducted between January 1, 2025, and July 1, 2025.
- Human Limitations: The study was limited to actual buyers using e-commerce platforms.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Research

2.1. Mental image and attitudes

A mental image is defined as the mind's representation of what will be perceived through the senses, not necessarily visually, but it could be heard, smelled, tasted, or felt. This perception or generation of sensory impressions varies among individuals according to their different experiences with sensory objects [5]. Another definition describes a mental image as a relative cognitive and psychological process with cultural origins, based on individuals' selective, direct, and indirect perception of the characteristics and attributes of a subject (company, institution, individual, group, or society), forming emotional impacts (positive or negative) and resulting in cc tendencies (overt or covert) within a given society. These perceptions, attitudes, and tendencies may be stable or unstable, precise or imprecise [6]. It is also defined as the accumulated store of ideas, impressions, and judgments in the human mind, formed through direct or indirect sensory abilities toward an individual, group, organization, or phenomenon. This store serves as a source for mental processes (thinking), which guide decision-making and judgments about things. Typically, this accumulated store of mental images is charged with emotion, so that the impressions and judgments are either positive or negative [7]. Thus, a mental image is the mental representation that forms in an individual's mind about a particular subject, such as an electronic application BEn or a previously purchased product, reflecting a collection of impressions and experiences that are stored and recalled when interacting with that subject.

2.2. Attitudes

An attitude is defined as a mental or neural readiness formed as a result of successive experiences, guiding an individual's responses toward various objects and situations [8]. It is also defined as a tendency to respond to environmental factors from which external stimuli originate, whether positive or negative [9]. In the context of e-commerce, mental image and attitudes refer to the impression a consumer forms about an application based on their digital experience and the available information, whether through direct interaction or evaluations and experiences of others [10]. The formation of attitudes and mental images in individuals' minds depends on three main components. Cognitive Component: This component represents the informational aspect of an attitude or mental image, the knowledge and data related to a particular subject. Information can be acquired directly through personal experience or proximity to the subject, or indirectly through personal communication, media, and other information sources. This component is typically subject to self-selective processes in all its forms and stages. It includes all of an individual's cognitive processes, beliefs, and judgments related to the attitude or mental image, in addition to the information available to the individual, which also helps in perceiving the subject or obstacle related to the mental image. Affective (Emotional) Component: This component involves the formation of positive or negative emotional attitudes toward the phenomenon or subject of the mental image. Attitudes are not necessarily negative; they can also be positive, or neutral in cases where supportive and opposing information are balanced.

This component is reflected in an individual's feelings and desires toward the mental image, whether they like or dislike it. The affective dimension thus refers to the tendency to respond positively or negatively toward a subject, issue, person, or institution within the set of mental images formed. Behavioral Component: This component is manifested in some observable behaviors toward the phenomenon or in latent

behaviors (example: negative evaluation, superiority, contempt). The behavioral component of an attitude or mental image is seen in practical responses toward the subject of the image. Therefore, an individual's behavior reflects the nature of the mental image they hold, allowing the mental image to predict behavior. Individuals' behaviors reflect their mental image of the subject. These three components work sequentially: they receive, process, and reproduce a large amount of information and facts, ultimately forming the mental image. Simply put, the process begins with the cognitive component receiving information, followed by the affective component forming an emotional tendency, and finally, the behavioral component making a decision based on the outcomes of the first two components. This final component is measured by the concrete decision taken at the end of the process.

During this process, some information is passed along while other parts are excluded, as the mind cannot produce mental images without selective filtering and exclusion. This is necessary to simplify the formation, organization, and classification of images. Ideological biases also play a critical role in forming and producing mental images, as an individual's ideology often guides their thinking and decision-making processes in ways that serve their interests [11].

2.3. The relationship between attitudes, mental image, and e-commerce

In the context of e-commerce, a mental image refers to the impression a consumer forms about the platform under study, based on their digital experience and the store of information in their mind obtained through direct interaction or from the perspectives and experiences of others [12]. Since the introduction of 3G and 4G networks, Iraq has witnessed rapid growth in e-commerce due to technological developments that enabled smartphones to maintain continuous internet connectivity. This has led to the emergence of many e-commerce applications [13] .Commerce relies on attitudes and mental images in an integrated manner, particularly as the scientific literature emphasizes that attitudes and mental images are formed through two main sources [14] .

- Direct Experience: This consists of repeated purchase decisions made by the individual.
- Indirect Experience: This refers to personal messages received by the individual from friends, media about the organization, social media platforms, events, or other individuals, without firsthand observation, which help in forming impressions that constitute the final mental image.

From a social perspective, attitudes and mental images can be seen as abstract mental representations of a particular subject or category of subjects, formed based on direct and indirect sources of perception. Attitudes and mental images integrate all these sources, and through language use, social relationships and interactions among individuals, mental images are generalized and acquire a socially shared character [11] .

2.4. Research-guiding theory

The theory assumes that the recipient (consumer) forms a mental image of an organization or brand based on the communication messages they are exposed to through media and direct interaction.

3. Practical Framework: Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 400 actual users of e-commerce applications in Iraq. The data were analyzed using statistical analysis software to extract indicators related to the dimensions of the mental image, such as trust, service quality, interaction, and ease of use. Looking at Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Sample distribution based on age brackets

Percentage	Repetition	Age Bracket
%30	122	From 18- 25
%40	159	From 26- 35
%20	79	From 36- 47
%10	42	48 plus
%100	400	Total

Table 2. Average evaluation of the dimensions of the mental image according to the sample individuals

Ranking	Arithmetic Mean	Dimension
1	4.3	Trust
2	4.1	Service Quality
3	3.9	Ease of Use
4	3.8	Spead
5	3.5	Thechnical Support

The results indicate that the largest group of respondents falls within the 26–35 age range. This group is the most active in using e-commerce applications, meaning they are the primary demographic making online purchase decisions in Iraq compared to other age groups, such as 36–47 and older. A quick comparison with Table 3. reveals that the trust dimension ranked first in terms of evaluation, indicating the importance of digital security for the Iraqi consumer. The security dimension in e-commerce is comprised of a commitment to reliable and timely delivery, product quality, and accurate measurements. In other words, offering a specific product and delivering a different one in terms of accuracy, appearance, or quality lowers the trust dimension, which ranked first.

This is followed by service quality and ease of use, which are essential elements in forming the mental image. The dimensions of mental image for potential online buyers; centered on trust, service quality, ease of use, speed, and psychological support; are grounded in various digital experiences supported by published scientific research. A field study indicated that 93 out of 200 respondents believe that the trust provided by social media platforms to users made these platforms a motivating tool for the public to use e-commerce applications. Additionally, 45 other respondents stated that social media sometimes encourages users to visit these platforms. Together, this accounts for 69% of the total sample [15].

Table 3. Sample distribution based on satisfaction levels regarding online platforms

Percentages	Repetition	Satisfaction Level
%45	183	High
%35	139	Medium
%20	78	Low
%100	400	Total

It is evident that 45% of the sample reported high satisfaction with e-commerce platforms, indicating a positive mental image among Iraqi consumers, which is a relatively good proportion. Additionally, 35% of respondents reported moderate satisfaction, resulting from their varied experiences: at times the purchase process is accurate, and the customer feels they have not been deceived, while at other times they feel at risk of being misled. This suggests the presence of partially unmet expectations or unstable user experiences among some respondents [16]. The Table 4. smallest proportion, 20%, reported low satisfaction.

Table 4. Average ratings of the image

Ranking	Standard Deviation	Arithmetic Mean	Item
1	0.82	4.1	Overall impression
2	0.95	3.8	Trust in the application
3	0.88	3.6	Ease of use
4	0.2.02	3.4	Service quality

Based on the findings of the practical aspect of the research, the researcher suggests the following:

- Enhancing the user interfaces of digital platforms and applications to make them more user-friendly and interactive for potential buyers,
- Establishing rapid communication channels with potential customers to address any issues that may arise during order processing or delivery,
- Striving to provide the highest level of accuracy and security for potential buyers during their purchases from digital applications and platforms, and
- Utilizing digital marketing strategies to strengthen the brand image in the minds of buyers. Based on the table above, overall impression received the highest average score, indicating that most respondents had a positive impression while interacting with the applications. This suggests that users are sufficiently knowledgeable.

Conversely, the Trust category came in second place with an average of 3.8 out of 5, while Ease of Use received an average of 3.6 out of Table 5. ranking last after Service Quality.

Table 5. Hypotheses results

Scientific Explanation	Statistical Decision	Statistical Significance Level (Sig.)	Type of Statistical Analysis Used	The value of the correlation coefficient (R) or (F)	null hypothesis
There is a strong positive relationship between the mental image and consumer attitudes.	The null hypothesis is rejected	0.001	(Pearson Correlation)	0.67	There is no statistically significant relationship between the mental image of e-commerce applications and the attitudes of Iraqi consumers toward their use.
trust has a significant effect on purchase decisions and the attitude toward usage.	The null hypothesis is rejected	0.002	Simple Regression	F = 31.24	There is no statistically significant relationship between consumers' trust in e-commerce applications and their attitudes toward using them and purchase decisions.
The three variables together represent strong indicators influencing e-purchase decisions.	The null hypothesis is rejected	0.000	Multiple Regression	$R^2 = 0.58$	There is no statistically significant effect of mental image, attitudes, or trust on purchase decisions via e-commerce applications in Iraq.

4. Testing the Research Hypotheses

4.1. Hypothesis 1.

There is no statistically significant relationship between the mental image of e-commerce applications and Iraqi consumers' attitudes toward using them. The data above indicates a correlation between brand image and online shoppers, reflected in the relatively high average scores of brand image dimensions. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected, and a relationship is found.

4.2. Hypothesis 2

There is no statistically significant relationship between consumers' trust in e-commerce applications and their attitudes toward usage and purchase decisions. Data from Tables 2 and 4 indicate that trust recorded a mean of 3.8, one of the highest among the other dimensions. Table 3 shows that the high satisfaction percentage (45%) is directly associated with higher levels of trust. The active age group (26–35 years), representing 40% of the sample, is the most likely to make online purchase decisions, reinforcing the relationship between trust and purchase decisions. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is rejected, and it is accepted that there is a statistically significant relationship between consumers' trust in

e-commerce applications and their attitudes toward usage and purchase decisions. Hypothesis 3. There is no statistically significant effect of mental image, attitudes, and trust on purchase decisions via e-commerce applications in Iraq. Data from Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that the three factors; mental image, attitudes, and trust; collectively contributed to forming a positive overall impression with a mean of 4.1, the highest in Table 4. Additionally, the high means for trust, service quality, and ease of use correspond with higher satisfaction levels and purchase decisions, indicating a direct impact of these variables on purchase behavior. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is rejected, and the alternative is accepted.

Returning to the theoretical framework, this research established that mental images are formed based on individuals' experiences and the situations they encounter. Applying this to the table above, we find a common possibility: that a certain website might sell inferior products while another sells superior ones. Thus, the research participants formed their opinions based on their experiences. This leads us to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, a theory that emerged in the 1970s and focuses on studying media audiences. This theory posits that the audience is not passive in its reception; rather, it receives everything broadcast by communication and media outlets, but it has objectives when exposed to media. This theory is an attempt to explain how individuals use e-commerce platforms as a vital and important source to satisfy their needs, and they use social media as a gateway to enter. This audience is viewed as active and not passive eaning that it makes the purchase decision and is not a spectator or a skeptic. Its decision to purchase from e-commerce platforms is based on the trust that social media has given it on the one hand, and on its desire to satisfy its needs on the other hand.

5. Results

- The reliability of an application or platform is determined by its commitment to providing products that exactly match what is displayed in terms of appearance, quality, and responsiveness.
- The durability and quality of the product, as well as the variety of services offered, shape consumers perception of the platform's strength.
- The most active group in e-commerce and digital platforms is youth aged 18-35.
- Components of the mental image (cognitive and affective) are essential in making purchase decisions on e-commerce platforms and applications.
- Statistical results indicate that all Null hypotheses hypotheses were rejected in favor of the alternatives meaning, there are statistically significant relationships and effects between mental image, trust, and attitudes on one hand, and online purchase decisions on the other.

6. Conclusion

- The research sample generally holds a positive image of e-commerce applications and platforms. However, weaknesses exist regarding the quality of services provided and their inconsistency in some cases, as well as issues related to the difficulty of using the applications. These challenges pose a significant obstacle to the development of e-commerce.
- The clear differences in the sample's responses regarding their evaluation of the platforms or applications necessitate further research are based on the respondents' gender, age, or usage patterns in future studies.
- Some platforms and applications prioritize the image potential consumers have of them by providing user-friendly and fast-access applications, along with elements that ensure trust and security. This, in turn, fosters trust and encourages repeat purchases.

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