An examination of millennial attitudes to personalised online advertising in relation to data privacy

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Abstract

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Digital privacy issues are frequently in the media spotlight, with growing consumer concerns about privacy in the wake of major digital privacy breaches such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Apple's iOS 14.5 update in April 2021 has triggered sweeping changes in the online advertising industry in the name of improving consumers' control over their data for ad tracking.

The research is an exploration of how millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy. The research was conducted through a number of semi-structured interviews with millennials living in Ireland, followed by a thematic analysis of the transcripts.

The themes explored include behavioural versus trait-based targeting on the internet, personalisation of ads as distinct from mass-targeting, and consumer engagement with privacy controls online.

The study reveals that millennials in Ireland have an expectation of being targeted by brands online, with personalisation based on behaviour and traits. For some, the benefit of quickly being able to use a service online outweighs the concerns about accepting privacy and data policies. While privacy conscious consumers take steps to restrict data sharing, for others the sharing of personal data appears to be the cost of online convenience.

Declaration

Name: Ian Cummins

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Marketing

Material submitted for award:

(a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.

(b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

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14/08/2021

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1 Introduction

Social media advertising spend worldwide amounted to US$89.5 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow to US$138.4 billion by 2025 (Statista Digital Media Outlook, 2020). With growing consumer concerns about privacy in the wake of digital privacy breaches such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and calls for increased regulation of digital media, privacy issues are frequently in the media spotlight.

With social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, relying heavily on collecting first-party user data for personalisation, increased privacy regulation stands to negatively impact their ability to tailor ads to their audiences. Recent announcements from Apple regarding the privacy settings of iOS14, have already rocked the digital media landscape as they tighten up on customer control of their first-party data. As such, the implications of privacy regulation is already being felt by advertisers and has lasting implications for the advertising models of social media platforms.

The following research seeks to explore attitudes of millennials living in Ireland to personalisation and privacy on social media to determine whether the convenience of tailored advertising outweighs invasions of privacy felt by the targeted user.

Through a series of semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis, this research will explore attitudes to personalised advertising online with a view to addressing the research question "How do millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy?".

A number of key areas addressed by this research are the preferences of users for personalised or generic advertising, the use of behavioural and trait-based targeting to serve ads, and customer's privacy literacy and its bearing on their attitude to online ads. The research is conducted with the intent of discovering what impact, if any, privacy concerns have on online shopping behaviour and millennial consumers' likelihood to buy online.

The following chapter outlines a review of the existing literature on the subject, with respect to the above areas.

2 Literature Review

This research will seek to understand the attitudes of consumers to personalised advertising at the expense of customer privacy. This literature section will begin with an overview of the concepts of ad personalisation and digital privacy. It will then move on to the current theory around the subject of privacy specifically with regard to attitudes and approaches to online privacy, before proceeding to a discussion of the practical implications for the consumer and its repercussions for advertisers and its bearing on the proposed research.

2.1 Mass media and the marketing mix

The rapid development of technology over the last number of decades has led to heretofore unimaginable opportunities with regard to personalised marketing. While much the foundational theory of modern marketing was developed throughout the 1960s, it was done in respect to the media of the time. The 4 Ps of marketing (McCarthy, 1960) (Kotler & Armstrong, 1967), were developed largely with regard to mass media, and their usefulness has led to much debate with respect to the suitability of traditional marketing mix theory to contemporary technology and marketing channels.

In his analysis of modern consumer behaviour, Fetherstonaugh proposes a move from Product, Place, Price and Promotion to the 4 Es of Experience, Everyplace, Exchange and Evangelism. This move is in recognition of the contemporary consumer's expectations of their interaction with a brand (Fetherstonaugh, 2008). This approach accounts for the position that technology has changed not only the media which we consume, but also the patterns in which we consume them. Constantinides contends that these behavioural changes "have undermined the effectiveness of the impersonal one-way communication and the mass marketing approaches" (Constantinides, 2006). This in turn has led to a greater need for personalisation in marketing communications, facilitated by technology. This proliferation of technology, not only to consumers, but to brands and marketers, means that consumers have more opportunities to consume than ever, and more choices as to which brands they consume.

With evolving opportunities come additional challenges for marketers. A shift from the classic marketing foundation theory, as described by the above authors, suggest that developments in consumer empowerment mean that personalisation and consumer relationship management are more important than ever. Loyalty is no longer facilitated by a market with limited options. Per Constantinides, "the quality of the personal relationship between seller and customer and

successful customer retention are becoming basic ingredients of commercial performance" (Constantinides, 2006). While, in a prime example of marketing theory developing over time, Kotler himself expressed the very same view in 1992 that "companies must move from a short-term transaction-oriented goal to a long-term relationship-building goal" (Kotler, 1992).

2.2 Consumer Privacy

With technological advancements in the field of marketing, through the media of digital marketing channels (such as social media, digital display and eCRM), marketers have increased opportunity to acquire and store customer data. The collection of these data enables brands and marketers to provide increasingly tailored and personalized marketing communications to existing and prospective customers. With this level of personalization we see both in the academic literature, and in media, increasing concerns about user privacy and the extent to which digital marketing practices toe the line of digital privacy.

These concerns in a broad context have led to the introduction of sweeping data protection legislation in the form of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The introduction of GDPR was designed to protect user data and create a "modernized consumer-focused toolkit for privacy protection across Europe" (Davies, 2016). This in turn led to increased transparency for consumers regarding the usage of their data online and has given them greater protections when it comes to their right to be forgotten (Davies, 2016). However, the increase in the empowerment of user data and privacy controls appears to be fundamentally at odds with the increasing prevalence of personalisation within digital marketing.

2.3 Move to personalisation

With the prevalence of new marketing technologies and the availability of consumer data to brands and marketers, comes an increase in the level of personalisation or mass-customisation of marketing. Individual segmentation of consumer audiences represents the next iteration of targeting or segmentation of the brand's desired audience to achieve much finer segmentation, treating each consumer as though they were an individual segment of the market (Bardacki & Whitelock, 2003).

The approach of individual personalisation of marketing communications is commonly used across channels such as social media, display advertising, retargeting and CRM. Use of

consumer data in these serve to create and strengthen a "personalized relationship", particularly among millennials who value being treated as individual or special (Smith, 2011).

Grönroos proposes that there has been a paradigm shift away from the traditional 4Ps (or 7Ps), towards relationship marketing (Grönroos, 1994) in the last number of decades. This is borne out through digital media in the ability of brands to tailor their communications towards their target customer, albeit on a larger scale and a more automated manner than Grönroos had suggested. He proposes that "mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises" (Grönroos, 1994) are important in building trust with a consumer and this exchange seems to be reflected in the move towards custom messaging in digital marketing. Customised messaging leverages the mutual exchange of information to show useful or meaningful ads to individual customers in an attempt to drive brand engagement and ultimately conversion.

This value exchange of information can be of benefit to both the consumer and the brand, but brands must always be aware of the point where they step from useful to "privacy-invasive" (Ur, et al., 2012).

2.4 Useful personalisation

Personalisation provides brands and marketers with the opportunity "not only communicate with key consumers in a way that engages them, but also in a way that inspires action" (Pelino & Kohl, 2018). With the correct mix of level of personalisation, point in purchase cycle and context, Pelino and Kohl suggest that the value of the communication is maximised for the customer. One important best practice that they suggest – in response to the argument of privacy violation of the customer – is to use personalisation to tailor communications to a segment and "not all the way to a 1:1 level" (Pelino & Kohl, 2018). This advocates higher-level approach of segment targeting and allows the marketer or brand to customise a communication in a broad sense without the consumer feeling as if their privacy has been compromised.

In their research to assess the impact of digital personalisation on consumer attitudes, Baek & Morimoto (2012) identify a number of notable findings with regard to personalisation and ad avoidance, namely:

- Personalisation leads to a decrease in scepticism of the advert

- Personalisation may enhance credibility due to the perceived additional effort on the part of the brand to reach a relevant customer

- Perceived privacy violation, leading to irritation and therefore ad-avoidance seems to be less with regard to digital channels than with traditional direct marketing channels e.g. telemarketing.

In an analysis of consumer attitudes to online personalisation, Awad & Krishnan identified an important distinction in a consumer's outlook on the use of their data. While consumers were more willing for their data to be shared in the case of personalising an online service, the use of profiling with regard to online advertising produced a negative outcome in "willingness to be profiled for personalized offerings" (Awad & Krishnan, 2006). This distinction seems to suggest that consumer trust of online personalisation is linked to previous use of a service or product (i.e. one with which a user has already shared their data), and while they may deem that use of data to be acceptable when personalising that service, follow up advertising is potentially troublesome when it comes to the processing of user data. This obviously presents a challenge for marketers with regard to up-selling, cross-selling or retargeting follow up.

Conversely, it can be argued that big data personalisation is superficial and does not provide a useful service to consumers, but is instead "pushy, overly familiar advertising, high-pressure upselling, and unsolicited communication" (Lerman, 2014). Lerman posits that while personalisation presents an opportunity for brands to build better relationships, and develop consumer loyalty, it also makes consumers wary of the level of data collected on them. In many cases this can be inaccurate, thus rendering personalisation imprecise and ineffective (Lerman, 2014).

These conflicting outlooks on the value and accuracy of marketing personalisation seem to support the view that the evolution of digital marketing to influence consumer behaviour as "created unknowns" (Pelino & Kohl, 2018). The implication is that brands are constantly trying to achieve a balance in their attempts to toe the line between relevance and privacy violation. The lack of consensus among critics illustrated above with regard to the optimum level of personalisation, and the variation in consumer attitudes to these levels of personalisation, gives rise to the phenomenon of creepy marketing (Tene & Poloentsky, 2014).

2.5   Creepy marketing

With an increasing number of ways for brands to personalise and tailor their digital marketing communications to consumers, comes a likelihood for users to feel as if they have had their privacy infringed upon by "creepy marketing" (Tene & Poloentsky, 2014). There seems to be a line drawn by consumers when it comes to distinguishing between marketing that is tailored in a useful way as distinct from a creepy way. Crossing this line of useful/creepy can create ill will towards a brand if it is seen to have violated a consumer's privacy (Smith, 2011).

Creepy marketing, per Tene & Poloentsky is seen to be marketing that, while heretofore not in breach of privacy or data protection law – written prior to the introduction in the EU of GDPR – "pushes against traditional social norms" (2014). They cite the rapid development of the technology being used in digital media as one of the potential reasons that consumers have found themselves in a position whereby so much of their data can be used to target them online. Their research suggests that with the onslaught of convenience, consumers readily gave away their data, perhaps without a full understanding of the value exchange (Tene & Poloentsky, 2014). They go on further to suggest that relevant legislation is needed to establish regulation – as has been enacted in Europe – but also that brands should consider societal norms when marketing using consumers' personal data.

Rather than being simply annoying or uninteresting, creepy marketing causes the consumer to become uneasy with the level of insight or intimacy which it exhibits (Moore, et al., 2015). Moore et al., suggest that the three dimensions to be explored with regard to creepy marketing are – as with as with Tene & Poloentsky – invasion of privacy, stalking behaviour and violation of social norms (2015). However, they also highlight a prevalent challenge throughout the literature on targeting and personalisation – creepy marketing is a "moving target" for consumers. Many factors contribute to a consumer's perception of creepy marketing and these are often influenced by a number of factors with regard to receptiveness, both behavioural and demographic (Taylor, et al., 2011).

The emerging consensus in much of the literature seems to be with regard to the exchange of data between the consumer and the brand and how to strike a balance between value and risk (Xu, et al., 2011). The value provided by a brand must be proportionate to the perceived violation of privacy which comes from a consumer making their information available to the brand.

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The element of trust in a brand and confidence in the way in which user data are used have been evaluated by Ur et al. (2012), with their research highlighting that while many of their participants were aware in theory of the use of targeted behavioural marketing online many subjects were uneasy about the practice of the same.

2.6 Trait-based and Cue-based Personalisation

Digital ad personalisation consists largely of using targeting and customisation options afforded by the advertising platform in question. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, allow advertisers to target consumers based on the brand's first-party data on existing customers, or by using a combination of targeting options which can include demographic, behavioural and interest data.

Winter et al., make the important distinction between trait-based and cue-based personalisation for social media advertising (Winter, et al., 2021). Whereby cue-based personalisation may occur on the basis of an action taken by a social media user; trait-based personalisation is based on characteristics collected or inferred about a person. On the basis of their research, trait-based personalisation was not a predictor of high purchase intention.

Cue-based targeting resulting from users' actions taken, is potentially more likely to drive positive outcomes based on prior interactions with a brand or website (Tran, 2017). The research posits that relevance is a predictor of positive perception and that personalisation based on interaction with the brand may speak to ad credibility for customers. Furthermore, personalisation can also be associated with positive brand associations and outcomes, and may help to grow brand engagement over time on social media (Shanahan, et al., 2019).

Considering the above, the following research will seek to understand if cue-based targeting is positively received due to relevance and credibility. Additionally, it will explore whether personalisation based on inferred characteristics and trait-based targeting are off-putting due to perceptions of being invasive.

With an increasing number of ways for brands to personalise and tailor their digital marketing communications to consumers, comes a likelihood for users to feel as if they have had their privacy infringed upon by creepy marketing (Tene & Poloentsky, 2014).

2.7 Consumer Privacy

Following the Cambridge Analytica scandal of the 2016 US Presidential Election, privacy became a focus of much of the discourse around social media platforms and digital media at large. Based on the revelation that Cambridge Analytica used tailored advertising to influence voting habits, social media users familiar with the breach may be prone to amending their social media habits or even cease using them altogether (Hinds, et al., 2020).

Research conducted on social media profile data also suggests that consumers' profiles and interactions can be used to predict characteristics not explicitly stated (Garcia, 2017), or shadow profiling. The unintended "leaking" of consumer data based on their online activity may serve as a factor for the kind of trait-based targeting above. The perceived involuntary sharing of things like sexual orientation, as outlined by Garcia (2017), may contribute to consumers feeling as if trait-based targeting oversteps the boundary of acceptability for the social media user.

Privacy may also determine likelihood to purchase, as in an analysis of purchasing behaviour online consumers who engaged with the privacy policies outlined by brands were more likely to purchase from medium and high privacy brands (Tsai, et al., 2011). This appears to indicate that outcomes for advertising may be tied to consumers perceptions of privacy and may be negatively impacted by perceived violations of same. In line with changing attitudes in the media, attitudinal changes are reflected in research. Heavy social media users who previously displayed lower privacy risk perception, have become more privacy focused over the past number of years (Tsay-Vogel, et al., 2018).

2.8 Privacy Control

Industry developments in social media marketing in 2021 include the advent of Apple's iOS14 updates, providing consumers with increased transparency and control over their privacy. These changes are set to impact heavily on social media platforms' ability to deliver personalised ads (Hern, 2020). The initial indicators suggest that a move towards increased privacy control may initially damage the personalisation products of social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. However, these controls may ultimately make customers more likely to buy from advertisers on these platforms, on the basis that they have more perceived control over their privacy (Mosteller & Poddar, 2017).

While allowing consumers more control over their privacy, it is interesting to notice that drawing attention to privacy concerns, may lead users to become more concerned about their own data privacy (Marreiros, et al., 2017). Therefore, while the digital media industry moves to give consumers more transparency and secondary control of their data (Mosteller & Poddar, 2017), drawing attention to the issue of privacy at all can backfire. This may lead to increased levels of concern among users with regard to the data that they are explicitly or implicitly sharing in their social media platform usage.

2.9   Research Question considerations

With respect to the above literature, a number of reasonable research areas arise regarding consumer reactions to the following:

1. The type of data that are collected about the consumer
2. The way in which those data are used in order to target ads to the consumer
3. The usefulness of personalised advertising to the consumer
4. The level to which personalisation is acceptable to the consumer
5. Consumer control over the data that they share online

The subsequent chapter is a distillation of these emerging themes from the literature into an over-arching research question and key areas of focus for the researcher.

3 Research Question

Per the above literature review above there are a number of themes arising that warrant further exploration as part of this research. In order to investigate the topic further, this research will focus on millennials in Ireland as digital natives, with some assumed awareness of digital privacy in order to address the research question:

> "How do millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy?"

3.1 Research objectives

1. To determine whether millennial consumers make the distinction between behavioural and trait based personalisation and whether either is perceived as more invasive.

Based on the distinction made by Winter et al. (2021), the interviews will seek to determine whether consumers differentiate between the triggers for advertisements that they see online. Do consumers make a distinction between ads that are served based on their behaviour (cue-based) or their demographic and interest data (trait-based); and if so do they react differently to which lever is used in targeting them online?

2. To establish whether millennial consumers are more or less amenable to personalised adverts than generic mass-targeted advertising online

With regard to literature outlined above, do consumers find ads that are personalised to them more useful than generic ads? The interviews will explore consumers' willingness to see personalised ads that may be more useful to them based on their browsing behaviour and inferred traits.

3. To investigate whether millennial consumers feel as though they have sufficient control over their data sharing and privacy online

With increased media coverage on digital privacy following the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, do consumers feel as though they have control over their digital privacy? The research interviews explore consumers' familiarity with the data they share and their control over same.

These three objectives will form the areas of focus for the research. Given the subjective nature of the topic, the following chapter will explore the potential approaches and research instruments, and evaluate their suitability to the investigation.

4 Research Methodology

The below is an examination of the attributes of a qualitative approach to research, with respect to an analysis of customer attitudes towards digital privacy and personalisation. The below will analyse the application of a qualitative model and thematic analysis of structured interviews in order to rationalise the suitability of such an approach to answering the research question "How do millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy?"

The application of the theoretical concepts to the research question will include a consideration of the suitability of the approach, along with its advantages and limitations when undertaking the research.

4.1 The Research Design

With a view to addressing the research question "How do millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy?", the researcher will first examine the type of data that they are attempting to collect in order to determine an approach that will allow them to collect and analyse these in an appropriate manner. Breaking the potential approaches down into the three broad categories of research – *Exploratory Research, Descriptive Research* and *Causal Research* (Hair, et al., 2010) – the researcher will then select the most appropriate approach.

Given that the research in question deals largely with consumer attitudes and behaviours, and will likely involve a deeper analysis into the themes and motivations, the work will be primarily qualitative in nature, and given the understanding that the data being collected will likely need elaboration – a descriptive research approach can be ruled out at this stage, due to its reliance on quantitative date.

While the research explores the relationship between privacy and personalisation, both of these concepts are potentially highly subjective and as such, a causal analysis would likely assume too much when attempting to set variables in order to understand the cause and effect of the impact of ad personalisation on attitudes to privacy. Given the value that different participants may place on privacy and how they define the concept, and not being able to account for variables such as technical literacy within the analysis, means that it would be difficult to

standardise the results and control for a variety of factors in an analysis of a large sample through methods such as surveys.

Having ruled out the quantitative and cause-and-effect approaches to the research question, the chosen approach is an exploratory research approach as this would allow for a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups (Hair, et al., 2010).

4.2 The Research Onion
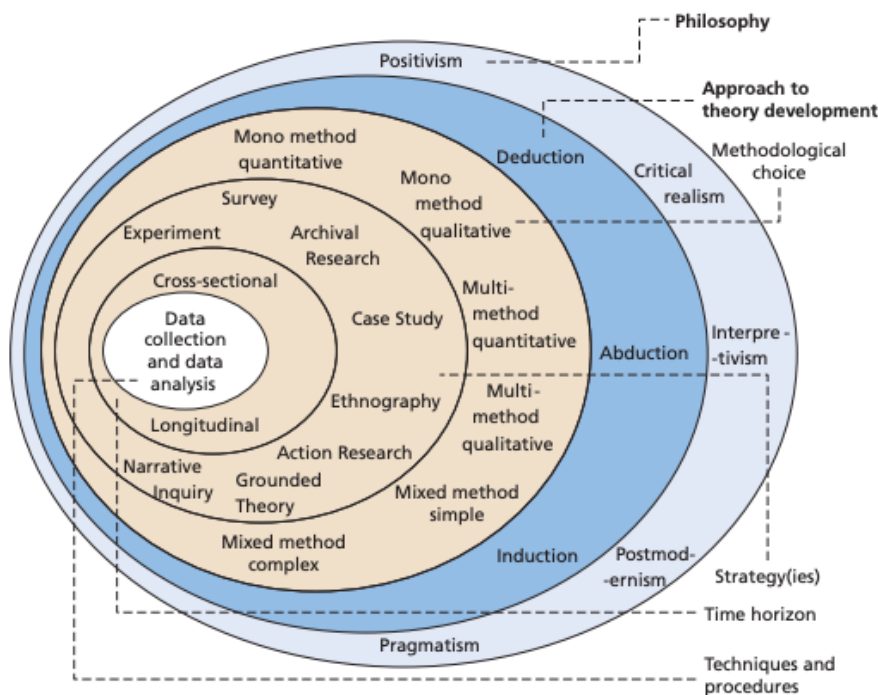
Figure 1 The Research Onion (Saunders, et al., 2019)

In the approach to the topic, the Research Onion (Saunders, et al., 2019) is useful in narrowing down the approach and in understanding the different avenues available with respect to the research topic. Using the model in Figure 1, above, it is possible to work through each of the relevant layers from research philosophy through methodology to data collection, in order to establish a plan from study design to data collection, analysis, and theory development.

For the purpose of this research, using the research onion, the below is the preferred approach to the research question:

1. That the researcher proposes to adopt an interpretivist philosophical position.

2. The researcher will examine their findings in order to generate new theory by means of an inductive approach.

3. That the researcher will adopt a grounded theory, mono-method qualitative approach

4. That the research will be conducted cross-sectionally

5. That the research will adopt a quantitative approach on the basis of the subject matter being subjective to the participants' experiences

The subsequent sections will outline the rationale for the approach outlined here, and will examine advantages and limitations of the selected methodology and theoretical framework. In each case the decision will be outlined in respect to the research question "How do millennials in Ireland respond to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy?", and the chosen approach will be justified in line with theory.

4.3 Philosophical Position

Due to the bearing of individual motivations and attitudes on the behaviour being examined as part of the research as it pertains to online privacy versus the personalisation of adverts, the preferred approach to the research is from an interpretivist standpoint. As the research will be a qualitative analysis of a reasonably small sample of participants, the research is unlikely to yield a widely applicable "one-size-fits-all" theory, as the subject matter is reasonably subjective.

As such, in order to attempt to better understand the attitudes and behaviours of participants within the context and norms of their cultural and geographic distribution, the researcher in this case will adopt an interpretivist view of the methods and processes which follow. While this should allow for an understanding of behaviours and diverse perspectives in these contexts, it is unlikely that the results could be generalised to the whole population (Creswell, 2009).

4.4 Exploratory Research

In order to conduct the research into the consumer's perception of privacy and personalisation and to deepen the understanding of their relationship when it comes to consumer attitudes and behaviour, a grounded theory approach to the collection and analysis of the data will be adopted, taking the following steps as the outline to the research:

1. Establish a philosophical position

2. Investigate methodological possibilities
3. Plan the study
4. Enter the field
5. Apply essential grounded theory methods
6. Develop a theoretical model
7. Develop a dissemination plan
8. Evaluate grounded theory

Through the coding and characterisation of the data, writing of memos, theoretical sampling, comparative analysis and advanced coding, insights will be generated on the basis of the above process. This will allow the researcher to understand and codify the interplay of privacy and personalisation in the view of the sample group, in order to generate new theory around consumer behaviour regarding digital privacy.

4.5 Qualitative Analysis

Per Williams and Moser, "[q]ualitative research provides opportunities to locate the genesis of a phenomenon, explore possible reasons for its occurrence, codify what the experience of the phenomenon meant to those involved" (2019). As such, given the theme of the research question, in order to understand the experience of the research participants and to explore the phenomenon and develop a conceptual understanding of the user reaction to personalisation and the impact of the same upon their experience of internet privacy, a qualitative approach affords the opportunity to probe and understand these themes. A quantitative approach, despite offering the opportunity to collect and analyse a larger representative data sample, would not allow the chance to explore the themes and experiences of the participants, with regard to the subjective areas of privacy.

A notable criticism to highlight here is the perception of qualitative analysis as being "soft" or subjective. While quantitative data may be seen as more objective (depending on the research design and biases in question setting, etc.), the application of coding to qualitative data as a means of data reduction is not mathematically systematic (Hammer & Berland, 2014) and thus can leave the results open to challenge, as the viewpoint of the coding researcher must be accounted for. The will be borne in mind when determining an approach to the subject and considering whether a qualitative or quantitative methodology is more appropriate for the intended outcomes of the work.

In addition to the lack of mathematical standard to coding, another pitfall of qualitative analysis is researcher subjectivity. The background and analytic style of the researcher also serve as variables in the collection and analysis of qualitative data and this should be borne in mind during the research design, in order to identify and combat issues of subjectivity and reliability (Madill, et al., 2000).

Improving the quality and validity of the research is contingent upon a number of factors, including the rigour of the data collection in addition to the credibility of the researcher (Patton, 1999). Bearing in mind the above critiques of the chosen research design, practices of reflection and reflexivity will be adopted in order to account and correct for subjectivity.

4.5.1 Reflection and Reflexivity

While reflection involves an observation of our actions and ways of doing, reflexivity is the process of exposing and questioning these (Hibbert, et al., 2010). As such, reflexivity in qualitative research is an awareness of the researcher's role in the research and the influence of the object of the research on the findings – an acknowledgement of the process by which the researcher affects the research (Haynes, 2012). Applying reflexivity to the processes of data-collection and data analysis, the researcher may endeavour to improve objectivity, by increasing the awareness of how they conduct each step of the process and take into account the lens through which they view the data. While the process of reflexivity does not provide a solution to the issues of subjectivity in qualitative research, it can help to sensitise us to our position as researchers and to the impact that our perspective may have on the research undertaken (Johnson & Duberley, 2003)

4.6 Semi-structured Interviews

In order to facilitate the exploration of complex themes and allow for the subjectivity of participant attitudes to privacy and personalisation, per the research question, semi-structured interviews will be conducted, in order to understand behaviours and motivations, in line with the exploratory approach outlined above.

Advantages of the semi-structured interview format include:

    (a) Prepared questions to guide the conversation

    (b) Open-ended questions to encourage participants to volunteer information

    (c) The ability to request that the interviewee elaborate where necessary

(d) The ability to ask follow up questions as insights begin to emerge

Participants in semi-structured interviews may be more likely to share candidly than in a group setting (Adams, 2015), particularly when it comes to the subject of internet privacy and so the format is preferable to a focus group in order to facilitate the safety and comfort of the participant when sharing potentially sensitive information. Additionally, opting to conduct semi-structured interviews affords the support of the interview guide and the flexibility to adapt "the formulation of question, follow-up strategies and sequencing" (Hopf, 2004).

With regard to the potential limitations of the structured interview format, there are a number of factors that must be taken into account when critically evaluating the approach, including the skill of the interviewer, the construction of the interview questions and the honesty of the interviewee. In order to conduct an interview with the value of insight required, the construction of the questions is crucial in order to tie the output of the discussion back to the theoretical concept and to glean the necessary information in order to code, analyse and construct meaning. In order to ensure that the semi-structured interview questions are suitable for purpose, it may be necessary to run pilot interviews, in order to determine the success of the question set. Further limitations are down to the skill of the interviewer, this extends to being able to facilitate the participant to feel comfortable and safe with regard to the information that they are providing, also being able to take cues from the interview in terms of pursuing particular threads of the discussion which may be of interest, that arise outside the standard question set.

Outside of the above factors, pertaining to the semi-structured interviews themselves, one particular criticism of semi-structured interviews concerns the sample size and make-up of the groups interviewed. In the case of the sample research question it is unlikely that the researcher will be able to achieve a significant enough sample size in order to mimic the precision of quantitative data collection, due to the significant time commitment required in conducting, transcribing and analysing the interviews. In this case, the researcher must accept that in order to explore the nuances of the issue at hand, they must sacrifice the volume that might provide them with better statistical significance.

4.7 Thematic Analysis

Data Reduction is the process by categorisation and coding are applied, in this case to the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews conducted (Birks & Mills, 2015). After the

interview has been transcribed, sections of the output will be categorised and then coded on the basis of recurring themes. This will be undertaken either on the basis of researcher's knowledge and previous experience, or by the inductive development of codes that emerge as the data collected is processed (Hair, et al., 2010). By working inductively, using Grounded Theory methods, the themes of the data emerge in the analysis, rather than being defined before the analysis, as is often the case in quantitative research. Coding the research moves the output from having many pages of data from the initial data collection and distils this down to a number of themes emerging from the research.
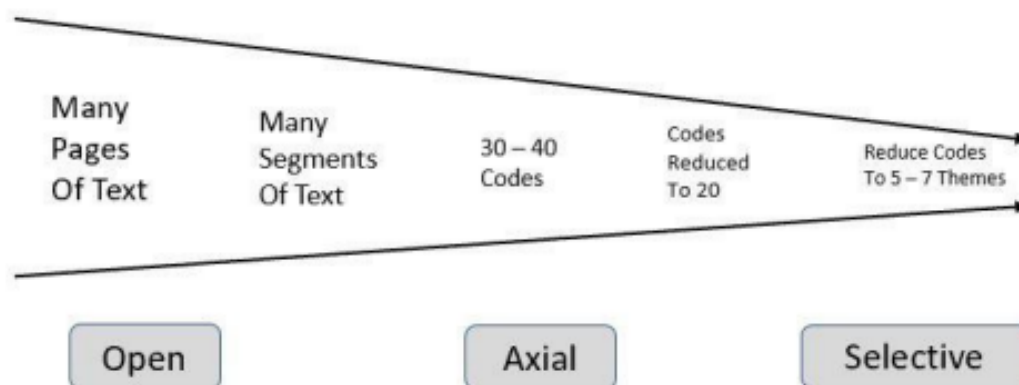
Figure 2 Overview of the coding process (Williams & Moser, 2019)

Undertaking the coding and thematic analysis in the above manner may allow for the development of new theoretical frameworks and the construction of meaning, based on the selective theme outputs (Williams & Moser, 2019). This coding will be approached iteratively, in order to create a robust code structure informed by the data, and will also include an approach of negative case analysis (Hair, et al., 2010), in order to challenge the themes and theories emerging, so that the research is correctly bounded by its limitations and is not subject to confirmation bias in the analysis of the themes.

Once the data has been coded, the output will be subject comparison in order to determine similarities and differences within the themes identified in order to identify behaviours or patterns in the data, in order to begin to build a theoretical framework.

Member checking should be employed in order to verify that the interpretation of the findings and story-telling around the same are accurate, with the process of member checking consisting of key informants reviewing the report (Hair, et al., 2010).

After the coding and comparative analysis will follow the theoretical integration. Per Birks and Mills, "Theoretical integration is the most difficult of the essential grounded theory methods to accomplish well. A grounded theory generally provides a comprehensive explanation of a process or scheme apparent in relation to particular phenomena." (2015)

The researcher will, through coding, analysis, memo writing and theoretical integration seek to generate new theory in respect to the research question outlined.

With the research methodology and approach to analysis defined, the following chapters outline first the findings (Chapter 5) and subsequent discussion (Chapter 6) of the output of the semi-structured interviews. The target cohort for these interviews is millennial consumers (born between 1981 and 1994), living in Ireland.

5 Findings and Results

The following is the presentation of the findings of seven interviews with millennials living in Ireland. The interviews covered their experience of online advertising and their thoughts on the information which they make available to advertisers online.

5.1 Research Objective 1

To determine whether millennial consumers make the distinction between behavioural and trait based personalisation and whether either is perceived as more invasive.

5.1.1 Theme 1 - Behavioural Targeting

When asked to consider their likelihood to respond to cue-based or behavioural targeting, the interview participants were generally aware of ads based on their browsing behaviour and were reasonably accepting of the occurrence of this type of targeting. One participant noted that they were aware that by engaging with search engines and website that they were readily making that data available about themselves online:

> "I think if I'm searching something that's obviously me, like, making the conscious decision to search that and like put that information out to the internet."

While other respondents made the point that behavioural targeting has the potential to be less "invasive" than trait or demographic targeting, given that it is based on actions that they have taken and not based on assumptions made about them.

> "I think I'd find that less invasive, if they were targeting based on my behaviour."

Given that this advertising was based on their interactions with certain brands and websites, it had the potential to be more relevant and useful to them. `

> "And like, and I don't dislike it… And I prefer to see more of that rather than random stuff being advertised."

Conversely, two of the interviews highlighted concerns about the use of behavioural targeting. One participant, a doctor, mentioned using their personal device for work and called attention to being targeted with work related ads on her own devices in her spare time.

"But I've searched relevant, medical, you know, things and I guess it's targeted me that way. And that has come up a few times, which is sort of just irrelevant to me. So that's it's kind of annoying, I guess that it follows me."

This device-based concern was also brought up in another interview, where cross-device targeting was a cause for concern and had pushed the interviewee to take action to improve their privacy settings with regard to their device setup.

"I search something on Google on my laptop, and then I will get it in my YouTube on my phone recommended, like the next day… Yeah, I don't like it at all. To be honest, I'm going to try to get away from that as much as possible."

5.1.2 *Theme 2 – Trait-based Targeting*

When questioned about their feelings towards trait or demographic based targeting, many of the interviewees viewed this type of targeting in a negative light. One of the most significant recurring themes with regard to trait-based targeting centred on assumptions based on a customers' demographic information:

"I feel like the demographics is probably worse… demographics are other people's assumptions of what you want, or should be doing."

"They're the things that make assumptions about people I feel about how they are about the norms in society, like, I really do believe that. And that can be triggering for some people."

The view of demographic and trait-based targeting appears to prompt responses from consumers around their individuality and an unwillingness to be pigeon-holed by advertisers:

"They kind of assume things about you. By the way… by your age, by your gender, you know, they're just assuming things about you about. And they're like that, they're generic, like norms. Do you know what I mean? Like, not everyone wants the same life. And you don't have to be, like, nearly cookie-cuttered into that."

The negative feedback in the above around this kind of trait-based marketing appears to align with Tran's (2017) assertion that prior behaviour is a predictor of relevance. Whereas trait-based targeting does not seem, in this case, to facilitate serving useful ads to people based on what appears to be general demographic information.

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The ideas of norms and societal expectations with regard to trait-based marketing recurred throughout the interviews, with respondents finding that the pressure of expectations based on their age, gender and other characteristics resulted in pressure placed upon them:

> "I am targeted by a lot of health and fitness ads. And while I don't feel like that sensitive information again, you know, like, it's, you know, dieting and all that kind of stuff. Sometimes I feel like it's a bombardment of like, you know, like how to, you know, look and appear a certain way and all that. Okay, sometimes that bothers me."

The pressure of fitness expectations and the societal norms that enforced by advertising gives rise to the next theme explored, that of sexual and reproductive health.

Despite the largely negative feedback, one attribute which two of the interviews identified as potentially helpful when it came to targeting was location. Location data used to target ads for events or offers nearby was deemed to be less personal than other user traits and therefore, less invasive:

> "Oh, like, she might like this, because she's a 26 year old female living in Dublin."

5.1.3   Theme 3 – Reproductive Health

During the course of the interviews, one prominent topic that stood out for participants in their experience of personalised advertising was in the area of reproductive health. Both female and male respondents indicated that they had been targeted with ads online regarding their reproductive health, with females noting ads regarding pregnancy, pre-natal vitamins and menstrual health products and one male participant stating that he had been targeted with supplements for erectile health.

Respondents generally indicated that being targeted with ads regarding their sexual and reproductive health made them uncomfortable, suggesting that - as per Ur, et al. (2012) – the topic of reproductive health is "privacy-invasive" and assumes too much. Within the context of the user and brand relationship online, topics deemed sensitive or overly-personal seemed to cross a line for respondents:

> "I feel like that's a bit invasive. Okay. It's kind of like they're, you know, trying to pre-empt my sexual health or something like that, you know, okay, but I feel it's a bit over the top."

Furthermore many of the female participants reacted negatively to these types of advertising, citing societal pressure as one of the off-putting characteristics of this type of advertising.

> "I feel like an example of this was after we got married, you suddenly start seeing loads of like baby ads and I feel like that's kind of a societal push."

Finally the sensitivity of the advertising in an individual context was raised, given that while advertisers may have a large amount of data in order to target consumers, that data largely exists without qualitative context. One interviewee highlighted the potential harm posed by ads targeted to her after searching a present for her nephew.

> "And I think probably a bit insensitive as well from like advertising because, you know, I'm not looking to have a baby right now, but somebody could be in a position where they're trying to have kids, they're trying and they're trying to have a baby and they cannot."

Taking the above arguments into account, it seems that within the sample there is some agreement that the subject of sexual and reproductive health is sensitive enough to step into over-familiarity. In this case, the broad strokes targeting of consumers, likely on the basis of age and gender, for something as subjective as reproductive health seems to have the potential to be off-putting in an online context and veers into the territory of creepy marketing. An interesting question in future research could be a comparison of these ads in a non-personalised ad context (such as TV and out-of-home advertising) to see if they produce as strong a reaction as ads served on a demographic basis online.

5.2   Research Objective 2

To establish whether millennial consumers are more or less amenable to personalised adverts than generic mass-targeted advertising online

5.2.1   Theme 1 – Preferences

When questioned about their preferences on whether they would prefer to see personalised or generic ads online the results were mixed. There were some clear cut responses in favour of personalisation:

> "I think I'd be okay with my data being used for those personalised ads."

Meanwhile, several respondents commented that, while they would generally favour tailored ad as, they may be more helpful, they do feel like there are privacy considerations at stake, with one respondent again highlighting the issue of creepy marketing:

> "I think I'd rather tailored ads. It is a little bit creepy in a way, because they've seen everything that you've kind of done, but yes, no, I think I prefer tailored stuff that I'd be more likely to buy based on my search history."

A further highlighted theme was that of consumer consent to advertising and their control over the same. Questions of consent and privacy control occurred throughout the interviews and will be reviewed later in consideration of Research Question 3.

> "I just feel like, even though tailored ads might be more helpful, it kind of comes back to the idea like, have you consented to have more tailored ads."

At the other end of the scale, two respondents stated that they would rather see generic rather than tailored advertising as they were unlikely to engage with either meaningfully and they would prefer not to have their data used in the targeting of ads:

> "I would prefer to just have random stuff than, like super targeted."

> "I probably, like if, if all things were equal, then I would just I would prefer if they weren't targeted, yeah."

Interestingly both of the respondents who felt that they would rather generic advertising had described engaging more significantly with privacy controls online in order to restrict the amount of data shared with advertisers.

5.2.2 Theme 2 – Prompted Purchases

On the subject of utility of personalisation, interviewees were questioned on how useful they have found ads to be in the past and whether or not they had ever purchased a product on the basis of an ad they had seen online. One interviewee stated that they had been targeted, likely on the basis of their online behaviour, with items related to some of their other browsing history.

> "We've been doing a few bits in the house, and we're getting the garden done. So we've been looking at different things like that. Yeah, with regards to that different garden

furniture and things have been popping up. And that might be like, well, that could actually look really nice."

Other respondents had experiences of seeing products marketed to them that were ostensibly interesting, and which did not seem to be directly based on browsing, and thus, we may assume that these could be targeted on the basis of interests or trait-based targeting strategies by brands:

"And yeah, like, I've definitely come across some ads that are weird and kind of predictive. I was like "how did they know that that's what I'm going to like..." when I haven't directly searched it before"

Respondents who had seen an ad for a product that they might want mostly responded that while they were interested in the products, they had not acted on the ad to complete a purchase:

"Oh, I saw this thing like, okay, started maybe a few months ago, I think it's an Irish company that made like little click together tables that you can bring to the park, and they like, hold your wine glass, for example. So it's not something that I even knew, I maybe was, I would want, but you see it, and it's like, 'I go to the park and have wine with my friend. A little table would be awesome', but I haven't followed through to actually purchase it. But that might be something Yeah, that I didn't know I needed or wanted."

5.2.3 Theme 3 – Retargeting

Behavioural targeting by brands and online advertisers is one of the most common use cases of digital marketing, with regard to retargeting ads designed to bring customers back to websites to complete abandoned purchases. The practice usually relies on pixels or cookies form the retargeting platform in order to be able to show customers products on their social platforms which they have already viewed.

One emerging theme that was highlighted during a number of the interviews was the propensity for retargeting behavioural ads to be annoying, due to the factors that had prevented the consumer from making the purchase on their initial visit.

"I might have not bought something because they actually don't have either sizes available or the style that I wanted. So like for that reason, I probably didn't buy it. And

then it's still continued to be marketed and advertised to me. And I'm like, this is just annoying me because I actually can't get my hands on the product that I want."

Here a lack of availability of the product has not been taken into account when retargeting the ads to the consumer and therefore continuing to show them unavailable products based on their browsing behaviour is not useful, but irritating.

In addition to availability, customer change of mind is not something that can necessarily be taken into consideration when marketing the products to consumers who have viewed and abandoned them:

"Um, I felt it was definitely a little bit annoying, because I'd probably decided that I didn't want to buy that. And felt it was a little bit it was trying to push me to buy it. And I probably for whatever reason decided that I didn't want it either."

"If you've looked at something, and then made this decision that you don't want to buy it, then it's quite annoying."

Annoyance on the part of the customer where they have actively made the choice not to purchase, seems to detract from the usefulness of this kind of advertising due to a negative reaction. These cases give rise to the need for users to interact with ads in order to better control the kinds of products and ads they are served when browsing, which will be considered under Research Objective 3 below. These interactions may include blocking the advertiser which not only signals a lack of usefulness, but may also inhibit the brands ability to advertise to the user in the future.

5.2.4 Theme 4 – Consumerism

While not a universal theme across the interviews, two respondents brought up concerns about consumerism with regard to online advertising. One respondent stated that their online shopping has declined due to a conscious choice to shop less:

"But I tried to not use it as I suppose, I just, I've actively tried to stop using Amazon in the last sort of year, because of Jeff Bezos, and everything... Yeah, very little shopping online, very little shopping in general. I've tried to just buy less stuff anyway."

Another participant cited concerns that personalised advertising tied to one's browsing behaviour raised questions about increased consumerism due to the pressure of seeing repeated ads after browsing a site:

> "You will come across more things that you're more likely to buy, but then that kind of feeds into the whole consumerism."

5.3   Research Objective 3

To investigate whether millennial consumers feel as though they have sufficient control over their data sharing and privacy online.

5.3.1   Theme 1 – Taking Action using Privacy Controls

Interview participants shared various examples of ways in which they had interacted, either with ads or with privacy policy settings on websites in order to exert more control over the ads they were shown online.

Interviewees who were more privacy conscious were more likely to take more deliberate and proactive steps in order to not share their data with advertisers:

> "I use Brave Browser now, if you know it? I don't use Chrome because you can kind of get away from a lot on Brave Browser and you can control the amount of ads you get."

In addition to using privacy focused browsing software, another step highlighted was to actively engage with the data controls on websites in order to take ownership of what was shared:

> "I would actually always like when I'm accepting cookies or accepting things on a website, I would actually take a second to go in and remove certain tracking"

For those that did not actively take steps to prevent ad personalisation, most had interacted with ads in order to no longer see them, due to annoyance or recurrence:

> "There was an account I was following on Instagram for some makeup thing, and then I decided to unfollow it, because it just wasn't kind of what I wanted anymore. And then I still kept seeing ads for that, and I found that annoying. so that I reported just being like, I don't want to see this ad anymore."

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> "I have often clicked on the ad and clicked not interested, because I've seen it so many times."

While one theme within the interviews was a lack of transparency in how customer data may be collected and the terms of use to which the customers had consented, many felt that they were comfortable with the systems in place for stopping a recurring ad:

> "Facebook, if I'm remembering correctly has the option where you can exit out and say like, Don't show me this ad. And I've done that a few times"

Furthermore use of these controls once an ad had been served to a customer, seems to be something that the participants found reasonably intuitive:

> "I would say like, I don't want to see this or do whatever you have to do just to stop seeing. I think it is made pretty easy on most platforms."

5.3.2   Theme 2 – Perceptions of Unauthorised Monitoring

When discussing trust and privacy controls, one theme which recurred through several of the interviews conducted was the idea that consumers' phones may be monitoring them. This topic is one that has been discussed anecdotally for some time (Khatibloo, 2017) and was prevalant in the responses recorded.

Responses cited examples of spoken conversations had by the participants which they believed had resulted in being served an ad related to that conversation:

> "But I've definitely noticed that I've said something out loud before and then it has come up as an ad."

> "I also often find, you know, when you've been talking about something to someone, you might not have searched for it at all, and then ads for that pop up, I find that a bit disconcerting."

In addition to the idea that microphones might be monitoring spoken conversations, one participant provided an example of a written conversation in WhatsApp, that in their opinion may have been used to serve them ads related to the topic of conversation:

"My friends were actually booking a boat trip on the Shannon, for like these cruise liners. And they involved me in a WhatsApp group. And I wasn't going on this, I didn't search for it. I didn't do any research on it. But like, from that conversation, and I started getting targeted with like cruise liners, and all different kinds of cruise liner brands along the Shannon"

Despite the uncanny nature of these ads, several of the participants made the point that the idea this was mostly conjecture, and that it was also possible that predictions for the ads were made modelled on their behaviour, or in relation to actions that they were unaware they had taken.

"I suppose it's the whole kind of urban myth, slash 'is it a real thing?' where you're like, your microphone is kind of like... your ads are based on your microphone."

5.3.3   Theme 3 – Explicit vs Implicit Ad Consent

When discussing the topic of control of their privacy, the participants were questioned on their familiarity with the consent and volume of data that they shared with online ad platforms and brands.

"I have allowed them by saying I agree to the terms and conditions. And but I feel like it is like, not everyone is aware of that either they just like, you know, they just carry on, they don't really see the like, the link between the two. So I think it can take advantage of people sometimes."

Some of the respondents felt as if the privacy terms of the sites they browse and social media platforms used were not clearly outlined when it came to how their data was used, feeling that brands obfuscate the information:

"I would say I'm sure it is somewhere in the legal terms and conditions. But is it outrightly easy for people to understand? Probably not. No, no, I think I think the information is there somewhere."

Another, mused that the difficulty in being able to navigate the terms of the agreement and the extent of what the user was consenting to was made deliberately difficult to follow:

"But like, it's, it's so hard to actually navigate the things like privacy, I suppose a lot of that is on purpose. But they have to put the option there somewhere, to some extent, I suppose."

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A common position among the responses was that people see privacy policy modals on websites as blockers and accept the terms and conditions of using a service, simply to most past the inconvenience of a pop-up:

> "But like I just to, like, I feel like a lot of people are in that position where they just accept all cookies for the point for reasons of simplicity, to just move on to see what you want to see on the internet."

Finally, when discussing online privacy, one interviewee described accepting privacy policies and consenting to cookies as the cost of availing of certain services online:

> "Yeah, like, it's a term and condition of browsing the internet, whether you agree with it or not, I think it just it is how it what it is. So it doesn't really freak me out necessarily."

5.3.4   Theme 4 – Creating an online paper trail

Throughout the course of the interview participants noted that their online browsing behaviour was likely to create a virtual 'paper-trail' or online profile that ad platforms and advertisers could use to target them on the basis of their behaviour. In many cases, this was happening without a great deal of conscious thought:

> "It's something you don't, you know, you kind of do passively and don't really think about it."

Respondents acknowledged that that they did not have a full sense of how much information that they were generating to share with ad platforms:

> "Although I've sort of accepted that my data is probably out there in the world much more than I'm probably aware of."

The point came up in several conversations that interviewees were uncomfortable with the level of data that they had knowingly or unconsciously provided, either through their social media presence or their online behaviour:

> "Yeah, it is a bit uncomfortable knowing that, like brands and everything have all that information about me. Unsettling."

"I used to be mad into social media, kind of like, proper, like posting on Facebook all the time. But, um, and then slowly use less over the years, and then proceeding to get me the fact that I had all this information freely available, like you could type my name into Google. And like, all this stuff came up about like, things that I did, like 10 years ago."

When queried as to whether they had made the conscious choice to share the data that was being used to profile them, consumers noted that while they had not necessarily taken action with the understanding that it could be used to targe them with ads, they had likely tacitly accepted it through the terms of their online interactions:

"I'd say from all the things that I've ever signed up for, agreed to or been part of, then yeah. I would say it's all been voluntary information, or an amalgamation of the information that I've given has been, you know, a summary of me has been created."

Additionally, interviewees accepted that their social media posting was a source of the data shared with ad platforms and brands:

"Yeah, more so through posting, never really, I don't know, really explicitly giving them but I'm sure they can also track through my phone, which always has the location."

5.4   Discussion of the themes

With the themes above identified, per the research methodology outlined in Chapter 4, the following chapter outlines a discussion of these themes in respect to the theory reviewed. The discussion will review each of the three research objectives and how the emerging themes allow us to build a picture of millennials' feelings toward online ad personalisation with respect to their digital privacy.

6 Discussion

6.1 Research Objective 1 Discussion

To determine whether millennial consumers make the distinction between behavioural and trait based personalisation and whether either is perceived as more invasive.

The majority of the participants in the sample were aware of the distinction between ads they had seen based on their online behaviour and ones that were likely targeted towards them based on trait or demographic data. Many of the participants cited examples of products or services that they understood had been targeted to them on the basis of having visited a particular website. Conversely they recognised that many ads had been served to them on the basis of things unrelated to their browsing behaviour, using their demographic data or interests.

Generally, with the exception of one outlier in the sample set, participants agreed that behavioural based advertising was more likely to be relevant to them. They also agreed that this type of advertising was less invasive, and seemed to cause them less distress than the trait-based targeting. This position is consistent with Tran's findings (2017) that cue-based or behavioural targeting is more likely to drive positive outcomes than trait-based approaches. Regardless of their agreement with the statement, the respondents generally understood that behavioural based ads were shown to them as a result of prompts or cues that their own actions had provided to advertisers.

The results of this study do not support the idea that personalisation may lead to positive brand associations (Shanahan, et al., 2019), with none of the respondents indicating that they felt more positively based on personalisation. Some of the respondents did however indicate that they engaged more with personalised ads. Given the limitations of the study due to the sample size, this warrants further exploration in an Irish context to see if increased engagement is a predictor of brand sentiment.

Trait based targeting was generally looked upon as unfavourable, with one of the key findings being that trait based targeting tended to assume to much about the consumer, or that it adopted a stance of over familiarity. This appears to back up Tene & Poloentsky's (2014) "creepy marketing" assertion about brands infringing on user privacy.

From the above interview responses, it may be inferred that targeted advertising on a limited number of collected data points on a consumer without a being able to ground those in a personal context can result in an unexpected reaction to the product or service. Similarly, presuming familiarity around sensitive and personal matters, as with the reproductive health examples, may cross the line for many consumers as targeted advertising can assume too much without a holistic view of a customer. This may result in the advertising producing an aversion to the product or service based on the ads crossing the line of consumer privacy. This appears to support Lerman's (2014) argument against pushy and overly-familiar personalised advertising.

As an industry consideration, advertising medium and audience size should be reviewed in the context of perceived invasions of privacy resulting from the targeting of sensitive products. This echoes Pelino & Kohl's findings (2018) that the level of communication tailoring is an important factor in user receptiveness. Brands whose products may be seen as personal or intimate, may perform better in the context of mass media channels than on a closely targeted basis. Customer sentiment by advertising channel should then be reviewed from a managerial standpoint for these brands.

From the sample's responses, behavioural rather than trait-based appears to emerge as a preferable means of targeting, which appears in line with the idea that prior interactions with a brand or website are more likely to produce positive outcomes. This is largely in line with the research presented in the literature review.

6.2   Research Objective 2 Discussion

To establish whether millennial consumers in Ireland are more or less amenable to personalised adverts than generic mass-targeted advertising online.

When examining the amenability of the sample to personalised advertising, the majority of respondents indicated that they would accept some level of personalisation of ads in order to see products that were relevant to them. However some did note an element of concern with regard to the degree to which they had consented to see ads from the brands in question. In many of the cases, users had accepted that seeing ads was to be expected when using the internet and had made the point that it might be more useful to see relevant ads. This seems to support Pelino & Kohl's (2012) statement about engaging customers with relevant advertising.

However, their point on inspiring action in the ad recipient does not necessarily hold true for the customers who have seen personalised ads and not acted upon them.

Invasions of privacy continue to be a concern throughout the themes covered in this section, with personalisation once again raising the issue of the ads being creepy and users providing informed consent for the targeting. The issues of privacy and control over informed consent to advertising have been separated into a later theme, due to the frequency with which they were mentioned.

With regard to the question of whether respondents are more amenable to personalised or generic advertising, the majority were in favour of some kind of personalisation to increase relevance, in agreement with Pelino & Kohl (2018). However one point to note is the relationship between a dislike of personalised advertising and the likelihood to take action against seeing a particular ad, or opt-in to marketing on a website. Given that those in the sample who stated a preference for generic advertising had taken steps to block ads, this may suggest some correlation between an aversion to personalised advertising and a likelihood to engage more with privacy controls in order to prevent this kind of personalisation. This will be discussed later as an area for further research.

With regard to retargeting, while the analysis of Research Objective 1 indicated that behavioural targeting was generally more acceptable, the product may also have an influence on user receptiveness. In many cases respondents outlined their annoyance at seeing repeated ads for a product that they had made the decision not to purchase, however they were subsequently served that same product a number of times. While Baek & Morimoto highlight trust as a factor in decreasing ad avoidance (2012), there seems to be a frequency threshold after which that trust no longer mitigates the annoyance felt by users who have previously engaged with a brand. This raises a practical consideration for marketers that, while retargeted products may serve to improve consideration, the reason for abandoning the purchase has a bearing on a user's willingness to see the same product ad shown to them over time.

6.3   Research Objective 3 Discussion

To investigate whether millennial consumers feel as though they have sufficient control over their data sharing and privacy online.

With regard to privacy policy and consenting to online advertising personalisation, the participants surveyed displayed a general familiarity with the type of consent that they were providing when using online platforms and services. Some respondents indicated that they accepted the terms and conditions of online platforms without fully reading or amending them, for the sake of convenience.

While Davies describes GDPR as being a "customer-focused toolkit" in order to protect privacy (2016), this research indicates that the way in which measures are implemented are not always customer-friendly. Among the responses, the theme emerged that privacy and data policies of online companies and platforms, while accessible to the user, were not phrased with the end user in mind. Terms may often be written from a legal standpoint, making it difficult for customers to fully understand the conditions to which they consented. It also suggested that this may be deliberate on the part of the sites and platforms, presumably to obfuscate the full extent of the consent that they provided. A very small number of participants actively engaged with the privacy settings on sites in order to control how their data was used. Given the limitations of the sample size, one consideration for future research may be an examination of how digital privacy literacy impacts internet users resistance to personalisation and data usage.

Another trend that seemed to emerge during the course of the interviews was the idea that accepting data policy terms and the collection of data for the targeting of ads is a norm of using the internet. Participants recognised that the collection of data for marketing and the building of online profiles for ad targeting is in some ways the 'cost' of using services online for free. Access to services such as social media platforms, search engines and online shopping services is free from a financial perspective, and in some cases users seem to be paying with their data in order to use them. For the most part the respondents accepted that mutual creation and exchange of value, in line with Grönroos (1994), but some opt for additional privacy measures to preserve their privacy.

While there is an expectation of some level of tracking as a condition of using modern smart technology, the concern also remains about the level to which that tracking occurs, and the extent to which our privacy choices are honoured. The subject of surveillance was a recurring topic and it speaks to a mistrust of technology companies and ad platforms that many consumers within the sample raised concerns about audio and messaging surveillance. While this would fall outside of the explicit terms and conditions of the platforms in question, they have not succeeded in building trust enough to dispel the idea. Once again, future research

might focus on the correlation between surveillance fears and trust of online platforms and how technology users reconcile suspicion and convenience.

The following chapter summarises the above themes into a view of the research sample's attitudes to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy, drawing on the above research objectives. It considers practical and managerial applications, in addition to some future areas of research.

7 Conclusion

When considering the attitudes of millennials in Ireland to personalised advertising online in relation to their data privacy, an element of digital tracking is seen by many of the participants as inevitable. While not something that is fully accepted, personalisation based on behaviour and traits is something that all of the interviewees had an expectation of being targeted by brands online. For some the convenience of quickly being able to use a service online outweighed the concerns about accept privacy and data policies and the subsequent use of their data for targeting may be considered the cost of that convenience. For others the value-exchange of using a service did not necessarily justify the use of their personal data, and these consumers were more likely to engage with the privacy controls in order to minimise the data shared.

While in some cases personalisation was deemed as interesting, engagement with and recall of those ads did not seem like a predictor of purchase. Several of the interviewees noted seeing a particular product targeted to them that they may have found interesting, but not enough to follow through to convert online. It should be noted that the sample size does not allow for a broad conclusion to be drawn about this propensity to buy, but there may be a relationship between awareness of targeting strategy and some ad scepticism on the part of the consumer.

Advertising targeted using trait-based data such as demographic and interest targeting was generally looked on less favourably among the sample, as this was deemed to be more invasive than advertising based on consumer behaviour. The creation of online paper trails and the construction of a profile used to target ads seems to be uncomfortable for some consumers. While many noted accepting data policies as they used particular websites, some interviewees had not considered the accumulation of all of those data in building a picture of a customer to target. Unless a consumer is very privacy conscious and taking proactive steps to prevent tracking, the lasting implications on privacy does not appear to be something that consumers think about as they go about their daily usage of the internet.

Despite many of the interviewees accepting the collection of data in their browsing, several raised the question of surveillance. Though largely anecdotal, many of the respondents noted instances of being targeted with advertising that seemed to be based on conversations that they had had either out loud or via messaging apps. The mistrust of technology companies and ad platforms, seems to feed into the narrative that our devices may be used to monitor us to better

personalise ads. While this appears to be unfounded, it may in fact speak to the sophistication of predictive personalisation, using modelled behaviour that consumers do not even realise they have displayed. The idea of increasingly accurate predictive modelling versus perceived surveillance and their impact on customer trust may make for interesting further research.

The key findings of this investigation of millennial attitudes to online ads with respect to their privacy are as follows:

1. Some element of personalisation based on behaviour appears acceptable to consumers.
2. Repeated retargeting with products from abandoned purchases may have the opposite of the desired effect on consumer's likelihood to purchase.
3. Specific targeting of sensitive and personal products may not be appropriate for many consumers in an online setting.
4. Transparency with regard to privacy and use of data is important to reassure consumers and build trust.

These considerations have practical applications for industry as they may help to inform brands' market research on their ad effectiveness, as levers for ad performance and consumer receptivity. The impact of the above considerations may effect, at a practical level, audience targeting, creative messaging and display frequency of ads to particular consumers.

Finally, based on this research there are a number of potential venues for future study, either by expanding the scope or by comparing additional demographics. The limitation of the small sample size, as outlined in the research methodology, means that these finding are not universal. A quantitative study of a larger sample size might better explore some of the apparent correlations from the above discussion, as in the case of privacy literacy's impact on aversion to personalisation. Conducting a broad quantitative survey within the same demographic could allow for further exploration on the bearing of understanding of privacy to ad receptiveness. Another avenue worth exploring could be a comparison of attitudes of other generational cohorts, such as Baby Boomers and Generation Z in order to understand if there are distinctions in their attitudes to online advertising. These research avenues may have practical implications for industry when approaching targeting strategies for ads online.

8 References

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9   Appendix

9.1   Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the interview today. The purpose of the research that I am currently conducting is to better understand people's experience of online advertising with respect to their privacy. I would love to have a discussion and get some of your opinions on your experience of these issues.

This is entirely voluntary and should take about 30 – 40 minutes based on how much we have to talk about. If during the interview you don't want to answer a particular question, or are uncomfortable giving a response; or if at any point you decide not to continue with the interview for any reason, please let me know and we can move on, or stop.

The responses that you give will be anonymised in the research report and your identity will be kept confidential. The audio from interview is going to be recorded for the purpose of the research. Do you have any questions on the information that I've just given you?

Is it okay with you if I begin recording?

Intro

Do you mind telling me a little bit about how often and what you like to use the internet for? On computer, phone, other?

Are you currently active on any social media platforms? (How often do you check them? Do you have a favourite platform?)

Do you use the internet for shopping? (What kinds of things do you buy? Do you use websites to research products before you buy them? Do you buy them online or offline?)

Behavioural Retargeting

1. Have you ever seen an ad for something you searched online, but didn't buy?
2. Have you ever felt as though you were being "followed" around the internet by a product that you searched for? (How did that make you feel?)

3. Have you ever wanted to stop seeing an ad for a product after you had searched it? (Do you know how to clear your cookies/update adsense/block an ad from social media?)

Trait-based Marketing

1. Have you ever been repeatedly targeted with an ad for a product that you hadn't searched for?
2. Was the product something that you hadn't searched for but was relevant to you?
3. Have you been targeted with an ad for something you "didn't know you wanted or needed" but subsequently bought?

Invasions of Privacy

1. Have you, in your experience, been targeted with an ad based on information you might consider sensitive (gender, age, sexual orientation)?
2. If so, do you feel like that ad was targeted to you based on information that you volunteered to the advertiser?
3. If you didn't volunteer the information, why do you think you were targeted? How did they get enough information to target you?
4. Have you ever been targeted with an ad for a product that you were thinking about buying but hadn't yet started to research?

Trade Off

1. Are you happy for brands to retarget you with products you have viewed but haven't bought?
2. Are you happy to be targeted with things that may be useful to you, on the basis of being profiled by advertisers based on your online behaviour?
3. Are you happy to be targeted with ads for things based on not on your behaviour, but on the basis of your characteristics (gender, age, sexual orientation, political or religious affiliation)?
4. If Yes+No – Why? What is the difference in those two types of targeting for you?
5. Are you happy to trade some of your data in order to see relevant adverts rather than randomly allocated ones? (Why/Why Not?)

9.2 Consent Form Template

An Examination of Consumer Attitudes to Digital Privacy and Personalisation

Consent to take part in research:

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves an interview with the researcher to discuss the research topic outlined above.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.

- This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained by the researcher on a password protected laptop, to which only they have access, until the exam board confirms the results of the researcher's dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Names, degrees, affiliations and contact details of researchers (and academic supervisors when relevant).

Signature of research participant:

_____

Signature of participant

_____

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

_____

Signature of researcher

_____

Date