



## **How Does Ireland's Transition Toward a Cashless Society Influence Consumer Behaviour Across Different Demographic Groups?**

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## Abstract

This study explores how Ireland's transition toward a cashless society influences consumer behaviour across different demographic groups. As digital payment adoption accelerates globally, Ireland presents a distinctive case where rapid innovation coexists with persistent reliance on cash among certain populations. Understanding how these changes impact daily financial behaviours is not only important for promoting inclusion and consumer wellbeing but also presents an opportunity for policymakers, financial institutions, and retailers to adapt to evolving payment preferences.

This research project was based on an extensive literature review and a subsequent qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews with a designed sample representing older adults, low income earners, rural residents, and digitally fluent young professionals. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns relevant to the research objectives.

The main findings from this study were that younger, urban, and higher income consumers embraced cashless payments for their convenience, efficiency, and integrated budgeting tools, while older, rural, and lower income participants expressed reluctance due to perceived security risks, loss of financial control, and unreliable infrastructure. Cash was also valued for its tangibility, role in budgeting, and social traditions such as gifting and in person banking. The study additionally revealed concerns about privacy, data surveillance, and the erosion of personal interaction in financial transactions.

The primary conclusion drawn from this research is that while digital payment systems are reshaping consumer behaviour in Ireland, a significant digital divide remains. It is recommended that stakeholders maintain dual payment infrastructures, strengthen digital literacy initiatives, and design inclusive systems that preserve consumer trust and choice. Further research opportunities were identified at the end of the study.

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# Chapter One - Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Understanding consumer behaviour is essential for businesses and policymakers navigating evolving payment environments. As financial transactions increasingly migrate to digital platforms, the role of payment methods in shaping consumer experience has become a central focus in marketing research (Kotler and Keller, 2016). The shift from cash to digital payments offers notable benefits: efficiency, speed, and integration with technology but also raises behavioural and social concerns, particularly for consumers who are reluctant or unable to adapt (Pantano et al., 2020; Ladhari and Tchetgna, 2015).

While many consumers embrace the convenience of digital wallets and contactless cards, others remain anchored to cash due to familiarity, budget control, or distrust in digital systems. These behavioural differences may be shaped by age, income, location, and confidence in technology. As Ireland moves steadily toward becoming a more cashless society, it is vital to understand how this shift affects different demographic groups and what implications it may have for inclusion, access, and consumer wellbeing. Research by Cwynar et al. (2021) highlights that consumers' knowledge and comfort with cashless payments are significantly influenced by demographic factors, including education level and household characteristics, which in turn affect their adoption and safe use of digital payment methods.

## 1.2 Ireland's Shift to Cashless Payments

Ireland has experienced a marked decline in cash usage over the last decade. The Central Bank of Ireland (2022) reports that cash accounted for only 21% of point-of-sale (POS) transactions by late 2022, compared to over 60% in 2010. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when public health guidelines encouraged contact-free transactions and limited physical cash handling (Kelly and Byrne, 2023).

While many consumers have transitioned seamlessly to digital payments, cash remains essential for others such as for older adults, low-income earners, and individuals who are less engaged with digital financial tools (Farrell and O'Connor, 2020). These groups are more likely to experience financial exclusion or reduced autonomy as businesses phase out cash acceptance or digitise core services.

### **1.3 Behavioural and Societal Implications**

Research in marketing and consumer psychology has long demonstrated that payment methods influence not only transactional efficiency but also emotional and behavioural responses (Prelec and Simester, 2001). For some consumers, cash serves as a tool for managing spending, resisting impulse purchases, and maintaining financial control. Digital payments, while convenient, are often perceived as abstract and harder to monitor (Pantano et al., 2020).

Trust is another critical factor. Ladhari and Tchetgna (2015) note that consumers are less likely to adopt digital payment systems if they perceive them as insecure or lacking transparency. In Ireland, concerns around fraud, surveillance, and data misuse continue to impact public confidence in digital financial systems (Murphy et al., 2021). These behavioural reservations influence the pace and nature of digital adoption, particularly among those with less financial or technological confidence.

### **1.4 Research Gap and Rationale**

Despite growing academic interest in digital payment systems, much of the literature focuses on infrastructure and adoption rates, with relatively limited attention to consumer attitudes, behaviours, and demographic differences in Ireland. There is a need to explore how the shift toward cashless transactions affects the daily lives of Irish consumers, not just in terms of access, but also control, trust, and financial decision making. By uncovering consumer behaviour and emotion behind this transition, this study hopes to create actionable insights for policymakers and financial institutions.

This research aims to address that gap by investigating how different demographic groups in Ireland are responding to the decline of cash. It will examine behavioural motivations, trust factors, and perceived barriers to digital adoption, offering insights that can guide businesses, banks, and policymakers in designing more inclusive and consumer sensitive payment strategies.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

### 2.1 Understanding Consumer Payment Behaviour

Consumer payment behaviour is deeply influenced by perceptions of value, control, convenience, and trust factors that are central to marketing theory and practice (Kotler and Keller, 2016). In an increasingly digital global economy, individuals are presented with a diverse range of payment modes, each bringing out varying behavioural responses.

According to Pantano et al. (2020), the uptake of digital payment systems is predominantly driven by their perceived convenience, transaction speed, and seamless integration with contemporary, technology-oriented lifestyles.

To further understand these behaviours, theoretical models offer a structured lens. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) identifies perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as central to technology adoption. Within the context of digital payments, these perceptions influence how consumers evaluate cashless options. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) emphasises the role of behavioural intention shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control-elements that are particularly relevant among individuals who feel less confident with digital financial tools.

However, not all consumers respond equally to this shift. For some, especially those with lower financial literacy or operating on tight budgets, cash remains the preferred method due to its tangibility and role in expenditure control (Prelec & Simester, 2001). In the Irish context, Farrell and O'Connor (2020) found that older consumers and those from lower-income brackets rely more heavily on cash not merely out of necessity but as a deliberate behavioural strategy for budgeting and maintaining financial discipline.

These findings are reinforced in marketing research, where payment methods are shown to influence not only transactional choices but also emotional outcomes. Cash, as noted by Soderberg (2021), often provides a sense of autonomy and control that digital systems fail to replicate, particularly for those who mistrust financial institutions or feel excluded from technological advances.

## 2.2 Trust and the Psychological Dimension of Digital Payments

Trust in technology and financial institutions plays a critical role in determining consumer behaviour in a cashless environment. In their study on digital payment adoption, Ladhari and Tchetgna (2015) observed that consumers' willingness to engage with digital financial tools is strongly influenced by perceived security, transparency, and institutional credibility. Lack of trust can act as a significant barrier, especially for older and more risk-averse consumers.

Murphy et al., (2021) highlight that concerns around data privacy, transaction tracking, and fraud continue to hinder broader adoption of digital payments in Ireland. Consumers remain cautious about how their personal and financial information is stored, shared, or potentially monetised. There is evidence that these concerns are particularly salient among those with limited digital experience or exposure to past negative experiences with online financial systems.

International comparisons underscore this trust gap. Nordic countries such as Sweden and Finland report higher rates of digital payment use, which researchers attribute to a combination of user-centric design, strong legal frameworks for data protection, and public trust in national institutions (Arvidsson, 2014). Ireland, while technologically advanced, has not matched this level of consumer confidence, suggesting that trust-building remains a critical priority for Irish financial institutions and service providers.

In marketing and public communication, addressing these concerns is essential. As Pantano et al. (2020) argue, digital payment systems must be positioned in a way that builds psychological reassurance and perceived fairness. Ignoring the emotional and trust-related dimensions of adoption can undermine not only uptake but also long-term brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction.

## 2.3 Fraud, Privacy, and the Perceived Risks of Digital Payments

As digital payment systems become increasingly embedded in daily financial transactions, concerns around fraud, data misuse, and personal privacy have emerged as major barriers to widespread consumer trust and adoption. These concerns are particularly salient in Ireland, where several high-profile fraud cases and scams have contributed to public scepticism about the safety of cashless platforms (Murphy, O'Leary and Carroll, 2021).

Digital fraud typically manifests in forms such as phishing, account takeover, unauthorised card use, and social engineering attacks targeting vulnerable users. The Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI, 2023) reported a significant rise in fraud incidents in 2022, with over €85 million lost to card fraud and digital scams. Much of this was linked to impersonation fraud, in which scammers posed as legitimate institutions to gain access to consumer accounts.

Privacy concerns are also deeply tied to perceptions of risk. Many consumers remain uneasy about how their financial data is stored, used, and potentially shared by financial institutions or third-party platforms. According to Zuboff (2019), the emergence of "surveillance capitalism" has intensified public fears around digital transactions becoming tools for profiling and commercial exploitation. This has relevance in a cashless environment, where every transaction leaves a data trail and the concept of financial anonymity is diminished.

In Ireland, the Central Bank has acknowledged that trust in digital financial infrastructure is not uniform across demographics. Older adults and those with lower digital literacy are more likely to express anxiety about fraud and identity theft and often cite these concerns as reasons for sticking with cash (Farrell and O'Connor, 2020; NALA, 2023).

Financial institutions, meanwhile, face a dual challenge: innovating quickly to remain competitive while ensuring that security measures are both effective and transparent. Recent campaigns by the BPFI and the Department of Finance have aimed to raise public awareness of online fraud, but critics argue that more robust protections, such as default transaction limits, clearer terms, and simplified dispute processes are necessary to reduce consumer vulnerability (Age Action, 2023).

Understanding how fraud perception shapes consumer behaviour is vital for any effort to encourage digital adoption. If individuals perceive digital payments as high-risk or opaque, they are less likely to engage, regardless of the actual technical security in place. Building confidence therefore requires not just technological safeguards, but also consistent, plain-language communication, inclusive education efforts, and policy frameworks that put user protection at the centre of innovation.

## 2.4 Demographic Disparities in Payment Preferences

Payment behaviour varies significantly across demographic lines. Younger, urban, and digitally fluent consumers tend to favour contactless cards, digital wallets, and mobile banking apps due to lifestyle alignment, convenience, and trust in technology (Soderberg, 2021). In contrast, older adults and low-income earners are more likely to use cash, even when digital alternatives are available.

In the Irish context, Farrell and O'Connor (2020) identified a persistent age-based divide, with individuals aged 65 and over significantly more reliant on cash for day-to-day transactions. This tendency is not simply a result of limited access to digital devices or internet connectivity but is also rooted in behavioural familiarity, financial caution, and a desire for control over expenditure. For many in this demographic, cash remains a tangible, trustworthy tool for budgeting and personal finance management.

Concerns over the diminishing availability of cash services have been echoed by organisations such as Age Action Ireland and the Irish Postmasters' Union (IPU). In a 2023

statement, the IPU warned that the trend toward reduced cash access, particularly in rural areas, risks further isolating older populations and damaging local economies (Irish Postmasters' Union, 2023). The closure of bank branches and ATMs in small towns has placed greater pressure on post offices, which often become the last remaining point of access to cash-based financial services. Age Action (2023) similarly emphasises that many older adults feel excluded from a digital-first approach and continue to prefer in-person transactions for security and social reassurance.

In addition, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (2023) highlights that digital exclusion disproportionately affects people with lower levels of education, limited literacy, or disabilities; many of whom rely on cash due to difficulties navigating digital platforms. Without appropriate support and alternatives, the rapid push toward cashless infrastructure risks exacerbating existing inequalities.

Retailers and financial service providers must recognise these demographic nuances. As Soderberg (2021) argues, a failure to accommodate diverse consumer preferences can result in feelings of alienation, reduced brand loyalty, and missed commercial opportunities. In Ireland, these risks are particularly acute in communities where digital infrastructure is weaker, or where consumers perceive the cashless transition as a form of social or economic marginalisation. The challenge lies in promoting digital inclusion while safeguarding consumer choice, ensuring that those who rely on cash are not left behind in the name of innovation.

## **2.5 The Symbolic and Emotional Role of Cash**

Beyond its transactional function, cash holds symbolic and psychological value for many consumers. Prelec and Simester (2001) demonstrated that consumers are more likely to overspend when using credit cards versus cash, due to the psychological detachment from the “pain of paying”. In contrast, cash creates a stronger emotional connection to the value being spent, making it an effective budgeting tool, especially for those managing tight or fixed incomes.

This emotional attachment to cash is evident in both consumer and small business behaviour. Kelly and Byrne (2023) note that many SME's continue to prefer cash transactions, particularly in sectors like hospitality and personal services. These businesses often cite bank fees, immediacy, and customer demand as reasons for maintaining cash acceptance.

## 2.6 The Rise (and fall) of Cashless Banks

Financial institutions that operate entirely through digital platforms without physical branches or cash handling have reshaped consumer expectations around convenience, accessibility, and control. These banks, often app based, appeal particularly to younger, digitally fluent consumers who prioritise mobile functionality, real time notifications, and seamless online payments over traditional in-branch services (Ladhari and Tchetgna, 2015).

Revolut serves as a leading example of this trend in Ireland. The digital-only bank surpassed 2.7 million users in Ireland by 2024, accounting for more than half the adult population (Independent.ie, 2024). Its success is strongest among consumers aged 25 to 44, who report using the app for daily transactions, international transfers, and budgeting (Irish Times, 2023). Revolut's popularity exemplifies the behavioural shift among younger demographics away from conventional banks and toward cashless financial ecosystems, aligning with research that links technological trust and lifestyle fit to payment method preferences (Pantano et al., 2020).

However, the rise of cashless banking is not universally welcomed. In contrast to Revolut's growth, traditional institutions have faced public pushback when attempting to reduce cash services. In 2022, Allied Irish Banks (AIB) announced plans to make 70 of its branches cashless, eliminating ATM and over the counter cash services. The announcement prompted nationwide public outrage, especially from rural communities and older customers who rely heavily on physical cash access. The backlash led to a swift reversal of the decision by AIB within days (RTE News, 2022).

This case illustrates the tension between innovation and inclusion in the digital payments landscape. While digital banks thrive among younger, tech-savvy users, there remains a significant portion of the population that perceives the removal of cash services as exclusionary.

## 2.7 Ireland as a Unique Case in the Cashless Transition

While global trends toward cashless payment systems are well documented, Ireland presents a particularly distinctive case, shaped by a convergence of economic, cultural, and infrastructural factors. Despite being a high-income EU member with a modern banking sector and growing fintech adoption, Ireland has historically maintained a relatively high dependence on cash compared to its European counterparts (Central Bank of Ireland, 2022). This duality, rapid digital innovation, coexisting with enduring cash reliance, positions Ireland as a valuable context for studying the behavioural and societal implications of payment transformation.

One aspect of Ireland's uniqueness lies in its relatively late but rapid adoption of digital financial tools. According to the Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI, 2023), the

volume of contactless payments rose by over 30% in a single year, reflecting an accelerated shift, particularly post COVID-19. However, this transformation has occurred unevenly.

Younger demographics have embraced digital options, while older populations, rural communities, and individuals with lower digital literacy have remained more cautious (Farrell and O'Connor, 2020; NALA, 2023).

Another distinguishing factor is the critical role of post offices in preserving financial inclusion. Unlike many countries where cash services are almost exclusively bank-led, Irish post offices continue to serve as a lifeline for those needing access to social welfare payments, pensions, and cash lodgement or withdrawal facilities. The Irish Postmasters' Union (2023) has warned that any further erosion of physical financial infrastructure, particularly in rural Ireland, could severely undermine financial access for vulnerable groups.

Ireland's regulatory and political responses to cashless initiatives also highlight its specificity. Public and governmental pushback against perceived exclusionary digital banking policies, such as bank branch closures or ATM reductions, have influenced financial institutions to maintain a dual-channel approach. This tension between innovation and inclusion reflects broader societal values around fairness, access, and public service responsibility (Age Action, 2023).

Culturally, Ireland's relationship with money also remains grounded in a preference for autonomy and personal control, which physical cash affords. Prelec and Simester's (2001) theory of the 'pain of paying' has particular relevance in this context, as many Irish consumers continue to associate cash with budgeting discipline and financial independence.

Taken together, these elements make Ireland an instructive and underexplored case study in the cashless transition. Studying the Irish experience offers not only local insights but also broader implications for other mid-sized, high-income countries where rapid digital transformation must be balanced against equity, trust, and consumer agency.

## **2.8 Gaps in Literature and Implications for Research**

While the transition to digital payments has been extensively documented in economic and fintech literature, relatively few studies take a consumer behaviour approach to understanding demographic variation in payment preferences, particularly within the Irish context. There is a lack of in-depth, localised research that explores the dimensions of consumer behaviour in a cashless economy.

This study aims to bridge that gap by focusing on how different consumer segments in Ireland are experiencing and responding to the cash decline. By combining insights from marketing, behavioural economics, and consumer psychology, the research will contribute to a more holistic understanding of the human impact of digital transformation in payments.

## 2.9 Industry Research

### Introduction

This section presents findings from secondary data gathered from various industry sources, including the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI), the Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI), and the European Central Bank (ECB). It explores national trends, regional and demographic disparities, temporal variations, cash usage decline, behavioural proxies of trust, and income-related variation. This industry research provides the broader context for understanding Ireland's transition to a cashless society, complementing the qualitative findings presented in the subsequent chapter.

### National Trends in Digital Payment Behaviour

The most recent data from the Central Bank of Ireland (2024) and the Banking and Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI, 2025) shows a consistent shift towards digital and contactless payment methods over the past five years. Total card spending in Ireland reached €102.6 billion in 2024, up from €89.9 billion in 2023, marking a 14.1% year-on-year increase. Contactless payments now dominate in-store transactions, accounting for 87.1% of all point-of-sale (POS) card payments in 2024.

### Regional and Demographic Variation

Despite the national growth in digital payments, the data reveals uneven adoption across regions and population groups, highlighting digital inequality concerns. Data from the Central Bank's county-level reports show that urban counties like Dublin recorded significantly higher per capita contactless usage compared to rural counties such as Leitrim and Roscommon, which recorded much lower levels of contactless spending.

### Temporal Patterns and Cash Decline

Seasonal trends illustrate the growing use of card payments, particularly around the holiday season, with over €10.09 billion spent via card payments in December 2024. In addition, cash withdrawal volumes continue to decline, indicating a shift towards digital transactions as the primary payment method.

## **Behavioural Proxies for Trust and Digital Confidence**

The increased use of mobile wallets serves as a proxy indicator of consumer comfort with technology. According to the BPFI (2025), mobile wallet payments now account for over 50% of all contactless transactions, with younger adults and urban populations leading this trend.

## **Income and Payment Behaviour**

Income plays a significant role in shaping payment preferences, with lower-income consumers relying more on cash due to limited access to digital financial systems and concerns about fraud and budgeting control. This highlights an income-based digital divide, where higher-income consumers are more likely to adopt digital payment methods.

## **Summary of Industry Findings**

The secondary data analysis reveals several key trends:

- Digital payments dominate, especially contactless and mobile wallet transactions.
- Cash usage continues to decline, particularly in urban areas and among younger demographics.
- Geographic disparities exist, with rural and lower-income groups trailing in digital adoption.
- Behavioural proxies indicate increasing trust and confidence in digital payments among younger, urban, and wealthier consumers.

This chapter has provided a thorough exploration of the existing literature on consumer payment behaviour, focusing on the motivations, emotional drivers, and trust issues influencing the adoption of cashless payment systems. It has become clear that while digital payment methods offer significant benefits in terms of convenience and integration with modern lifestyles, many consumers, particularly older adults, low-income earners, and those in rural areas, remain hesitant due to concerns over security, fraud, and the loss of control typically associated with cash.

Furthermore, cash holds not only practical value but also emotional and psychological significance for a large portion of the population. Understanding these emotional ties is crucial for building a more inclusive transition to a cashless society, ensuring that those who rely on cash are not left behind. The literature also highlights the importance of trust in both digital technology and financial institutions in influencing consumer behaviour. This underscores the need for transparency, security, and education to help consumers navigate this transition.

With these insights in mind, the following chapter will move from theoretical insights to addressing the research questions central to this study. It will explore how the dynamics of consumer behaviour in Ireland align with or diverge from the trends observed and provide a deeper understanding of how different demographic groups are experiencing the shift towards cashless payments.

# Chapter Three - Research Questions

The shift towards a cashless society is propelled by clear technological and economic factors, offering enhanced efficiency, convenience, and integration with the digital economy. However, the behavioural response to this transformation varies significantly across different demographic groups. Understanding this response is crucial, as it reveals not only the drivers of adoption but also the barriers and emotional responses that influence consumers' choices. As Ireland navigates this transition, it becomes essential to explore how distinct consumer segments perceive, experience, and adapt to the decline of cash. This analysis will provide a clearer picture of how inclusive or exclusive this change is, highlighting who may be left behind in the drive toward a cashless future.

## 3.1 Primary Research Question

How does Ireland's transition toward a cashless society influence consumer behaviour across different demographic groups?

The primary research question seeks to investigate the core theme of the study: how the evolving landscape of payments in Ireland is reshaping consumer behaviour, especially considering the diverse demographic characteristics such as age, income, and geographic location. This enquiry will allow us to understand not just adoption rates, but also the underlying reasons for resistance or acceptance of digital payment systems.

## 3.2 Sub-Questions

### 1. Behavioural Patterns:

- a. What motivations and emotional factors influence Irish consumers continued use of or resistance to digital payment methods?

This question delves into the psychological and emotional drivers that either promote or hinder digital payment adoption. It explores aspects such as financial control, familiarity, and the sense of security provided by cash, versus the perceived benefits of digital payments like convenience and speed.

### 2. Demographic Variation:

- a. How does age, income, and geographic location impact payment preferences and attitudes toward digital payments?

This sub-question aims to dissect the way demographic variables influence the adoption of cashless systems. It focuses on understanding whether younger, wealthier, or urban consumers are more inclined to adopt digital payment methods, while older, lower-income, or rural groups may show greater resistance due to factors like trust, access, or comfort with technology.

### **3. Trust and Perceived Security:**

- a. To what extent do concerns about data privacy, fraud, and financial control affect consumer adoption of cashless systems?

Trust is a major factor in digital payment adoption. This question addresses the concerns that consumers, particularly those who are digitally excluded or wary of technology, might have regarding privacy, fraud risks, and the perceived loss of control over their finances when using cashless systems.

### **4. Consumer Adaptation:**

- a. What coping strategies or behavioural adjustments are consumers employing in response to reduced cash acceptance?

This question focuses on the practical adjustments that consumers are making to adapt to the reduction of cash usage. It looks at how individuals modify their financial behaviours, whether by increasing their use of alternative payment methods, using budgeting tools, or seeking out cash-friendly environments.

The combination of these research questions provides a holistic understanding of the socio-economic, emotional, and trust-related factors that shape consumer behaviour in the face of Ireland's cashless transition. By addressing both the drivers of adoption and the barriers to entry, this research aims to uncover key insights into how inclusive or exclusive this transition is, and what further steps can be taken to ensure a balanced, consumer-sensitive shift toward a fully cashless society.

# **Chapter Four - Research Methodology**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for this study, which employs a purely qualitative approach. The focus of this research is to explore consumer behaviour and emotional responses to the declining use of cash in Ireland, particularly in relation to digital payment adoption. The methodology is designed to provide in-depth insights into individual experiences, motivations, and perceptions through direct interaction with participants. This will then be compared with the literature review and the industry research set out in Chapter Two.

## **4.2 Research Philosophy**

The research is grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, which posits that reality is socially constructed and can best be understood through the subjective experiences of individuals (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophical approach is particularly suited to the study of consumer behaviour, as it allows for an exploration of the meanings, emotions, and values attached to the shift from cash to digital payments. The interpretivist approach enables the researcher to engage with participants' personal stories, uncovering the psychological and emotional factors that influence their payment preferences and behaviours.

## **4.3 Research Approach**

This study adopts an inductive approach, which involves deriving patterns, themes, and theories from the data collected, rather than testing predefined hypotheses (Gabriel, 2013; Bryman, 2015). The inductive approach is particularly appropriate for this research, as it aims to explore under-researched issues related to consumer behaviour in the context of digital payment adoption. By focusing on qualitative methods, the research will uncover nuanced insights into how different demographic groups experience and react to the decline of cash in Ireland.

## **4.4 Research Design**

The research design is qualitative and utilises semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to explore key themes in detail while allowing participants to share their experiences in their own words. This design is particularly well-suited to capturing rich, personal insights about the emotional and behavioural aspects of digital payment adoption.

The interview topics will address the following key areas:

- Motivations for continued use of or resistance to digital payment methods.
- Emotional responses to the transition, including trust, anxiety, and empowerment.
- The role of cash in personal budgeting and financial control.
- Perceived barriers to adopting digital payments.

This approach allows for the exploration of both general trends and individual differences in response to the cashless transition, giving the research a deep, qualitative understanding of consumer experiences.

#### **4.5 Sampling Strategy**

A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants who can provide the most relevant and diverse perspectives for this study. Participants will be chosen based on demographic characteristics and payment behaviours, ensuring a broad range of experiences is represented. The key demographic groups to be included in the study are:

- Adults aged 65 and older, who are likely to have different payment preferences and experiences with cash.
- Low-income earners, who may face barriers to accessing digital payment systems and may rely more heavily on cash.
- Rural residents, who may experience challenges with infrastructure and access to digital payment methods.
- Digitally fluent young professionals, who are more likely to embrace digital payments and may have different perspectives on financial control and convenience.

The purposive sampling method ensures that the study captures a range of viewpoints from individuals with varying levels of experience with both cash and digital payment methods. A total of **6 to 10 participants** will be interviewed, with the sample size determined based on qualitative research norms and the principle of data saturation.

#### **4.6 Data Collection Methods**

Semi-structured interviews will be used as the primary data collection method. This method allows for flexibility, ensuring that all key topics are covered while also allowing for new ideas and themes to emerge during the interviews. Interviews will be conducted via telephone or video conferencing, depending on participant preferences, and will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes each. Participants will be asked open-ended questions, which will encourage

them to discuss their experiences, attitudes, and emotional responses regarding cash and digital payments.

The interview guide will focus on the following areas:

- Payment preferences and motivations.
- Emotional responses to the shift from cash to digital payments.
- The role of cash in managing personal finances and budgeting.
- Barriers to digital payment adoption and trust-related concerns.
- Perspectives on digital inclusion and the role of cash in society.

Each interview will be via telephone and anonymised to ensure confidentiality. The transcriptions will be stored securely, in compliance with GDPR standards.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews will be analysed using Framework Analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This method is well-suited to qualitative research as it allows for a systematic, structured approach to analysing complex data, while maintaining flexibility to account for the nuances of individual participant experiences.

The analysis will proceed through the following stages:

- **Familiarisation:** The researcher will read and re-read the interview transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of the data and begin identifying recurring themes and patterns.
- **Identifying a Thematic Framework:** Initial themes will be developed based on the research questions, the literature review, and emerging insights from the interviews. These themes will guide the analysis.
- **Indexing:** The transcripts will be coded according to the thematic framework, with key sections of text being assigned to relevant categories.
- **Charting:** The coded data will be organised into thematic matrices, allowing for a comparative analysis across different demographic groups.
- **Mapping and Interpretation:** In this final stage, the researcher will identify connections between themes and interpret how they relate to the research questions and the broader context of the study. The findings will be discussed in relation to existing literature, providing insights into how different demographic groups experience and respond to the decline of cash.

## 4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study will be obtained in accordance with **NCI** guidelines. Participants will be fully informed about the purpose of the study and their involvement, and they will be given the right to withdraw at any point during or after their interview. All interview data will be anonymised, and pseudonyms will be used in the reporting of findings. Audio recordings and transcripts will be stored securely and deleted once the analysis is complete, in line with GDPR requirements.

## 4.9 Limitations

While this methodology is robust and appropriate for the research objectives, there are a few limitations to consider:

- **Non-generalisability:** The qualitative nature of the study means that the findings will not be statistically generalisable to the broader population. However, the aim is to gain a deep understanding of consumer experiences, rather than generalise findings.
- **Self-selection bias:** Participants who volunteer for the study may already have strong opinions or experiences related to the topic, which may influence the results.
- **Researcher bias:** As with all qualitative research, the researcher's interpretation of the data will be subjective. To minimise bias, the researcher will follow rigorous procedures in the data analysis process and maintain transparency in the reporting of findings.

## 4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the qualitative methodology used to explore consumer behaviour in Ireland's transition toward a cashless society. The study adopts an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach, using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. The data will be analysed using Framework Analysis to identify key themes and patterns that provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and behavioural aspects of digital payment adoption. The next chapter will present the qualitative findings, offering insights into consumer behaviour and experiences in response to Ireland's transition to a cashless society.

# Chapter Five - Qualitative Research Findings

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with four distinct demographic groups: adults aged 65+, low-income earners, rural residents, and digitally fluent young professionals. The purpose of these interviews was to explore lived experiences and perceptions regarding Ireland's transition toward a cashless society. The analysis follows a Framework Analysis approach, allowing for a structured comparison across demographic groups, aligned with the key research themes identified in the literature review: emotional responses to digitalisation, barriers to adoption, budgeting behaviours, and inclusivity in payment systems.

*Fig 1 - Interview respondents*

Respondent	Age	Sex	Location	Occupation
Interviewee A	72	Female	Urban	Retired
Interviewee B	68	Male	Rural	Retired
Interviewee C	60	Female	Rural	Farmer
Interviewee D	35	Male	Urban	Finance Professional
Interviewee E	45	Female	Suburban	Part-time worker
Interviewee F	31	Male	Urban	Digital Marketing Professional
Interviewee G	31	Female	Urban	Finance Professional
Interviewee H	65	Male	Rural	Retired
Interviewee I	60	Female	Suburban	Cleaner

## 5.2 Research Objective 1: Personal Experiences with Declining Cash Usage

### Theme 1: Cash as a Budgeting Tool

Both older adults and low income respondents used cash as a deliberate budgeting mechanism. Many interviewees cited cash as an essential tool for managing their finances, as it gave them tangible control over their spending. For these participants, the use of cash was seen as a practical method to track and allocate their money efficiently.

*"I'd take out my pension in cash weekly. I split it into envelopes. Bills, groceries, a bit for myself. Can't do that with a card."* (Interviewee A, 72, city)

This quote highlights how older adults often rely on cash as a budgeting strategy, providing a clear, visual method to track spending across categories.

### Theme 2: Digital Tools as Financial Aids

In contrast, younger professionals leveraged digital tools to aid in budgeting and money management. These tools, such as budgeting apps and mobile banking alerts, enabled more structured, efficient, and even gamified ways of saving and tracking expenses. Younger respondents described these tools as both empowering and fun, illustrating how digital financial management can be both a practical and enjoyable experience for tech savvy consumers.

*"I use Revolut vaults and monthly budgets. I even have a savings challenge going. It's fun and useful."* (Interviewee G, 31, Works in Finance)

For these younger participants, digital payment tools were seen as an opportunity to enhance their financial control and planning, with mobile apps providing an accessible and engaging way to manage money. Additionally, digital banking tools offered extra perks that increased the appeal of using them for everyday transactions.

*"I even get travel insurance and points that can be used towards hotel stays or flights when I pay for things using my digital card."* (Interviewee G)

This added benefit of rewards and insurance highlights how digital payment tools go beyond mere convenience and financial tracking. They also offer tangible incentives, enhancing the overall value of these platforms for younger consumers.

### **5.3 Research Objective 2: Emotional Responses to Digitalisation (Trust, Anxiety, Empowerment)**

#### **Theme 1: Trust as a Generational Divide**

Older and rural participants expressed significant concerns about trust in digital payment systems, citing fears of fraud and system failures. These interviewees described a sense of insecurity regarding digital platforms, especially when faced with unsolicited requests for personal information or reports of fraud. This reflects the broader generational divide in trust levels between those who grew up with physical cash and younger consumers comfortable with digital technologies.

*"I get these dodgy texts every day, I'm scared someone will clone the card. And I won't even know until the money's gone."* (Interviewee B, 68, Rural Resident)

This statement reflects the mistrust many older consumers feel, particularly when digital systems require them to share sensitive information.

Again, younger participants expressed more confidence and empowerment in using digital payment methods, which they viewed as a way to gain more control over their finances.

*"I like seeing the little graphs in my app. It shows me where my money's going, and I can adjust before the month is over."* (Interviewee B)

Younger, tech savvy consumers appreciated the transparency and control offered by digital tools, enhancing their overall financial empowerment.

#### **5.4 Research Objective 3: Financial Management Habits in a Cashless Context**

##### **Theme 1: Budgeting control**

Older adults and low income respondents continued to use cash as a central part of their financial management. By physically allocating funds into envelopes or separate cash categories, they felt they were able to manage their finances better. This technique, while old fashioned, remained a highly effective budgeting strategy for those who preferred tangible money and wanted to avoid digital temptation.

*“The app tells me when I’m close to my grocery budget. I’d never get that kind of instant warning with cash.”* (Interviewee F)

This practice demonstrates how for some, apps on their mobile play a crucial role in providing a sense of financial discipline and control, whilst others may use cash in this context.

#### **5.5 Research Objective 4: Barriers to Using Digital Payments**

##### **Theme 1: Infrastructure and Connectivity in Rural Areas**

A significant barrier to adopting digital payments was the poor infrastructure in rural areas, including unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to digital payment facilities. Rural participants expressed frustration at the lack of reliable digital payment options, often resorting to cash because of these infrastructure issues.

*“There’s still places here with no signal. You need cash for the butcher or the market.”*  
(Interviewee C, 60, Rural Resident)

This quote underscores the geographical divide in digital payment adoption, highlighting the limitations of digital payment infrastructure in more remote areas.

##### **Theme 2: Digital and Financial Literacy Gaps**

Both older adults and low income earners expressed challenges in understanding digital payment systems. These groups often struggled with digital literacy and had difficulty navigating the technical aspects of online transactions, such as entering passwords and managing multiple apps.

*"It asks for passwords and PIN codes. It's too much. I get lost in it."* (Interviewee D)

For these individuals, the complexity of digital systems posed a barrier to their adoption of cashless payments, and they expressed a need for simpler, more intuitive systems to facilitate their transition to digital methods.

## **5.6 Research Objective 5: Improving Inclusivity in Payment Systems**

### **Theme 1: Maintain Cash as a Safety Net**

Nearly all older and low income participants advocated for the continued availability of cash, emphasising the need to maintain a choice in payment methods. Many feared that a completely cashless society would exclude people like them, who rely on cash for practical and emotional reasons.

*"Don't take cash away. Just give people the choice. Not everyone is ready for all these machines."* (Interviewee B)

This comment reflects the importance of choice in payment methods, with participants calling for a hybrid system where cash remains an option alongside digital payments.

In addition to this point, several interviewees stressed the importance of having both cash and digital payment options available in retail settings. This hybrid approach would accommodate both groups who are comfortable with digital payments and those who prefer cash.

*"Even if most use cards, keep the till for cash. It shouldn't be either/or."* (Interviewee C)

This call for dual payment systems highlights the need for inclusive infrastructure that considers the diverse needs of all consumers.

### **Theme 2: Education and Support Services**

Several respondents recommended the introduction of tailored workshops or local training sessions to help people understand and use digital banking apps. These respondents believed that education could ease the transition to digital payments, particularly for those who felt overwhelmed by technology.

*"A drop in centre or even a session in the bank to show people how to use these apps would go a long way."* (Interviewee E)

This suggests that financial literacy initiatives could play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations through the digital payment transition.

## **5.7 Miscellaneous Findings**

Beyond the core research objectives, several additional insights emerged from participants that provide further context to the lived experience of Ireland's move towards a cashless

society. These remarks, while not central to the predefined themes, offer a glimpse into how payment behaviour feed into broader cultural, social, and emotional dimensions.

Several participants reflected on the changing social aspect of payments. One younger respondent described how mobile transfers have transformed even the smallest transactions:

*“Splitting a bill now is few taps on the phone. It used to be coins across the table, now you barely notice it happening.”* (Interviewee E)

While they may see this as efficient, some participants felt that this shift removed an important human element. An older interviewee noted:

*“When you hand someone cash, there’s a moment: a thank you, a chat. On the phone, it’s over before it begins.”* (Interviewee G)

This sentiment extended to interactions with banks. Several older participants valued the personal relationships built with local bank staff, expressing concern that the trend towards branch closures and cashless banking broke their trust and community ties. One participant linked this directly to the AIB cashless branch controversy, stating:

*“You knew the person behind the counter, they’d help you out if something went wrong. Now it’s all machines, there’s no one to talk to.”* (Interviewee C)

Generational differences also emerged in gifting practices. Some participants recalled the tradition of placing cash in a birthday or Christmas card, contrasting it with the instant transfer culture of younger generations:

*“I’d always put money in a card. Now it’s ‘Revolut me’ - I don’t give empty cards.”* (Interviewee F)

For some, this change symbolised a broader loss of tangible, sentimental elements in financial interactions.

Charitable giving was another area affected by the decline of cash. Fundraising volunteers noted that street collections and event donations had been hit by the lack of loose change in people’s pockets. While contactless donation devices exist, some donors felt awkward or uncertain about using them for small amounts:

*“People say, ‘I’d love to give but I’ve no cash.’ Not everyone wants to tap for a fiver or whatever the set amount is.”* (Interviewee H)

Taken together, these findings highlight that Ireland’s cashless transition is not only about efficiency or access but also about the cultural and human aspects of money. For some, the removal of physical exchange strips away moments of personal connection, whether in giving gifts, chatting with a bank staff, or dropping coins into a collection bucket. While these may

seem like small details, they reflect deeply embedded social practices that form part of everyday life.

## 5.8 Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings underscore the challenges that older adults, low income earners, and rural residents face in transitioning to a cashless society. These groups often expressed emotional discomfort with the decline of cash usage, citing loss of control, budgeting challenges, and security concerns. In contrast, younger, digitally fluent participants embraced the transition, with many viewing digital payments as empowering, efficient, and easier to manage.

The findings also illustrate the digital divide: urban, younger, and wealthier consumers are more comfortable with digital payments, while older adults, low-income earners, and rural populations continue to rely on cash for practical reasons. For these groups, cash represents certainty, control, and a reliable budgeting tool.

Participants also pointed to worries about the data trail created by digital payments. A younger urban participant summarised this concern from a different angle: *“I work in marketing and can see how purchase data feeds targeting. Sometimes it feels like my card is telling on me every time I buy a coffee.”* (Interviewee F, 31, Urban). Others emphasised the stress associated with fraud resolution rather than fraud itself: *“If a transaction goes wrong online, you’re into forms and waiting; with cash, I hand it over and it’s done, no chasing anyone.”* (Interviewee H, 65, Rural). These perspectives add depth to the themes of privacy, surveillance, and post fraud uncertainty, reinforcing that barriers to adoption are psychological and procedural as much as they are technical.

In addition, participants highlighted subtle cultural shifts, such as the loss of personal interaction at bank counters and the fading tradition of gifting cash in cards, now often replaced with instant digital transfers. For some, these small changes symbolise a loss of the human connection once embedded in everyday financial transactions.

# Chapter Six - Research Discussion

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive comparison of the findings from the literature review, industry data, and qualitative research. By integrating insights from these three sources, the chapter aims to provide a holistic view of Ireland's transition to a cashless society, emphasising patterns, barriers, and emotional responses that shape consumer behaviour. The comparison highlights both convergence and divergence between macro-level industry trends, theoretical perspectives, and the personal experiences of different demographic groups.

## 6.2 Key Themes: A Comparative Overview

### Adoption Rates and Digital Confidence

The industry research from sources such as the Central Bank of Ireland (2024) and the Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI, 2025) demonstrates a notable shift toward digital payment methods, particularly contactless and mobile wallet transactions. These payment methods have gained widespread adoption, with urban, younger, and wealthier consumers leading the charge. The statistics show that contactless payments alone accounted for over 87% of in-store transactions in 2024, underlining the growing confidence in cashless systems.

The literature review supports this trend, as studies by Pantano et al. (2020) and Prelec & Simester (2001) emphasise that the adoption of digital payments is strongly influenced by perceived convenience, security, and trust in the technology. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) explains that the perceived ease of use and usefulness of digital payment systems are crucial factors in driving adoption, particularly for younger, digitally fluent consumers. These consumers often exhibit higher levels of confidence in using digital tools, as evidenced in the interviews with younger participants, particularly those in urban settings. These participants expressed high levels of trust and empowerment when using digital payment methods. For them, mobile apps have become indispensable tools for financial management, helping them track budgets, monitor spending, and even earn rewards. As one younger participant put it: *“I set weekly spending caps in my app and it nudges me when I’m close; it’s like having a coach in my pocket.”* (Interviewee F, 31, Urban).

In contrast, older adults and rural participants in the interviews expressed significant scepticism toward digital payments. These participants, particularly those who are less digitally literate, cited concerns over security, fraud, and privacy. One interviewee shared: *“If a message asks me to click a link or verify my details, I delete it, I don’t trust any of that online banking business.”* (Interviewee H, 65, Rural). This scepticism reflects a broader trend where older and rural consumers face greater challenges in adopting digital systems, which aligns with the issues highlighted in the literature.

Both the industry research and qualitative findings confirm that younger, urban populations are more likely to embrace digital tools, whereas older adults and rural groups face substantial barriers, primarily driven by trust issues.

### **Income Disparities in Payment Behaviour**

The industry research also highlights a clear divide in the adoption of digital payment systems based on income. According to data from the European Central Bank (2024) and BPFI (2025), higher income groups are more likely to adopt digital payment systems, with mobile wallets and contactless cards becoming the preferred options for those earning more than €2,000 per month. This divide in payment preferences is a significant point of meeting between the industry data and the literature review.

Ladhari and Tchetgna (2015) argue that wealthier consumers tend to have better access to technology, higher financial literacy, and more positive experiences with digital tools. In contrast, lower-income groups often rely on cash due to limited access to technology and concerns about budgeting control. This disparity was reflected in the qualitative interviews, where low-income earners, such as Interviewee E, emphasised the practical role of cash in helping them manage their finances. Interviewee E explained: *"With cash, you see it leave your hand. Cards are dangerous when you don't have a whole lot."*

On the contrary, wealthier, younger consumers who are more digitally fluent found digital tools to be a convenient and efficient way to manage their money. As another urban professional noted, *"Perks like travel insurance and fee-free currency make the app my default for bigger purchases."* (Interviewee D, 35, Urban). The industry research and qualitative data both underscore that wealthier groups are more inclined to adopt digital payment systems, whereas lower income groups tend to rely on cash due to limited access to digital infrastructure and financial constraints.

### **Geographic Disparities in Payment Preferences**

The industry data reveals that urban areas, particularly Dublin, have seen higher adoption rates of contactless payments, with urban dwellers leading the way in terms of digital payment usage. This finding aligns with the literature, which highlights the role of geographic location in shaping payment preferences. Urban areas benefit from better access to digital payment infrastructure, such as contactless systems, mobile networks, and point of sale terminals. In contrast, rural areas face greater barriers to adopting cashless systems due to limited infrastructure and connectivity.

The qualitative findings mirror these trends. Rural participants expressed frustration with unreliable internet connectivity and the lack of digital payment options in their local shops. These insights further emphasise the digital divide between urban and rural areas, where urban populations are more readily adopting digital payments due to better infrastructure, while rural residents continue to rely on cash due to connectivity issues.

### **Trust and Perceived Risks of Digital Payments**

The industry research highlights that while younger and urban consumers trust digital payments, concerns about security, fraud, and data misuse remain prevalent, particularly among older and less digitally literate consumers. This theme is reinforced in the literature, with researchers such as Ladhari and Tchetgna (2015) and Murphy et al. (2021) emphasising the trust gap between different demographic groups. The literature suggests that older consumers and those with lower financial literacy are more likely to distrust digital payment systems due to fears of fraud, identity theft, and the loss of control over their financial transactions.

The qualitative findings echo these concerns. Older and rural participants consistently expressed fears of fraud and a sense of insecurity when using digital systems. As one rural retiree put it: *“If something goes wrong online, who do you talk to? You can’t argue with a machine.”* (Interviewee H, 65, Rural). In contrast, younger participants expressed more confidence and control over their financial transactions. A younger professional observed: *“I can see spend by category, set limits, and freeze the card in seconds, so I feel safer, not exposed.”* (Interviewee F, 31, Urban). These findings suggest that trust remains a key factor in the adoption of digital payment systems, with older consumers and those with lower digital literacy being more hesitant to embrace these technologies.

### **6.3 Summary of Comparison**

The comparison between the industry research, literature, and qualitative findings reveals several key insights:

**Digital Divide:** There is a clear digital divide between younger, wealthier, and urban consumers who are more likely to adopt digital payment systems, and older, lower-income, and rural consumers who remain reliant on cash due to trust issues, digital exclusion, and financial control.

**Trust Issues:** While younger and digitally fluent participants express confidence in digital payment systems, older adults and rural residents often face significant barriers due to concerns about security, fraud, and lack of control.

**Income and Geography:** Income level and geographic location play a crucial role in determining digital payment adoption. Wealthier individuals and urban dwellers are more likely to adopt mobile wallets, while lower income groups and rural residents continue to rely on cash due to limited access to digital infrastructure and financial constraints.

**Financial Control:** Cash continues to be viewed as a tool for budgeting and financial control, particularly for older adults and low-income earners. These groups value the tangibility and visibility of cash, which provides them with a clearer sense of how much money they have left to spend.

This comparison highlights the need for more inclusive and accessible digital payment infrastructure, particularly for older adults, low-income earners, and rural populations. Ensuring that these groups are not excluded in the transition to a cashless society is essential. The insights gained from this comparison lay the groundwork for the recommendations that will be offered in Chapter 7, which will focus on how policymakers, retailers, and financial institutions can support a more inclusive and equitable cashless transition.

# **Chapter Seven - Conclusion and Recommendations**

## **7.1 Introduction**

This final chapter summarises the key findings from the study on Ireland's transition to a cashless society and their implications for different demographic groups. It synthesises insights from the literature review, industry data, and qualitative interviews to draw conclusions regarding consumer behaviour in the face of declining cash usage. Based on these findings, targeted recommendations are provided for policymakers, financial institutions, and retailers to foster a more inclusive and equitable transition, without pushing for a fully cashless society, but rather one that balances digital adoption with the needs of all consumer groups.

## **7.2 Summary of Key Findings**

This study uncovered several significant patterns related to the shift toward digital payments in Ireland. The analysis revealed that the transition to a cashless society is not a uniform process; instead, it is influenced by a variety of factors, including age, income, geography, and trust in digital systems. Key findings from the research include:

**Digital Divide:** There is a clear digital divide between younger, wealthier, and urban consumers who are more likely to adopt digital payment methods, and older, lower-income, and rural consumers who continue to rely on cash due to concerns about security, trust, and the tangible nature of cash.

**Trust Issues:** Trust remains a critical factor in the adoption of digital payment systems. Older and rural consumers expressed significant concerns about security, fraud, and privacy when using digital payments, whereas younger consumers, particularly those in urban settings, exhibited greater confidence in digital tools. These attitudes echo the literature on perceived risk and the role of institutional credibility, and they also reflect participants' lived experiences with phishing messages, spoofed bank calls, and uncertainty over dispute processes.

**Income Disparities:** Higher income groups were found to be more inclined to adopt digital payment methods, benefiting from better access to technology and higher financial literacy. In contrast, lower-income groups are more reliant on cash due to limited access to digital infrastructure, concerns about financial control, and lack of trust in digital systems. For many, cash provides a visible ceiling on spending that is harder to maintain with tap and go transactions.

**Geographic Disparities:** Urban populations were more likely to embrace digital payments due to better infrastructure and connectivity, while rural populations faced significant barriers to adoption, including poor internet access and limited availability of digital payment options.

These structural constraints shaped behaviour at individual and community levels, influencing everything from local markets to social events.

**Financial Control:** Cash continues to be a valuable tool for budgeting, especially among older adults and low income earners. These consumers value the tangible control over their finances that cash provides, whereas digital tools were often viewed as abstract or difficult to monitor. At the same time, younger participants used digital features such as spend alerts, category tracking, and automated savings to recreate or even enhance budgeting discipline, indicating different routes to the same goal of control.

### **7.3 Implications for Stakeholders**

The findings from this research have several important implications for key stakeholders involved in Ireland's transition to a cashless society, including policymakers, financial institutions, and retailers. Below are targeted recommendations for each group to ensure a smoother, more inclusive transition:

#### **7.3.1 Policymakers**

**Promote Digital Inclusion:** Policymakers should ensure that digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is accessible to all consumers. Expanding internet access and supporting mobile network development will help bridge the digital divide and facilitate the adoption of digital payments. This should be accompanied by support for community access points (libraries, post offices, community centres) where residents can receive assistance with digital tasks related to payments.

**Provide Financial Literacy Programs:** Tailored education programs should be developed to help vulnerable groups, such as older adults and low-income earners, build trust in digital payment systems. Offering workshops and resources on financial management and digital security could alleviate concerns around fraud and data misuse, and these should be delivered through trusted local channels.

**Regulate Digital Payment Security:** To build trust in digital payments, government agencies should work with financial institutions to implement robust security measures, such as fraud protection and data privacy safeguards. Transparent communication about these measures, clear liabilities, and streamlined dispute processes are crucial for increasing public confidence.

#### **7.3.2 Financial Institutions**

**Develop Inclusive Digital Tools:** Financial institutions should design digital payment systems that are accessible to users with varying levels of digital literacy. Simplified user interfaces, clear language, and optional 'digital envelope' features that mirror cash budgeting can reduce

anxiety. Voice-assisted support and in-person tutorials can help users bridge the confidence gap.

**Offer Hybrid Payment Options:** Recognising that cash is still an important method of payment for some groups, financial institutions should offer hybrid services, allowing consumers to access both cash and digital payment options. Maintaining ATM networks and counter services in underserved areas can mitigate exclusion while adoption rises.

**Implement Reward Systems for Digital Payment Adoption:** Encouraging digital payment adoption can be supported by introducing reward systems that offer incentives for hesitant users - however, these should be paired with spending controls, alerts, and clear fraud guarantees so that benefits do not come at the expense of perceived safety.

### **7.3.3 Retailers**

**Maintain Cash Acceptance:** Retailers should continue accepting cash payments, particularly in areas where digital infrastructure is weak or where customers still prefer cash for budgeting and financial control. This is especially important in rural areas or for older customers who feel more secure using cash.

**Improve Digital Payment Accessibility:** Retailers should ensure that their payment systems are fully compatible with all forms of digital payments, including mobile wallets and contactless cards. Clear signage indicating accepted options and contingency plans for outages (e.g., offline modes, manual fallback) can prevent lost sales and frustration.

**Educate Customers:** Retailers can play a role in educating customers about digital payments by offering brief in-store guidance, providing informational materials, or training staff to assist customers who may be unfamiliar with digital payment technologies.

## **7.4 Addressing the Emotional and Psychological Barriers**

One of the central themes emerging from the research was the emotional attachment that many consumers, particularly older adults and low-income earners, have to cash. For these groups, cash represents not only a financial tool but also a symbol of control, autonomy, and security. To address this psychological barrier to digital payment adoption, it is essential to recognise that the shift towards cashless payments is not only a technical change but also a social and emotional one.

Policies and strategies aimed at promoting digital payment adoption should take these emotional factors into account. Financial institutions, for instance, could integrate features into digital payment systems that mimic the transparency and control provided by cash. These features could include real-time spending notifications, detailed transaction histories, and “digital envelopes” to help consumers budget more effectively; clear refund guarantees and visible fraud controls can also reduce anxiety. Such innovations could help alleviate the emotional discomfort many consumers feel when using digital payments and make them feel more in control of their finances.

Additionally, to support those less tech savvy individuals, banking institutions and the government should introduce workshops specifically designed to address the educational needs of older adults, low-income earners, and rural residents. These workshops could focus on building digital literacy, fostering trust in digital tools, and helping individuals understand how to safely use mobile payments and manage finances online. Tailored workshops in local communities, possibly held at post offices, community centres, or even within banking branches, would help bridge the knowledge gap and reduce anxiety surrounding digital payments.

## 7.5 Future Research

This study highlights several gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the demographic factors that influence consumer attitudes toward cashless payments in Ireland. Future research could include:

**Expanding the Research Scope:** Future studies could extend beyond Ireland to compare how different countries are navigating the shift to a cashless society, especially those with varying levels of digital infrastructure and socio-economic disparities. Comparative work could also examine the role of national institutions and cultural attitudes toward privacy and surveillance in shaping trust.

**Exploring the Impact of Financial Inclusion Programs:** Further research could investigate how targeted financial inclusion programs, such as digital literacy training, enhanced fraud guarantees, or incentives for low-income groups, impact digital payment adoption and perceived control over time, ideally through designs that track changes in confidence and behaviour.

## 7.6 Conclusion

The transition toward a cashless society in Ireland is complex and multifaceted, shaped by various factors including trust, financial control, geography, and income. While younger, wealthier, and urban consumers are generally more comfortable with digital payments, older adults, low income earners, and rural residents continue to face significant challenges. These challenges include a lack of access to digital payment infrastructure, concerns about privacy and security, and emotional attachments to cash.

For Ireland to successfully transition to a more cashless society, it is crucial to address these barriers and ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind. This study's findings highlight the need for more inclusive digital infrastructure, greater transparency in digital payment security, clear and rapid dispute resolution, and targeted financial literacy initiatives. With sustained attention to trust, choice, and accessibility, Ireland can make the transition to a

cashless society more inclusive and equitable, benefiting all consumers, regardless of demographic background.

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