Doctoral   Business

2022

An Investigation of Teenagers' Advertising Literacy in the Context of the Brand-Rich Environment of Social Media

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An Investigation of Teenagers' Advertising Literacy in the Context of the Brand-Rich Environment of Social Media

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Technological University Dublin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2022

Abstract

Teenagers are avid consumers of social media and consequently, constitute attractive target audiences for marketers. On social media, advertising can be integrated into content such as YouTube videos and Instagram posts which means the boundary between commercial content (the advertisement) and non-commercial content (e.g., the video in which the ad appears) becomes increasingly blurred. Therefore, in this context, the consumer must be able to navigate a minefield of overt and covert advertising that is disseminated by a range of sources, including brands and social media influencers. A resulting concern for academics, parents and policy makers alike relates to young people's understanding, evaluation and critical responses to such advertising practices, i.e., their advertising literacy. In order to command a basic level of advertising literacy, consumers need to be able to recognise the source of an advertisement, identify the commercial and persuasive intent, and subsequently enact a critical response. However, this can become challenging in the context of newer advertising practices on social media platforms where advertising content can be seamlessly woven into editorial content that is interactive, entertaining, and engaging. It follows that if a young consumer cannot properly identify and respond to an advertising episode, then the act of targeting them is unethical.

This thesis reports on a qualitative study of 29 teenagers aged 15–17 years. The aim was to investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on social media platforms. The study sought to investigate their general knowledge, attitudes and judgements regarding advertising which develops over time (dispositional AL), but also their ability to retrieve and apply this knowledge during exposure to specific advertising episodes (situational AL). The findings indicate that whilst the participants had a highly developed associative network about SM advertising (i.e., their dispositional AL), their ability to retrieve and apply it (i.e., their situational AL) was dependent on the nature and origin of advertising. Specifically, the marketer's ability to craft messaging which delights the consumer; emerges from a meaningful source; or provides opportunities for social learning can impede critical response.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Technological University Dublin and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the TU Dublin's guidelines for ethics in research.

TU Dublin has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature __*Emma Sweeney*_____ Date ___13/05/22_____

Candidate

Acknowledgements

I wish to express sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor and Dr. Mairead Brady. Thank you, Margaret-Anne, for your expert guidance and patience, for generosity with your time, and for your optimism. Thank you especially for your attention to detail and for making me feel excited about my work. It is hard to imagine a better mentor. Thank you Mairead for your holistic view, encouragement, and support. I have learned so much from you both. Thank you for your continued faith in me over the years.

Thank you to Jo, my grandmother. Nothing means more to me than the days in Kinkeen where you prepared me for spelling tests, made me recite my times tables and ensured I completed my homework to perfection. Thank you for never forgetting, for always loving, and for telling anyone who would listen about the short stories I wrote as a seven-year-old. I love that, to you, they are the biggest masterpiece I will ever produce. But mostly, thank you for your unconditional love and warmth. It is only because of your encouragement and belief in me that academia became so important to me. This is for you.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Emmet, who has been my rock throughout this journey. This would not have been possible if not for your humour, care, motivation, and for the many, many (!) cups of tea. Thank you for the welcome escapes from work when I needed them, and for celebrating every victory, large and small. Thank you for your unwavering love and support, for always reminding me of the end goal, and for believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself. I cannot wait for all there is to come.

Finally, thank you to Gavin and Keith, who did more than they know. There is no better distraction than spending time with you.

List of Publications

Journal Articles

Sweeney, E., Lawlor, M.A, & Brady, M. (2022). Teenagers' moral advertising literacy in an influencer marketing context. *International Journal of Advertising*, *41*(1), 54-77. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1964227

Conferences

Sweeney, E. (2017, June 22-23). *A qualitative research agenda for exploring children's online advertising literacy* [Conference presentation]. European Conference on Research Methods in Business and Management 2017, Dublin, Ireland.

Sweeney, E. (2018, 2-5 July). *Young people's advertising and commercial literacy in the context of social media* [Doctoral Colloquium presentation]. Academy of Marketing Conference 2018, Stirling, Scotland.

Symposiums

Sweeney, E. & Lawlor, M.A. (2019, 29 October). *Young consumers' advertising literacy in a Social Media Context - Challenging Traditional Concepts in a New Media Environment* [Symposium presentation]. Critical Literacy Symposium, Dublin, Ireland.

List of Abbreviations

AL   Advertising literacy

ASAI   Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland

eWOM   Electronic word of mouth

IM   Influencer marketing

IUA   Irish Universities Association

PKM   Persuasion Knowledge Model

POEM   Paid, owned, and earned media

RO   Research objective

SAHRC   State Adolescent Health Resource Centre

SM   Social media

UGC   User generated content

WOM   Word of mouth

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Advertising literacy	Understanding, identification, evaluation, and critical responses to advertising.
Affective advertising literacy	One's attitudes towards advertising.
Cognitive advertising literacy	The ability to recognise and understand advertising.
Dispositional advertising literacy	One's associative network about advertising generally, i.e., one's general knowledge, attitudes and judgements regarding advertising which develops over time.
Earned Media	Where users engage with or create eWOM and user-generated content (UGC) related to a brand.
Influencer marketing	Where influencers disseminate advertising on behalf of brands who provide financial compensation and editorial control.
Middle adolescence	Those who are aged 15 to 17.
Moral advertising literacy	The ability to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of advertising.
Owned media	The presence that brands can have on social media by virtue of their business or brand profile which essentially is a social media account used to generate awareness and interest in the organisation and its offerings.
Paid media	Brand-driven advertising, where marketers pay social media platforms to behaviourally target consumers through a range of different advertising strategies.
Parasocial relationship	The relationships consumers develop with (social) media characters, which contributes to making them important sources of information.
Persuasion Knowledge Model	A seminal model which is used to illustrate how the behaviour of agents and targets interact during persuasion episodes.
Situational advertising literacy	Activation and retrieval of one's associative network about advertising during exposure to a specific advertising episode.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction & Research Question

Social media (SM) is an integral part of life for modern teenagers. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook and TikTok provide seemingly endless opportunities for fun and creativity; identity management and exploration; relationship building and maintenance; connection with online global communities; maintaining connectivity amidst global lockdowns; and a host of other benefits (Pulkki-Råback et al.., 2022; Raising Children Network, 2020; Sarangi et al.., 2022). It is therefore not surprising that social media use amongst adolescents is abundant. For instance, 84% of US teens use Instagram, while 80% use Snapchat and 69% use TikTok (Statista, 2020a). Elsewhere, the average Irish teenager has been reported to check SM a minimum of sixty times a day (Okoh, 2022). Media consumption is increasingly taking place in the virtual space for this age group, to the detriment of traditional media. Ofcom (2020, p.6) reports that children and teenagers, aged 8-17, prefer to consume media via on-demand streaming services (such as Netflix) and social media platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) and tend to consume this content alone rather than watching live television. However, while there may be benefits associated with social media use for young people, there are also risks.

Specifically, in a business context, as children and teenagers have embraced online platforms with open arms, so too marketers are targeting them there. On these platforms, the marketing landscape is transformed into one which utilises immersive contexts and leverages an entertaining, playful, and interactive nature. As a result, the boundary between commercial and non-commercial content has become increasingly blurred where advertising can be embedded in online platforms such as advergames, blogs and social media (hereafter referred to as SM). Consequently, SM advertising has been labelled as "risky" for teenagers (Vanwesenbeeck et

al., 2020, p.3), meaning this age group are frequently exposed to integrated and innovative formats such as profile targeting and influencer marketing which may may lead to "deceptive persuasion" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019, p.95).

A resulting concern for academics, parents and policy makers alike relates to young people's understanding, identification, evaluation, and critical responses to these innovative advertising practices – in other words, their advertising literacy (AL). The objective of fostering AL in young people is to invoke defence mechanisms so that advertising claims and brand messages are not taken as unquestionably true without critical thought (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). To command a basic level of AL, children need to be able to recognise the source of an advertisement, identify the commercial and persuasive intent, and subsequently enact a critical response. However, this can become problematic in the context of new advertising practices, in which advertising is seamlessly woven into content that is interactive, engaging, and entertaining, such as covert advertising on SM. In this context, young people's AL may be bypassed, and affective features of advertising (such as emotional, fun, colourful or distracting elements) may persuade on an implicit level. If a young consumer cannot properly decipher and respond to an advertising message then the act of targeting them is unethical (Kunkel et al., 2004; Spiteri Cornish, 2014; Young, 2003).

The AL literature has predominantly focused on children's AL in traditional contexts such as TV advertising where the presence of commercial sources and brand messaging may be more evident than in contexts like SM. SM advertising can manifest in overt formats, namely the more apparent forms of advertising that disrupt the user and require action to exit, such as pop-up and pre-roll advertising. However, increasingly, SM advertising is presented in covert formats, which constitute softer, more authentic, and less disruptive forms of advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Examples of covert advertising on SM include native advertising and influencer marketing.

This means that in this immersive and entertaining context, advertising can emerge from the advertiser *per se*, in addition to message sources such as SM influencers being paid to speak on behalf of brands, as well as consumers sharing brand-related, word-of-mouth communications with each other. Authors have therefore raised the alarm that advertising practices on SM are not easily recognisable, and as such have the propensity to pass 'under the radar' of young consumers (e.g., Boerman et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020).

In particular, teenagers are largely overlooked for inclusion within AL research, with a marked lack of research addressing the nature and presence of AL amongst teenagers (e.g., Zarouali et al., 2019). It is important to note that teenagers are defined as children (i.e., under the age of 18 years) by the Child Care Act (1991), the Children Act (2001) in Ireland and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).

An assumption is present in the literature that teenagers are less vulnerable to advertising because they have more mature cognitive abilities than younger children (Zarouali et al., 2019). However, this is unsubstantiated in empirical research, whereby research findings indicate that adolescents are no less affected by advertising than younger children (Nairn & Fine, 2008). It is posited that features of adolescence could have an impact on the development and deployment of AL, such as one's level of moral development (Kohlberg, 1984) and identity development (Klimstra et al., 2010).

To address these research gaps, this doctoral research poses the question: *what is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*

1.2 Research Aim & Objectives

Advertising literacy has been defined as "an individual's knowledge, abilities, and skills to cope with advertising" (Hudders et al., 2017, p.335). As such, AL can manifest in two ways: dispositional and situational. Dispositional AL refers to one's associative network about advertising generally, i.e., one's general knowledge, attitudes and judgements regarding advertising which develops over time (Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019). On the other hand, situational AL refers to the activation and retrieval of this associative network during exposure to a specific persuasive attempt (Hudders et al., 2017). Hence, AL can constitute a knowledge suppository about advertising which is formed and learned over time (dispositional literacy) but can also relate to the retrieval and use of this knowledge when exposed to specific advertising episodes (situational literacy).

Most authors have empirically investigated the situational manifestation (Zarouali, et al., 2019). That is, most studies expose young participants to a specific commercial event and measure their response according to particular attributes (Zarouali et al., 2019). While these studies contribute important knowledge to scholarly understanding, it means that little knowledge exists regarding young people's associative network about advertising in general, i.e., their dispositional AL.

Furthermore, although AL is conceptualised in terms of the two manifestations which should work in conjunction with one another (i.e., dispositional and situational AL) (Hudders et al., 2017), this has yet to be investigated empirically. Specifically, the interplay between the two manifestations is unclear. In new advertising climates, it is unknown to what extent young people are successful at retrieving their dispositional AL when exposed to advertising and then applying it as a critical filter. As previously outlined, SM advertising can take the form of overt, obtrusive formats (Kelly et al, 2010; McCoy et al, 2007) such as pop-up and pre-roll ads, but

also softer, more embedded ways, known as covert advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Such advertising can be disseminated by traditional sources including brand owners or advertisers, but also via novel sources such as peers and SM influencers. Therefore, the development of dispositional AL and deployment of situational AL may not be a straightforward task in the context of SM.

For example, it could be that young consumers (dispositionally) believe they are capable of identifying and understanding novel advertising tactics, but when they are situationally exposed, they might be distracted by the entertaining nature of the content and therefore less attuned to its commercial basis.

Furthermore, the literature to date has tended towards a narrow conceptualisation of AL (i.e., AL as a cognitive skill) whereas calls have been made for a broader theorisation of how literacy can prevail, in terms of how the consumer feels towards (affective AL) and evaluates (moral AL) advertising (Hudders et al., 2017). To summarise, AL consists of three dimensions - cognitive, affective and moral - which can manifest both dispositionally (i.e., as a conceptual knowledge) as well as situationally (i.e., as a response during advertising exposure) (De Pauw et al., 2019). The cognitive facet broadly refers to the ability to recognise and understand advertising (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). Though there is disagreement in the literature, the affective node is largely agreed to consist of a learned disliking of advertising (Hudders et al., 2016). Finally, the moral dimension can be described as the ability to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Zarouali et al., 2019). Hudders et al. (2017) have highlighted the requirement for research to investigate how the different nodes of AL (cognitive, affective, and moral) interact, constituting a major research gap.

Given these gaps in scholarly understanding, the aim of this doctoral research is *to investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on social media platforms*.

To address the research aim, three research objectives are outlined to guide the research.

Research objective one: *To investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on social media.*

A pre-requisite to the enactment of AL as a critical defence against advertising overtures is the ability to recognise advertising (An, et al., 2014; Friestad & Wright, 1994). Without recognition, the message will not take on meaning as a persuasive attempt and therefore might not be met with critical response. Furthermore, to cope with advertising, consumers should also be able to understand it (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). Therefore, cognitive AL (i.e., recognition and understanding of advertising) is an essential element of young people's defence against advertising (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Such pertinent knowledge includes understanding of advertising's selling and persuasive intent, and the persuasive tactics used in advertising (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). But given the innovative nature of SM where brands engage with audiences in novel ways, such as utilising influencers to disseminate advertising, it is unclear if young consumers have developed recognition and understanding of the range of new strategies and tactics in use.

Research objective two: *To examine teenagers' attitudes towards advertising on social media.*

The AL literature predominantly conceptualises attitudes towards advertising (i.e., affective AL) in terms of a learned disliking of advertising (Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, on SM, advertising is curated to be enjoyable and to be shared by consumers via their own SM profiles (Alhabash et al., 2017). Furthermore, consumers control the information flow (Kelly et al., 2010), meaning they can decide which profiles to follow, including brand, peer, and influencer profiles. Given that users actively seek out and freely opt-in to profiles on SM, for example, content creators and influencers, it follows that they may be positively disposed towards commercial content shared by these accounts that they *choose* to follow. Yet, AL studies overwhelmingly do not remain open to this possibility. It is important to examine adolescents' affective AL because should positivity be present, it could lower their motivation to retrieve and apply their AL as a critical defence.

Research objective three: *To examine teenagers' moral evaluations of advertising on social media.*

Authors have only recently acknowledged the importance of moral judgements within AL (De Pauw et al., 2017). But moral AL, namely how young people morally evaluate advertising, is critical because this ability to critique incoming advertising may facilitate the deployment of defence filters or coping mechanisms such as scepticism, avoidance, or self-regulation measures (e.g., to ignore persuasive attempts). However, on SM where advertising can be distributed by peers and trusted influencers, young people might be unmotivated to critique these practices due to feelings of connection with the source of the message. Therefore,

adolescents' ability to morally critique SM advertising, as well as the composition of their moral judgements, warrants exploration.

An overview of the structure of the thesis now follows.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. The present chapter provides an introduction to the context of study, as well as an overview of the research question, aim and objectives.

Chapter Two is the first of two chapters which provides an analysis of the academic literature. It provides an essential background by considering the nature of AL, i.e., how authors conceptualise AL in terms of its manifestations, dimensions, and components. The chapter also considers criteria necessary for the development of AL, thus considering cognitive development, consumer socialisation and moral development. Finally, defining features of adolescence are highlighted, such as identity development, heightened self-consciousness, and the increased desire for peer acceptance.

Chapter Three continues the review of the literature but focuses on AL in the context of SM. Specifically, it considers how SM advertising can manifest both overtly and covertly. This is important as the embedded, subtle nature of some formats of SM advertising can challenge the development and retrieval of AL. Furthermore, advertising and brand-related content on SM can be disseminated by way of paid media (e.g., paid-for advertising space), owned media (e.g., brands' use of SM platforms), and earned media (e.g., publicity and word-of-mouth shared by consumers and encouraged by brands). Therefore, a blurring of boundaries can occur between commercial and non-commercial content. Features of SM which may militate against the development of AL, including its opt-in nature, its high levels of personalisation and its facility

for embedding advertising, are also discussed. Finally, the conceptual framework guiding the author's research agenda is introduced at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Four discusses the research process put in place and rationalises the interpretivist perspective underpinning the research. This chapter provides insight into how important decisions were made in relation to research methodology, including research design and data analysis. It provides an overview of the process of data collection, which involved individual, qualitative interviews with 29 participants aged 15-17 years. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also addressed here.

Chapter Five presents the primary research findings relating to objective one, utilising excerpts from the participants themselves to illustrate the analysis and interpretation. This chapter provides insight into the participants' awareness and recognition of the range of advertising they interact with on SM, as well as their understanding of the marketers' objectives and tactics in this arena.

The findings which address research objective two are presented in Chapter Six. The primary findings relate to the participants' negative attitudes aroused by particular aspects of SM advertising such as frequency and irrelevance. However, positive attitudes are also highlighted in this chapter, which formed the more dominant pattern in the data.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to addressing objective three, namely findings relating to the participants' ability to assess the moral appropriateness of SM advertising. This chapter considers the participants' tolerance of SM advertising, but also highlights the aspects which they found morally questionable.

Chapter Eight provides a conclusion to the thesis, highlighting the contributions made to knowledge. The research question, objectives and conceptual framework of the research are revisited, and a new conceptualisation of AL is presented, arising from the key conclusions of

the research. Recommendations are given for future research, as well as implications for marketers and influencers, policymakers, and educators.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background to the research in terms of highlighting the importance and relevance of exploring advertising literacy (AL) amongst a teenage sample in the context of the social media environment. Arising from the research gaps in the academic literature, the chapter presented the research question, aim and objectives, as well as introducing the qualitative research methodology which underpinned the study. The chapter concluded by outlining the structure of this thesis in terms of its constituent chapters.

A review of the extant literature is now presented, commencing with Chapter Two which focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of AL.

Chapter Two: The Nature & Development of AL

2.1 Introduction

Today, teenagers prefer to consume media online, rather than via traditional means like television (Ofcom, 2020). In the online landscape, SM receives especial attention from adolescents, with one survey revealing that US teenagers check their SM accounts on an hourly or more frequent basis (Statista, 2020b). Marketers have recognised the importance of SM for young age groups and have developed strategies to target them there. This new media environment allows increased and intense brand exposure over longer periods of time which is unattainable in a traditional context where advertisements incite passive rather than active engagement (Shin et al., 2012).

To cope with advertising, consumers require the skill of advertising literacy (AL). AL refers to the ability to read and understand advertising in a critical manner, as well as to evaluate and respond to the message (Lawlor & Prothero, 2008; Spiteri Cornish, 2014). This skill not only refers to conceptual knowledge, but also includes the propensity to retrieve and apply this knowledge as a critical filter during exposure (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). An absence of AL may render children and teenagers susceptible and vulnerable to advertising effects (Spiteri Cornish, 2014) such as making unhealthy food choices, developing negative body image, and setting unrealistic beauty expectations.

The emphasis in the AL literature to date has been on traditional media such as television advertising. However, children and teenagers are increasingly embracing new, online platforms (An & Kang, 2013; Dahl et al., 2009) and SM in particular (De Jans et al., 2020). Subsequently, a major research gap relates to how young consumers may retrieve and use their AL as a defence in the SM environment, where advertising is subtly embedded into informative, relevant, and entertaining contexts (Alhabash et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008). Questions have

been raised regarding the fairness and appropriateness of using these formats to target young consumers (e.g., De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; Kunkel et al, 2004; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Spiteri Cornish 2014; Young 2003) since they may challenge the development and deployment of AL amongst young age groups.

Because of these ethical concerns, it must be questioned whether the integrated, immersive nature of the advertising mix on SM assists or militates against young people's critical evaluation of advertising. There is a dearth of research that investigates not only young consumers' understanding of the nature of SM advertising, but also their attitudes towards SM advertising, as well as their perspectives on the ethicality of such advertising. Overall, it is unclear whether young people have adapted and extended their AL (Malmelin, 2010) to take into account the range of new advertising strategies in use on SM.

This doctoral research therefore seeks to contribute to scholarly understanding by posing the question: *what is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*

The literature relating to children's AL will be examined, as well as the very small body of literature that specifically addresses AL amongst teenagers. Figure 2.1 presents a roadmap of the present chapter, which identifies the major concepts and perspectives to be examined. In this endeavour, this chapter reviews the extant literature relating to dimensions of AL; and criteria noted as necessary for the development of AL (including cognitive criteria, consumer socialisation and moral development). A discussion on the nature of AL in the more contemporary advertising context of SM, including a review of empirical research in this area, is presented in the next chapter, Chapter Three. The discussion commences with an examination of the nature and importance of AL.

Figure 2.1: *Roadmap of Chapter Two: The Nature & Development of AL.*
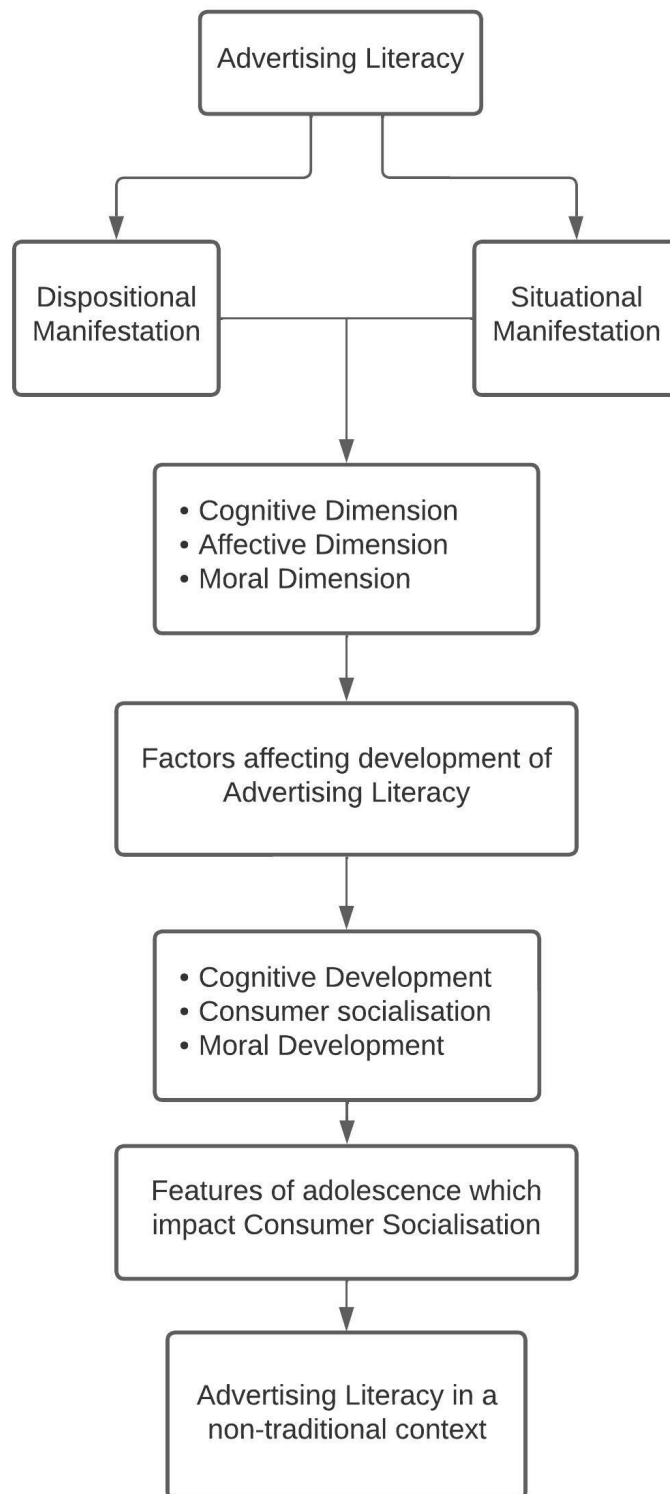
Source: developed by the author

2.1.1 Young Consumers' Understanding of Advertising – The Nature and Importance of AL

There is broad agreement in the literature that advertising literacy (AL) is a key life skill involving the ability to read and understand advertising in a critical manner, as well as using that comprehension to evaluate and respond to the message (Lawlor & Prothero, 2008; Spiteri Cornish, 2014). AL is a component of media literacy (De Pauw et al., 2019; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016), which is defined as "the ability to read and critically analyse different forms and means of media representation" (Malmelin, 2010, p.131). Given the development of digital media and the associated acceleration of information which individuals are exposed to daily, the importance of media literacy has been emphasised in recent years (Jones-Jang et al., 2019). Media literacy is a skill which can protect media users from misinformation by helping them to determine facts from falsehoods (Jones-Jang et al., 2019). In essence, it aims to equip individuals to think more critically about the media to which they are exposed. There are many branches of media literacy, including information literacy, news literacy, digital literacy, and advertising literacy (Jones-Jang et al., 2019; Malmelin, 2010). However, in comparison to other elements of media literacy, it has been noted that AL has received considerably less research attention (Malmelin, 2010). This is a gap which requires urgent addressing, given the range of advertising formats to which consumers are now exposed to, and the pace at which these formats are developing.

Throughout the extant literature, there is a lack of a definitive definition for AL. Definitions vary from broad descriptions to in-depth insights on specific dimensions involved. For instance, Lawlor et al. (2016, p.5) define AL as "a person's understanding of advertising" while An & Kang (2013, p.656) offer a more in-depth description: "the ability to acquire, to utilise understandings about advertising, and to understand the advertiser's point of view".

Similarly, De Veirman & Hudders (2019, p.95) define AL as "consumers' ability to recognise the commercial content and subsequently activate a critical reflection", while others define it as referring to "consumers' beliefs about the tactics, intentions, and strategies that are used in persuasive attempts, in the context of advertising" (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019, para. 2). Meanwhile, others refer to attitude towards advertising in their definitions. For example, Rozendaal et al. (2016, para. 1) broadly define AL as "children's understanding of advertising and their critical attitude toward it". Elsewhere, De Pauw et al. (2019, p.1197) define AL as: "knowledge, abilities, and attitudes regarding advertising". Therefore, some authors broadly refer to 'understanding' of advertising, while others highlight the ability to use this knowledge to critique the practice of advertising.

Of interest in many definitions, however, is the reference to 'coping' with advertising. For example, Hudders et al. (2016, p. 911) define AL as an individual's knowledge of and abilities to **cope** with different types of advertising techniques. Similarly, Young (2003, p.444) defines it as "how literate children are when **coping** with advertising in all its multifunctional aspects" and Hudders et al. (2017, p. 335) use the following definition: "an individual's knowledge, abilities, and skills to **cope** with advertising". In line with this theme, Zarouali et al. (2019, p.197) define AL as "the knowledge, abilities and attitudes that may help them **cope** with advertising". The emphasis on 'coping' is suggestive of combatting or overcoming a challenge or difficulty.

Therefore, throughout the definitions, there is a focus on 'understanding' of advertising, as well as the ability to 'cope with' the practice. While one seems to refer to a cognitive response (understanding), the other could be seen to denote an active retrieval or behavioural response (coping). Some authors highlight critical *attitudes* as being necessary to cope with advertising, while others suggest cognitive *knowledge* as integral. Others broadly refer to 'abilities

regarding advertising' (De Pauw et al., 2019; Zarouali et al., 2019), but it is unclear what these 'abilities' refer to.

Without a definitive, univocal definition, the meaning of AL is implicitly alluded to and left up to both the researcher's and the readers' intuition (Wright et al., 2005). When referring to advertising 'understanding', some authors refer to a rudimentary knowledge set (such as understanding of commercial and persuasive intent), while others refer to a wider set of more complicated concepts (such as understanding of concepts like brand positioning, target markets and marketer's motives and goals) (Lawlor & Prothero, 2008). Others refer to AL as having purposes relating to the use of advertising in achieving one's own goals (e.g., fulfilling consumption goals or partaking in everyday discussions and interactions) (O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson & Elliott, 1995).

Other authors emphasise AL as a knowledge suppository which can then be harnessed as a skill with which to respond to advertising (An & Kang, 2013; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). Therefore, these authors acknowledge that while the ability to recognise and understand advertising is a crucial element of AL, an equally important aspect is the expertise to respond effectively – in other words, to utilise one's understanding of advertising to evaluate the message (Spiteri Cornish, 2014).

In terms of evaluating the message, some authors stress that consumers act upon advertising by attaching their own meanings, uses and values (Lannon & Cooper, 1983; Lawlor & Prothero, 2008; O'Donohoe, 1994; Shankar, 1999). However, a more common theme is to refer to critically applying AL as a defence mechanism (e.g., De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Rozendaal et al., 2016). This can take the form of applying scepticism and disliking towards advertising to discount advertising claims, reduce purchase attention and increase advertising avoidance (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019;

Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). As such, AL refers to a conceptual understanding of advertising, but also the ability to assess messages and critically apply a defence mechanism (An & Kang, 2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Therefore, AL is viewed from both a conceptual and behavioural perspective.

The ability to understand and to critique advertising is also reflected in a specific knowledge set underpinning AL, namely persuasion knowledge (Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Nelson, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016; Waiguny et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2005). Persuasion knowledge is a prerequisite to AL (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016) and involves knowledge garnered about persuasive 'agents' and the ability to identify the source of a persuasive message. This is integral within AL. For example, the ability to recognise the source of advertising is noted by many authors as a key component in recognising and understanding an advertisement (Freeman & Shapiro, 2014; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Owen et al., 2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Rozendaal et al., 2013). Therefore, persuasion knowledge and AL are deeply intertwined.

2.1.2 Persuasion Knowledge

The concept of persuasion knowledge was originally developed by Friestad and Wright (1994) and generally refers to a consumer's understanding of persuasion attempts, i.e., that agents use tactics to influence target's attitudes, beliefs, decisions, and actions. Waiguny, et al. (2014, p.258) define persuasion knowledge as "an individual's ability to recognize commercial content and to understand its persuasive intent". Similarly, Zarouali, Poels, et al. (2020, para. 3) define persuasion knowledge as "consumers' comprehension of the persuasive strategies marketers use to convince them (e.g., in advertising) and to the persuasive intentions behind such strategies". Therefore, this knowledge refers to the ability to identify the agent (source of

the persuasion attempt) and the tactics being deployed by the agent to change the target's (e.g., consumer's) mental state, i.e., to persuade them.

Persuasion knowledge develops over time via a combination of first-hand experiences, observations, and conversations regarding marketer's tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Zarouali. Poels, et al., 2020). It continues to develop throughout an individual's life span, and changes as folk wisdom on persuasion evolves over time (Friestad & Wright, 1994; O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998). Additionally, as both 'agent' and target' are neutral terms, these are fluid roles which change constantly in daily life. As consumers inhibit both roles, persuasion knowledge may be further developed (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017).

Persuasion knowledge aids consumers in understanding how, when, and why a target may attempt to persuade them (Zarouali, Poels, et al., 2020). The concept is illustrated through the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), which is a seminal model in the literature introduced by Friestad & Wright (1994). The PKM illustrates how the behaviour of agents and targets interact during persuasion episodes (see Figure 2.2). Both targets and agents use their understanding of persuasion (i.e., persuasion knowledge) and beliefs about the topic of the message (i.e., topic knowledge) during persuasion episodes. Agents use this knowledge to influence the target's behaviour, while the target uses this knowledge to cope and maintain control over the outcome of the episode (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In doing so, the target uses agent knowledge, which consists of "beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p.3). Conversely, the agent uses target knowledge, which refers to the agent's knowledge about the target they are trying to influence. It could be argued that in the contemporary advertising ecosystem, marketers' target knowledge is more sophisticated and exhaustive than it may have been in the past, given access to consumers' personal data through modern technology, for example, via cookies (text files) that can track one's online browsing behaviour.

Figure 2.2: *The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)*
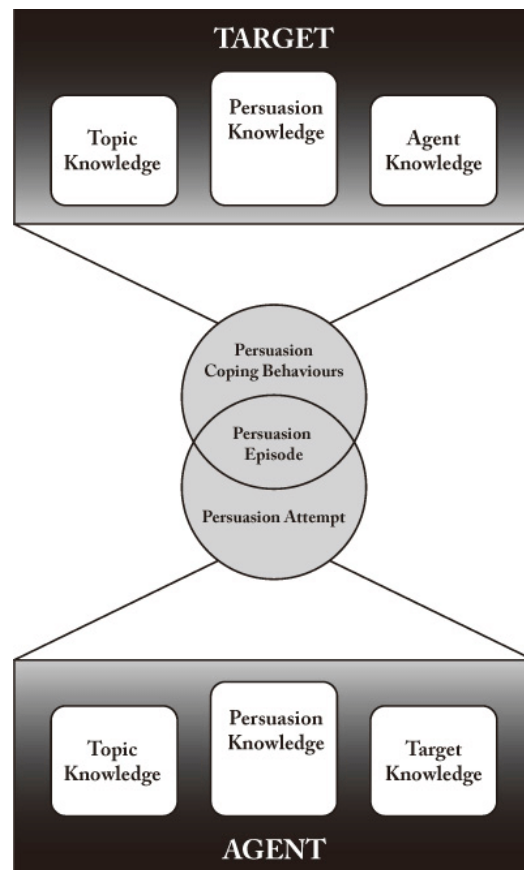
Source: Friestad, M and Wright, P (1994) The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research, Inc.,* 21(1), 1-31.

As a consumer's familiarity with persuasion tactics and coping mechanisms increases, responses should become more automatic and refined, with less cognitive effort required. The PKM presumes that when a persuasion tactic is identified as such, a "change of meaning" will occur (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 15). This refers to the realisation that a communication is in fact a persuasion attempt, which subsequently triggers critical reflection. This alters the way the target evaluates and responds to the message, invoking the detachment effect, whereby the target is irritated or deterred by the recognition that the agent is attempting to exert influence over him/her and will alter their response accordingly (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Therefore, to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of advertising, persuasion knowledge is cited as a requirement in the development and use of AL (Nelson, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016; Waiguny et al., 2012; Wright, et al., 2005). For example, Mallinckrodt & Mizerski (2007) broadly define AL as the assumption that the possession of persuasion knowledge weakens the effects of advertising on children. Others note that an individual's AL is likely to be greatly influenced by experiences of persuasion attempts they face in daily life (Hudders et al., 2017).

As such, the PKM is the seminal model used to highlight persuasion knowledge as a prerequisite for AL (Lawlor et al., 2016). Many authors discuss these frameworks hand in hand and refer interchangeably to AL and persuasion knowledge (e.g., Rozendaal et al., 2009; Rozendaal et al., 2013; Rozendaal et al., 2016). Others regard AL as the overall mechanism for recognising and responding to advertisements, with persuasion knowledge as a related framework which encourages scepticism, which they note is also the goal of AL (An et al., 2014). Therefore, many authors consider persuasion knowledge and AL as inextricably linked.

In new contexts where advertising is embedded and appears from external sources such as SM influencers, the application of persuasion knowledge may be a more difficult task. It was noted earlier that AL is likely to be strongly influenced by one's experiences of persuasion attempts which occur in daily life (Hudders et al., 2017). This therefore suggests that AL can encompass an understanding about advertising in general, as well as the use of this understanding when exposed to specific advertising attempts. In this regard, the literature has identified two specific manifestations of AL.

2.2 Manifestations of AL

Drawing on the PKM framework, AL is deemed to manifest itself in two ways, namely dispositional and situational AL (Hudders et al., 2017). This is a relatively new categorisation in the literature and addresses limitations regarding the conceptualisation of AL up to that time. Specifically, Hudders et al. (2017) highlight that the literature typically does not discern between different types of AL, namely between knowledge of advertising in general (i.e., dispositional AL) and the activation and retrieval of this knowledge in specific situations (i.e., situational AL). To address this limitation, they categorise AL according to dispositional and situational manifestations, which are defined as follows:

1. *Dispositional AL:* "consists of an entity of information nodes related to advertising that can be activated when confronted with a persuasive attempt" (Hudders et al., 2017, p.336).

2. *Situational AL:* "the thoughts and actions an individual undertakes in direct anticipation of a persuasive attempt, as well as during or after advertising exposure" (Hudders et al., 2017, p.335). This concept has two elements, the first being recognition of a persuasive attempt, which acts as a prerequisite for the second, which is critical reflection on the attempt (Hudders et al., 2017).

Therefore, while dispositional AL refers to the information one stores about advertising in general, situational AL refers to the activation of such knowledge during exposure to specific advertising episodes (Hoek et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019).

Dispositional and situational AL are predicated on two similar manifestations derived from the PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994), as follows:

Declarative/Factual Knowledge: <u>knowledge</u> of a specific concept or phenomenon (in this context, it may refer to market principles and advertising knowledge).

Procedural Knowledge: the <u>use</u> of declarative knowledge to perform activities, such as making a response to an advertisement (e.g., to ignore the advertisement, or conversely, to pay attention).

In essence, when a consumer is exposed to an advertisement, their situational AL may be enacted whereby they recognise the advertisement as a persuasive attempt and critically reflect on it using declarative knowledge (i.e., their dispositional AL). Both manifestations of AL include a cognitive, affective, and moral dimension (De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017). Each of these dimensions will be discussed in detail later (see Sections 2.2.1; 2.2.2; and 2.2.3), but a brief synopsis of each is now provided:

Cognitive AL: is defined as "the ability to recognise advertising, to understand its selling intent (i.e., to convince people to buy the advertised product) and persuasive intent (i.e., to influence consumers' behaviour implicitly or indirectly by altering their mental states), and to understand its persuasive tactics (i.e., to see through the specific techniques that are used to promote the advertised product)" (Hudders et al., 2017, p.337). Broadly, this dimension can be described as the ability to recognise and understand advertising.

Affective AL: this dimension is traditionally recognised in the literature as a learned disliking of, and scepticism towards, advertising (Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, a recent school of thought redefines affective AL as "a general set of affective attitudes (in terms of disliking but also, as we like to emphasize, liking) consisting of an implicitly "learned" set of norms and values related to the affective evaluation of advertising (formats)" (Hudders et al., 2017 p. 340).

Whereas early definitions regarded affective AL in negative terms such as a dislike or scepticism of advertising, Hudders et al. (2017) deem affective AL to encompass both positive and negative attitudes. As such, there is a lack of consensus amongst authors as to whether affective AL tends to be negative in nature or could be both positive and negative.

Moral AL: is described as the ability to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019). This dimension is multidimensional, as it can include evaluations of advertising as fair/appropriate, as well as judgements of advertising as unfair/manipulative (De Pauw et al., 2017; Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Each of these dimensions can manifest as a dispositional knowledge suppository (i.e., one's *universal* understanding, feelings towards and judgements of advertising *in general*), as well as a situational response when applied *during exposure* to advertising (i.e., one's understanding, feelings towards and judgements *of the specific advertisement to which one is exposed*). Therefore, as dispositional AL is retrieved situationally, a relevant information node (be that cognitive, affective, or moral) can be used as a defence mechanism during critical reflection (Hudders et al., 2017). The type of dispositional response which situational AL induces (whether it is based on moral, cognitive, or affective nodes), varies depending on the situation.

For example, when exposed to an advertisement for a chocolate breakfast cereal, a child might situationally retrieve cognitive AL and critically reflect on the ad by measuring the marketer's goal against their own (e.g., 'the ad wants me to ask my mother to buy a chocolate breakfast cereal, but I learned in school that too much sugar is bad for my health'). Likewise, if an adolescent was exposed to pop-up advertising, they might situationally retrieve affective AL

and feel irritated by the push nature of the content (e.g., 'I want to watch a YouTube video, but the ad is disrupting me, so I feel irritated and dislike this ad'). Similarly, if a teenager was exposed to influencer marketing, they might situationally retrieve moral AL by questioning whether the advertising claims made by the influencer are fair or rather manipulative (e.g., 'the influencer says she loves the brand, but she has been paid to post about it so she may be biased').

Therefore, when called into action, situational AL should influence responses such as purchase intention and brand attitude, i.e., the consumer should retrieve their advertising knowledge (dispositional AL), and subsequently use that knowledge to make a decision about the advertisement. For instance, the adolescent who called into play their affective AL when confronted with pop-up advertising might decide to ignore the ad and form a negative brand attitude. However, a related concern is whether situational AL can be successfully activated in the context of contemporary online advertising techniques which are subtle in their commercial nature and often entertaining, and therefore may not be easily identifiable as advertising.

The situational retrieval of relevant information nodes to match the advertisement depends on what Hudders et al. (2017, p. 336) term "coping skills". Coping skills link situational and dispositional AL by determining the speed, accuracy, and extent to which relevant information nodes are enacted (Hudders et al., 2017). The goal is to make this process more efficient and successful (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017). It is expected that over time, and with greater exposure to specific advertising techniques, that the process of enacting situational AL (i.e., retrieving and applying a relevant information node) becomes more automatic. In other words, the more experience one has with a particular kind of advertising, the better one's coping skills may be.

For example, the first time a consumer is exposed to covert advertising on SM, it may take significant effort to reflect on the content and to select a response. However, once a response is chosen (e.g., moral AL consisting of a reflection on the appropriateness of the ad's embedded nature) and the more often the consumer is exposed to that advertising format, the more automatic their response may become. This means that they may retrieve their moral AL more automatically or with greater ease when exposed to covert advertising the next time. Indeed, this has been found to hold true in empirical studies. For example, Waiguny et al. (2014) found within their study that those who were familiar with advergames were more likely to identify the game as an advertisement, i.e., to enact situational AL.

It has been argued that further research on *dispositional* AL is needed (Zarouali et al., 2019). Using the manifestations of dispositional and situational AL as a lens to examine the extant literature, the focus of research to date has been on attempting to 'measure' children's *situational* AL (i.e., their ability to retrieve advertising knowledge in response to a particular stimulus/event) (Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019). This is because most empirical studies expose children to an advertisement and then seek to measure their recognition and understanding of its intent. However, researchers have begun to acknowledge that advertising knowledge (dispositional AL) and retrieval of AL (situational AL) are not one and the same, and that by empirically 'measuring' or exploring one, it is not possible to make conclusions on both (Zarouali et al., 2019). Therefore, the overwhelming focus on 'measuring' young consumers' situational AL means that little is known about young peoples' dispositional AL.

This is significant, because without empirical research regarding dispositional AL, not enough is known about current levels of young people's advertising knowledge and beliefs in general (Zarouali et al., 2019). As most empirical studies report on the situational manifestation, it means that conclusions within these studies are relevant to AL in the context of a *specific event* only (e.g., a specific advergame in an experimental condition). Without also conducting

research which investigates dispositional AL, there is a gap in scholarly understanding about the composition of young consumers' general knowledge, feelings, and evaluations of advertising overall. As such, research focusing on the dispositional manifestation may allow insight into the strength of young consumers' AL in general, rather than being limited to a particular event. The present author will address this substantial gap by exploring teenagers' dispositional AL in a SM context.

Additionally, a gap exists in the literature for a study which empirically investigates *both* manifestations of AL – i.e., both dispositional knowledge and situational application of AL. The value of including both facets in an empirical study is that it would be possible to investigate the composition of young consumers' associative network about advertising in general (dispositional AL), but also and crucially, whether they deploy this associative network as a critical filter when exposed to advertising (situational AL).

Furthermore, little is known about how these manifestations work together. For instance, it could be that even though young consumers possess an extensive knowledge suppository about advertising, they may not be sufficiently motivated to activate this during advertising exposure. On the other hand, it could be that young peoples' dispositional AL is underdeveloped, where they may be relatively unaware of contemporary advertising tactics, and as such have little knowledge to draw upon during situational exposures. Without conducting a study which empirically addresses both manifestations, conclusions cannot be drawn about how, and whether, these facets work together.

As such, authors have called for studies which incorporate both manifestations to understand how they are related (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Indeed, a call was made in the literature a decade ago to consider AL from both a conceptual point of view as well as a behavioural perspective (i.e., the application and retrieval of AL) (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al.,

2011). Therefore, the current study will address gaps in the literature by exploring both manifestations of AL, and also how they might work together.

In summary, the literature is beginning to move from a narrow conceptualisation of AL (i.e., AL as a cognitive skill) towards a broader theorisation of the multi-faceted meanings inherent within it, namely how the consumer feels towards (affective AL) and evaluates (moral AL) advertising. The following section will examine the dimensions of AL which can prevail both dispositionally and situationally, namely the cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions (Hudders et al., 2017). The cognitive dimension is the first to be explored.

2.2.1 Cognitive AL

Cognitive AL (or conceptual AL as the terms are used interchangeably in the literature) refers to the ability to understand selling and persuasive intent, having developed the relevant cognitive facilities to do so (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). For this reason, it has also been referred to as the 'cognitive defence view' (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). The cognitive dimension of AL is the traditional perspective taken in the literature (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal et al., 2017), in that most authors define AL in terms of cognitive abilities such as understanding of commercial intent (e.g., De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). Out of the three dimensions, cognitive AL has received the most research attention (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Zarouali et al., 2019). This dimension is largely predicated on knowledge from the PKM (see Section 2.1.2) (Friestad & Wright, 1994) as it involves the ability to recognise and understand advertising (van Dam & Van Reijmersdal, 2019; Zarouali et al., 2019).

Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) offers an in-depth categorisation of the seven components associated with cognitive AL. These are now examined in turn:

1. *Recognition of advertising*: this relates to the ability to distinguish an advertisement as distinct from regular content (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011), for example: distinguishing between an article in a newspaper and a print advertisement. The ability can vary depending on the context in which the advertisement occurs – e.g., it is significantly more difficult to recognise embedded advertising (e.g., native advertising which takes the form of an embedded post within a SM newsfeed) compared to traditional advertising (such as a television advertisement which is clearly delineated from television programmes).

2. *Recognition of advertising's source*: the ability to identify who created and paid for the advertisement (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). This may be relatively straightforward in the context of traditional advertising (where brand logos are displayed prominently, and the assumption is that the brand has paid for the advertisement). However, in the context of SM where discourse on brands is ubiquitous and emerges from many different sources (such as owned brand profiles, consumers, and influencers) the task of identifying whether it has been incentivised by the brand or is an authentic consumer testimonial can become challenging.

3. *Perception of intended audience*: the ability to identify who the marketer is attempting to influence, i.e., the target market (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

4. *Understanding advertising's selling intent*: the ability to understand that the advertisement is attempting to convince the consumer to buy the product/service (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Once this understanding is in place, the target should realise the incentive behind the advertisement and, depending on their evaluation, may meet it with a sense of scepticism.

5. *Understanding advertising's persuasive intent*: the ability to understand that the marketer is attempting to influence the mental state of the consumer (behaviour, attitude, beliefs, decisions, and actions) (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). This component requires more mature cognitive skills and is not expected to be present amongst young children (Hoek et al., 2020; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). As with the fourth component, once a consumer recognises that they are the target of an influencing attempt, their response should alter to become more resistant (in line with the PKM).

6. *Understanding advertiser's persuasive tactics*: the ability to recognise specific tactics or strategies in use by the marketer to idealise the product and influence the consumer (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). In traditional contexts, this may be relatively undemanding (e.g., recognising promotional offers like 'three for the price of two' in a supermarket with the intention of encouraging multiple purchases). However, non-traditional advertising tactics may not be as easily recognised (Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Nairn & Fine, 2008). These may include the use of entertainment (such as advergames and branded quizzes) or opinion-leaders (such as influencers) within commercial messages to encourage positive associations with the brand.

7. *Understanding of advertising's bias*: the facility to comprehend that brand and product claims may be exaggerated or false, due to the ability to consider the advertiser's perspective (i.e., that the advertiser is attempting to persuade the consumer to make a purchase) (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). This includes the understanding that the advertised product may not reflect a realistic version of the product. Given the plethora of information available online and the multitude of formats in which advertising is presented, the ability to assess the reliability (and therefore bias) of messages online requires an advanced level of literacy (Malmelin, 2010). Assessing the difference between advertising and objective messages is a more difficult task on SM (Malmelin, 2010).

Other authors have also introduced dimensions of AL which relate to cognitive abilities. For example, Malmelin (2010) proposes four dimensions of AL, comparable to components of cognitive AL as outlined by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011). The first is informational literacy, which refers to the ability to "obtain information from the media and judge its accuracy" (Malmelin, 2010, p.133). This is described as the ability to use various sources of information, as well as to evaluate their accuracy, credibility, and validity (Malmelin, 2010). Next, visual/aesthetic literacy refers to "interpreting and understanding advertisements as a source of aesthetic pleasure and entertainment" (Malmelin, 2010, p.134). This involves an understanding of decisions made in executing, designing, and producing the advertisement (Malmelin, 2010). A third dimension according to Malmelin (2010, p.136) is rhetorical literacy, which refers to "understanding the means of persuasion used in advertising". This dimension also encompasses awareness of who is being targeted by advertising and therefore can be compared to persuasion knowledge. Finally, promotional literacy "helps consumers weigh and evaluate the commercial forms, functions and objectives of the media in general" (Malmelin,

2010, p.137). This is explained as the operational dimension of AL in that it involves recognition of advertising and commercial communications (Malmelin, 2010). As such, it could be explained as the situational application of cognitive AL, with particular focus on the 'recognition of advertising' component (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

However, where Malmelin (2010) departs from Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) and other authors is that emphasis is not placed on recognition and understanding of *advertising* alone, but on *promotions* more broadly. Formats mentioned include product placement; branded media; creative public relations; guerrilla marketing; and commercial partnerships and collaborations (Malmelin, 2010). Overall, great emphasis throughout the literature is placed on cognitive knowledge and abilities when classifying AL as authors mainly approach AL from a cognitive perspective (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2005).

In essence, cognitive AL is the belief that cognitive abilities are enough to serve as a defence against advertising effects and can act as a filter in this regard. However, this view only considers the cognitive requirements necessary to constitute an *understanding* of advertising; it does not consider cognitive limitations of young people (e.g., limited executive functioning and emotion regulation, see Section 2.3.3) which may inhibit the *retrieval* and *application* of this knowledge as a coping mechanism.

Furthermore, throughout the literature there is little empirical research to suggest that cognitive AL is an adequate defence against advertising effects. For example, Mallinckrodt & Mizerski (2007) found that children who identified persuasive intent had more *favourable* brand attitudes than those who did not identify persuasive intent, therefore understanding of persuasive intent did not trigger defence mechanisms. Similarly, De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders (2018) concluded that recognition of advertising was not enough to counter advertising effects in the

context of sponsored vlogs, but that feelings of disbelief or dislike towards sponsored vlogs diminished advertising effects and lowered purchase intention.

Additionally, it is assumed that as cognitive abilities develop with age, so too, do AL levels increase. However, Livingstone & Helsper (2006) argue that older children do not necessarily exhibit higher levels of AL or are less influenced by advertising than their younger counterparts. Instead, they posit that different processes of persuasion have greater influence at different ages. Therefore, empirical research suggests that cognitive AL is not enough to guard against advertising effects.

The most problematic aspect of cognitive AL is that it does not distinguish between *possessing* the relevant knowledge and critically *applying* this knowledge as a defence mechanism (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). There is a key difference between *conceptual* possession of knowledge versus active *retrieval and application*, and as such it is unreliable to assume that knowledge will be automatically applied as a defence mechanism (Waiguny et al., 2014).

It is a particularly naïve assumption when considering the limited cognitive ability of young children which can obstruct their facility to enact a 'stop-and-think' response (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). This refers to the process of pausing to recognise persuasive intent (as well as different processes at play in the message, such as advertiser's bias) before selecting and enacting an appropriate response mechanism (such as scepticism or avoidance). This is often inhibited by young people's underdeveloped executive functioning and emotion regulation abilities, as well as limited self-regulation (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Due to this inability to enact a stop-and-think response, children are unlikely to process an advertisement on an elaborate level, but instead are likely to process it peripherally (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). In other words,

children are unlikely to reflect on the content of the message and its persuasive intent but are more likely to consider surface level attributes such as colour or entertainment value.

Therefore, young consumers may require a cue or disclosure such as a warning message to trigger advertising knowledge and critical responses. For these children, without the presence of an explicit cue, cognitive AL will not facilitate critical evaluation of an advertisement. But in contemporary contexts, marketers often use highly involving tactics such as music, colour, and emotional components to distract young people from commercial content and decrease the possibility of AL being critically applied (An & Kang, 2013; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Consequently, the reliance on disclosures to activate AL is problematic when dealing with modern marketing practices where the disclosures may not be clearly visible or easily discernible (An et al., 2014; Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Moore & Rideout, 2007), or may not have a consistent format (Hudders et al.,2021). For example, the fact that covert advertising on SM (e.g., influencer marketing) uses disclosures such as #spon or #brandambassador, does not necessarily mean that these disclosures are meaningful or capable of being understood by the consumer. In other words, their presence does not always equate with clear visibility and ease of identification.

Because of problems associated with the cognitive dimension of AL in acting as a critical defence against advertising effects, authors have identified two further dimensions of AL. The second of the three dimensions is the affective aspect of AL.

2.2.2 Affective AL

The predominant conceptualisation of AL in the literature until 2011 was that as children grow older and develop cognitively, their understanding of advertising will increase, therefore making them less susceptible to advertising effects (i.e., the cognitive defence view)

(Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, little empirical evidence existed to support this view. Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) addressed this limitation by highlighting that the fun and immersive nature of contemporary advertising requires a different kind of defence – one based on attitudinal mechanisms. To this end, they introduced attitudinal AL as a new dimension of AL based on attitudes or emotions rather than cognitive knowledge, thus departing from the literature (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Throughout the literature, this dimension is referred to interchangeably as affective AL (e.g., Hwang et al., 2018).

Young children often perceive peripherally, which means they consume advertising messages under conditions of low elaboration. This means that they are not using their 'stop-and-think' response to critically consider advertising, but instead are seduced by affective elements of an advertisement, such as emotional, fun, colourful or distracting elements (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). When a child has developed sufficient cognitive resources, they should be able to pause (or 'stop') when confronted with an advertising message and then choose an appropriate reaction or response ('think') (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, less cognitively developed children will not have this facility in place.

For children with limited cognitive ability, Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) proposes that a learned association between advertising and negativity (attitudinal AL) will allow them to critically respond to advertising more easily. Therefore, if a child perceives advertisements peripherally, and does not have the information processing ability to retrieve and apply their advertising knowledge unprompted, attitudinal AL may be the most successful skill in decreasing susceptibility and guarding against advertising effects (An et al., 2014). To this end, attitudinal AL refers to maintaining a critical attitude towards advertising in general, so that if commercial content is recognised then a critical response should be more easily or automatically accessed, placing less emphasis on executive functioning and emotion regulation skills (Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Therefore, the goal of fostering attitudinal AL in children is to reduce dependency on cognitive schemas and allow children to access their AL with less motivation by bypassing cognitive resources to instead rely on attitudinal responses (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016; Rozendaal et al., 2009). Specifically, according to Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011), attitudinal AL involves two components which are both negative in nature:

Scepticism towards advertising: doubt or disbelief as to the truth of the advertising message and claims made therein (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Disliking of advertising: a general distaste or negative attitude towards advertising messages (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

As such, attitudinal AL as defined by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) relates solely to maintaining *negative* attitudes (scepticism and disliking) towards advertising, to then apply these as an automatic response. In this description, the authors do not leave room for positive attitudes, such as liking of advertising. The literature in turn has overwhelmingly followed suit – i.e., describing affective/attitudinal AL as a learned *disliking* of advertising (e.g., Hudders, et al., 2016).

However, more recently, Hudders et al. (2017) have extended this dimension (although they use the term 'affective AL'). They suggest that affective AL involves two components:

1. The first relates to knowledge of the emotional reactions which advertising seeks to bring about. They posit that if a consumer can understand how an advertisement seeks to make them feel, then this may aid them to take steps to regulate emotional responses. For example, if young consumers are aware of the marketer's agenda in promoting an effect-transfer between the positive experience of playing an advergame and the

advertised product, the child is more likely to be adept at recognising and critically responding to the persuasive intent at the time of exposure (Hudders et al., 2017).

2. The second component associated with affective AL is described as "a general set of affective attitudes (in terms of disliking but also, as we like to emphasise, liking) consisting of an implicitly "learned" set of norms and values related to the affective evaluation of advertising (formats)" (Hudders et al., 2017 p. 340).

Therefore, Hudders et al. (2017) stipulate that affective AL may be comprised of *both* positive and negative attitudes, in contrast to earlier conceptualisations of this dimension. They also emphasise that this dimension includes awareness of emotional appeals within advertising as a means of regulating the emotional response which the marketer seeks to bring about (Hudders et al., 2017).

However, authors have been slow to incorporate the components stipulated by Hudders et al. (2017) into their definitions of affective AL, instead using the conceptualisation offered by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) a decade ago – i.e., that affective AL encompasses negative attitudes (dislike and scepticism) alone. Therefore, most authors reject the more contemporary idea that affective AL may also involve positive attitudes, as well as awareness of emotional appeals within advertising (Hudders et al., 2017).

For example, van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019, para. 12) refer to 'attitudinal AL' as a dimension of AL and define it as involving "disliking of advertising and scepticism". In their paper a year later, the same authors use the term "attitudinal persuasion knowledge" and describe it as "critical attitudes toward advertising, for example, scepticism or disliking of the advertising" (van Reijmersdal & van Dam, 2020, p.1533). Mirroring this, De Pauw et al. (2019, p.1199) describe AL as having an attitudinal dimension and define it as "holding sceptical or

negative attitudes toward advertising". Similarly, Hoek et al. (2020, p.3) refer to attitudinal AL and define it as consisting of "scepticism and disliking". In parallel, De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders (2018, p.310) define affective AL as "feelings of disbelief or dislike toward a certain advertising format". This is despite the fact that in another paper published in the same year by the same authors, they define affective AL more broadly as "people's emotional reactions to advertising" (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018, p.404). Therefore, the literature's treatment of this dimension of AL is inconsistent.

Overall, the terms 'affective AL' and 'attitudinal AL' are used interchangeably in the literature. For example, Hwang et al. (2018) use the label "affective/attitudinal advertising literacy". However, there is a lack of consensus on what this dimension entails. Most commonly, and as illustrated above, authors define it as referring to disliking and scepticism towards advertising. However, a new school of thought in the literature allows for attitudes to be both positive and negative in nature (Hudders et al., 2017). It is unclear why authors have been reluctant to incorporate positive attitudes into affective AL and are prevailingly aligning with traditional definitions which refer to a learned disliking. Given the affect-based nature of contemporary, online advertising, it seems unorthodox to expect that young consumers will apply a learned disliking in contexts where advertising is entertaining and enjoyable. For example, consider the nature of SM advertising, which is often curated to hold the consumer's attention, to be enjoyable and to be shared by consumers via their own SM profiles (Alhabash, et al., 2017). In this context, the present author questions whether consumers are motivated to apply a learned disliking to advertising which they may enjoy and share with others through eWOM.

Furthermore, authors have noted that the characteristics of contemporary advertising lower consumers' motivation to critically reflect on it (De Pauw et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008). Indeed, it is because young consumers tend to reflect on contemporary advertising under conditions of low elaboration that Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011)

introduced attitudinal AL as a low effort, attitudinal mechanism. However, where advertising is fun (such as within entertaining, sponsored YouTube videos), the author questions whether even this 'low effort' dimension would be retrieved, since it requires consumers to attempt to stifle positive emotions evoked in favour of applying an opposite emotion – disdain. This may be an unrealistic expectation.

Overall, little research has been conducted which focuses on young consumers' affective AL in particular. Of those empirical studies which do take this dimension into account (e.g., An et al., 2014; De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Hoek et al., 2020; Rozendaal et al., 2013; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016), they overwhelmingly approach it from the traditional standpoint (i.e., encompassing negative attitudes alone). But the literature needs to consider the possibility that consumers could have positive attitudes towards advertising in a SM context. For example, given that users actively seek out and freely opt-in to brand and influencer profiles on SM, it follows that they may be positively pre-disposed towards commercial content shared by these accounts that they *choose* to follow. Afterall, the nature of such content is very different to traditional advertising which the consumer has little say in being exposed to, e.g., television advertising which is 'pushed' on the consumer, versus SM advertising which the consumer has often sought out and therefore 'pulls' towards them.

As such, there is a pressing gap in the literature for empirical research which is open to exploring affective AL as it emerges both positively and negatively in the context of SM. Thus far, only one study has employed such an approach, and indeed confirmed that adolescents exhibited negative *and* positive attitudes towards contemporary advertising on SM (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). The present author will also address this gap by approaching affective AL from an interpretivist perspective, thereby allowing participants to present their

affective AL in whatever way they see fit (i.e., negatively and/or positively), rather than testing

for the presence of pre-determined components (such as dislike of advertising).

Having discussed two dimensions of AL (cognitive and affective), the third and final dimension

is examined in the next section. This dimension is moral AL, which is the ability to critically

evaluate the fairness of advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018).

2.2.3 Moral AL

Within their seminal paper on persuasion knowledge, Friestad & Wright (1994) proposed that

consumers evaluate the behaviour of agents in two ways: perceived effectiveness of tactics

utilised, as well as perceived appropriateness. They describe the latter as having to do "with

whether the marketer's tactics seem to be moral or normatively acceptable (i.e., within the

boundaries of the 'rules of the game')" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p.10). Therefore, moral AL

is the third dimension of AL and can be defined as "individuals' ability to develop thoughts

about the moral appropriateness of specific advertising formats and comprises the general

moral evaluations individuals hold towards these formats (e.g., advergames, brand placement,

or TV commercials) and towards advertising in general, including its persuasive tactics (e.g.,

humour or celebrity endorsements, using personal data to customize commercial messages)"

(Hudders et al., 2017, p.337). Elsewhere, De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018, p.404) define

it as "the ability to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of advertising and the knowledge

needed to do this (e.g., insights into the use of gender stereotypes or think models". Similarly,

Zarouali et al. (2019, p.198) define this dimension as entailing "the skills, abilities and

propensity to morally evaluate advertising, as expressed by the beliefs and judgments people

develop about the appropriateness of its tactics". As such, there is a consensus within the

literature that moral AL involves making judgements about the moral appropriateness of

advertising, as well as specific tactics used within advertising. For instance, a child could consider television advertising fair, but judge the tactic of product placement in television programmes as unfair.

Whilst the ability to morally evaluate marketers' tactics has been noted as a hallmark of persuasion knowledge for more than two decades (Friestad & Wright, 1994), it has received scant research attention (Zarouali et al., 2019). Moral AL has been largely ignored in the literature, with its acknowledgement as a dimension only emerging within recent literature (Hudders et al., 2017). This is interesting, given the appropriateness of contemporary marketing tactics has been questioned within the literature for years (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2004; Owen et al., 2013; Spiteri Cornish, 2014). For instance, Owen et al. (2013) sounded a note of caution about the appropriateness of using embedded advertising techniques which utilise subtle persuasive processes to target young consumers. They found that children (aged 6-10) had a considerably lower and less well-developed understanding of non-traditional advertising (including advergames and product placement) than television advertising (Owen et al., 2013). As such, they concluded that "on ethical grounds, non-traditional advertising must be viewed as inappropriate" (Owen et al., 2013, p.204).

Although, as yet, the literature has not explicitly labelled the components of moral AL, a review of extant research suggests that it's components could include:

- the ability to form judgements about the appropriateness of advertising (Adams et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019).

- the knowledge needed to do this, such as understanding of gender stereotypes (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018).

- the ability to notice when advertising is biased (De Pauw et al.,2017; Hudders et al., 2017).

- the ability to consider perspectives outside one's own (De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017).

As children develop, they begin to judge actions by drawing on the perspectives of others and considering their motives and intentions (De Pauw et al., 2017). This ability aids the formation of judgements about the moral appropriateness of advertising. For example, when judging the appropriateness of an advertisement, one may do so by taking the perspective of the advertiser, or opposingly, the consumer to whom the advertisement is targeted. A resulting moral evaluation could be that the advertisement is fair, for example by considering the necessity of advertising for business owners (De Pauw et al., 2017). On the other hand, if considering the audience for whom the advertisement is targeted towards, it may result in evaluations of the advertisement as unfair/manipulative/morally inappropriate if tactics in place are seen as inappropriate (De Pauw et al., 2017).

These evaluations may then shape responses to advertising. For example, if an advertisement is judged as inappropriate, it may invoke scepticism as a response (Hudders et al., 2017). On the other hand, if an advertisement is considered fair, it may result in acceptance or tolerance (De Pauw et al., 2017). Therefore, moral AL can be considered as a knowledge structure (consisting of thoughts about what is appropriate/inappropriate in the context of advertising) which may be retrieved and applied as an evaluation during exposure to advertising (e.g., '*this advertisement is fair/unfair'*), to trigger a response (e.g., scepticism or tolerance).

As such, Hudders et al. (2017) note that this dimension is deeply intertwined with scepticism and recognition of marketer's bias, two concepts which are mentioned by many authors (e.g., An et al., 2014; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Owen et al., 2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Understanding of advertising's bias refers to the facility to comprehend that brand and product claims may be exaggerated or false (Rozendaal, Lapierre,

et al., 2011). Similarly, scepticism refers to doubt or disbelief as to the truth of the advertising message and claims made therein (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

If bias is recognised, it may prompt consumers to doubt the truth of advertising (i.e., apply scepticism) and therefore judge advertising as unfair. It should be noted that scepticism was previously examined under the second dimension of AL, namely affective AL (see Section 2.2.2). While the literature has tended to categorise scepticism as a component of affective AL (e.g., Hoek et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2018; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; van Reijmersdal & van Dam, 2020), it is worth considering whether it should be categorised as part of moral AL, since it relates to making judgements about the truthfulness (and therefore appropriateness) of advertising. For example, a small number of authors have categorised scepticism as a component of moral AL, e.g., De Pauw et al. (2017) and Hudders et al. (2017).

Surprisingly, research which empirically reports on moral AL is scarce. Only a small number of studies have explored this dimension of AL empirically. For example, many empirical studies which examine AL only consider two dimensions (with a greater focus on the cognitive dimension and a lesser focus on the affective dimension – see Section 2.2.2) and do not mention moral AL (e.g., De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; Hoek et al., 2020). Indeed, regarding the few studies which have empirically investigated moral AL, there are inconsistent findings.

For example, De Pauw et al. (2017) found that children (aged 9-11) had the ability to make moral judgements about the appropriateness of advertising once they were stimulated to take the perspective of others. This led them to judge advertising in many conflicting ways based on consequences for different actors, e.g., advergames as fun but also as 'bad' because others may not recognise them as advertising (De Pauw et al., 2017).

Elsewhere, van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) reported that teenagers (aged 12-16) evaluated influencer marketing (IM) as fair based on an understanding that it provides revenue for

influencers. However, another study found that adolescents (aged 12-18) had a 'high moral AL', which meant they were sceptical towards advertising and sought to resist it (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Therefore, there are contrasting findings within the literature about the presence and manifestation of moral AL amongst young consumers.

Given the scant research attention this dimension has received, along with inconsistent findings, not enough is known about this dimension of AL. It is unclear how young consumers judge the appropriateness of contemporary advertising, as well as the effect this has on their response to advertising. How young people morally evaluate advertising is critical because this ability to critique advertising may facilitate the deployment of defence filters or coping mechanisms such as scepticism, avoidance, or self-regulation measures (e.g., to ignore persuasive attempts). Furthermore, it may be possible to understand on what basis teenagers judge the ethical appropriateness of commercial messages in a SM context. This knowledge may aid researchers, policy makers and educators in understanding how young people morally evaluate contemporary marketing communications, and therefore respond critically.

It has been argued that research concerning this type of AL should seek to understand young people's moral evaluations of marketer's tactics and what psychological and persuasive states they seek to bring about (Hudders et al., 2017). Of particular interest could be teenagers' understanding of the agent's perspective – i.e., their understanding of why tactics are being used by marketers. For example, in the context of SM, research could investigate young consumers' understanding of advertising formats like native advertising (advertising embedded within SM newsfeeds) and marketers' motives for employing such strategies. Based on these understandings, moral evaluations could then be investigated.

Indeed, Hudders et al. (2017) emphasised the especial importance of moral AL as a dimension of AL. They contend that if a tactic is judged as unfair, advertising effects should be diminished

since this should prompt consumers to enact negative affective and critical cognitive AL (i.e., dislike of advertising and the use of cognitive knowledge to induce counterargument). For example, consider a child who judges an advergame as morally unfair. This may trigger them to enact counterargument (critical cognitive AL) and irritation (negative affective AL), and therefore cause them to exit the game. This could be characterised as an active response to advertising, whereby the young consumer protects their own agenda. Opposingly, consider a child who judges an advergame as morally fair based on empathy for the brand owner's agenda. This may lead them to bypass cognitive counterargument and invoke positive affective attitudes. A result is that they may respond with purchase intention, thereby responding in a passive manner by acting in line with the marketer's agenda.

This interplay can be compared to the change-of-meaning and detachment effect from the PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994), which determine whether AL is deployed as a defence. As explained in Section 2.1.2, the PKM contends that when an advertisement is *recognised*, a consumer's opinion and response should alter (change-of-meaning) in that they are more critical towards it (detachment effect). These behavioural responses may undermine the success of a persuasion episode by invoking the use of persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and as a result deploy AL as a defence mechanism (An et al., 2014). However, in the context of new advertising tactics where advertising may be enjoyable (such as advergames) or emerge from friends (through eWOM) and admired opinion-leaders (such as influencers), the change-of-meaning and detachment effect may not be invoked through *recognition* of advertising alone but may require further motivation. It is plausible that moral AL may motivate a young consumer to respond critically to advertising and invoke the change-of-meaning and detachment effect, *if* they judge a tactic as unfair or manipulative.

Therefore, it could be that moral AL moderates the application of cognitive and affective AL situationally (Hudders et al., 2017). For this reason, Hudders et al. (2017) have highlighted the

requirement for research to investigate how the different nodes of AL (cognitive, affective, and moral) interact. Limited empirical research exists which reports on the interplay of these dimensions. As such, this doctoral research will explore a substantive gap in the literature by investigating the presence and manifestation of each of these three dimensions amongst teenagers. Now that the manifestations and dimensions of AL have been reviewed, the chapter moves on to discuss a subsequent area of interest: factors affecting the development of AL in children and adolescents.

2.3. Factors Affecting the Development of AL in Young Consumers: Cognitive & Social Development

To develop, use and deploy the range of dimensions in AL, a young consumer must command competent levels of several cognitive and social development criteria. Fundamentally, a prerequisite to the development of AL is the ability to distinguish commercial from non-commercial content (Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007; Moore & Rideout, 2007; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Equally, young people require the ability to think abstractly and appreciate the motives of the marketer alongside the elements of the advertisement. It is posited by many authors that such cognitive criteria develop over time with age, making age an important factor when considering AL (John, 1999; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

 It is crucial to note that younger children may not possess proficient standards of these qualities due to more limited levels of cognitive and information processing ability, as well as limited social developments. For example: it is easier for children to comprehend that advertisers are attempting to sell them things (selling intent), as opposed to understanding that advertisers are attempting to influence consumers' mental states (persuasive intent) (Moses & Baldwin, 2005).

Empirical evidence reflects this, as understanding of selling intent has been noted to develop by the age of eight, while competent levels of understanding of persuasive intent were only found to start increasing at age ten (Rozendaal et al., 2009; Rozendaal et al., 2010). Therefore, the consensus throughout the literature is that the development and possession of AL is dependent on cognitive and social developments that take place throughout childhood, in conjunction with consumer socialisation (Hudders et al., 2017; John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). In general, researchers use age as a marker to predict AL level by basing their predictions and hypotheses on cognitive scales such as Piaget's framework (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). This will be examined subsequently in the following Section, 2.3.1.

However, critics suggest that socialised factors may present a more realistic measure of consumer ability and AL level due to affective processes of persuasion at play in contemporary advertising (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Nairn & Fine, 2008). Additionally, it has been posited that to command proficient levels of AL, increased exposure to socialisation agents and first-hand consumer experiences are required to develop this skill over time (Friestad & Wright, 1994; John, 1999). Given that moral AL is now acknowledged as a dimension of AL (Hudders et al., 2017), it is also necessary to consider the development of moral reasoning (De Pauw et al., 2017). Thus, the following sections will address each of these areas necessary to the development and deployment of AL. Specifically, cognitive development is addressed, including information processing, executive functioning, and emotion regulation; followed by a discussion on consumer socialisation, encompassing social development and moral reasoning.

2.3.1 Cognitive Development as a Factor Affecting the Development of AL

The dominant school of thought in the literature cites cognitive development as the key criterion in the development of AL. The basis of cognitive schemas is best described by Piaget's framework of cognitive development (John, 1999). In essence, Piaget's (1971) framework describes how young people's intelligence evolves through development of complex thought structures and increasingly abstract levels of perception. The framework suggests that as children grow older and learn to perceive stimuli more abstractly (for example, in the context of their surroundings), they experience discrepancies in what they assumed to be true and what they have perceived. They then learn to adjust their own assumptions and world ideas in respect of these discrepancies. The four stages of this framework are as follows (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005):

1. *Sensorimotor:* (0-2 years) thought structures emerge about behaviour, as the child learns to react to different stimuli. This is an extremely egocentric stage, where understandings are formed through trial and error.

2. *Preoperational:* (2-7 years) the primary focus revolves on perceptual features of stimuli. This stage is characterised by 'centration', as decisions are often made on the basis of a single feature or dimension.

3. *Concrete operational:* (7-11 years) children can begin to perceive stimuli in a more thoughtful way, based on the environment in which they appear. In this stage, perceptual features are no longer accepted as reality, but several dimensions can be considered at once and related to each other.

4. *Formal operational:* (11 to adulthood) individuals in this stage are capable of complex thought about hypothetical and abstract situations, with thought patterns developing towards an adult-like level.

In a commercial context, Young (2003) states that at some stage between the ages of 4-7 (preoperational stage), children learn to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content on television, i.e., they begin to realise that advertisements on television are not purely sources of entertainment and information, and therefore can understand selling intent (John, 1999). Understanding of persuasive intent is more complex, since it involves the ability to consider possible motives of the source of the advertisement, as well as an understanding that the advertisement is attempting to change/influence the consumer's mental state (Moses & Baldwin, 2005). Therefore, it is not expected that understanding of persuasive intent should develop until the concrete operational stage (ages 7-11), when children can think more abstractly (John, 1999).

Empirical research has revealed a lack of consensus as to the exact age when it can be expected that children have developed this understanding. For example, Lawlor & Prothero (2008, p.1216) found that children aged 7-9 were "fully aware of the persuasive/commercial nature of advertising"; Rozendaal et al. (2010) found that it was only at the age of 11 that most of their sample could identify the persuasive intent, but by age 12 still had not developed an understanding of persuasive intent equal to that of an adult. Elsewhere, Mallinckrodt & Mizerski (2007) found that approximately half of their sample (aged 6-8) could correctly identify persuasive intent.

However, it is acknowledged that identification of intent may also be affected by the context in which it occurs (e.g., television versus online advertising; explicit versus embedded). Studies suggest that an appreciation of commercial and persuasive intent is found to manifest at an earlier age in the context of traditional advertising, compared to in an online context (An et al., 2014; Hudders et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2013; Verhellen et al., 2014). Due to the lack of consensus surrounding the age at which recognition of persuasive intent has developed, alongside the varying structure of the context and embeddedness in which it may occur, it is

difficult to predict at what age robust levels of AL will be present. This may then prompt the question, are those who are posited to have developed levels of AL (teenagers aged 12 and older as per Piaget's framework) capable of transferring this literacy onto online platforms? AL-related empirical research thus far has neglected to pay sufficient attention to this age group, particularly to those aged over 14. It is only recently that this age group are beginning to receive research attention following calls for their inclusion (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Zarouali et al., 2019).

However, even if a young person has developed an understanding of persuasive intent, as well as sufficient advertising knowledge, they may still not have the cognitive capacity to *retrieve* and *apply* this knowledge (i.e., invoke situational AL) in order to respond effectively to an advertising message (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). This mechanism may be reliant on information processing abilities (John, 1999; Roedder, 1981).

2.3.2 Information Processing

Although young people may have developed sufficient cognitive skills to aid in the cognizance of commercial messages, lack of information processing abilities may impede their ability to retrieve and apply this knowledge – in other words, cognitive *ability* does not necessarily account for cognitive *activity* (Roedder, 1981). Roedder (1981) classifies information processing ability into three stages:

1. *Limited Processors:* (below 7 years) have limited processing skills which are not fully developed, are unable to successfully utilise information even when prompted to do so.
2. *Cued Processors:* (7-11 years) have the capacity to store and retrieve information, but often require an explicit cue or prompt to do so.

3. ***Strategic Processors:*** (12 to adulthood) use a variety of strategies to store and retrieve information, including rehearsal and verbal labelling. They are considered to have sufficient cognitive processing abilities to store and retrieve information without prompt or cue to do so.

Therefore, from a cognitive perspective, children aged 7-11 (cued processors) are thought to be able to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content (i.e., can recognise advertisements) and understand both the commercial and persuasive intent of an advertisement. However, they are unlikely to be able to spontaneously apply this knowledge without the presence of an explicit cue/disclosure, e.g., an 'ad bumper' which delineates commercial content from editorial/organic content (An & Kang, 2013).

Thereafter, when children reach the age of 12 (strategic processors in the formal operational stage of cognitive development) they are thought to have developed more elaborate cognitive schemas, as well as the facility to retrieve information processing skills to effectively respond to a commercial message without a cue/prompt (John, 1999). As a young person's cognitive abilities increase, they will evolve from distinguishing advertisements based on perceptual features (such as length of advertisement in comparison to television programmes) to distinguishing commercial content based on the perceived motive and intent of the message (John, 1999). Therefore, there is an assumption in the literature that by the approximate age of 12, young people have developed sufficient cognitive abilities which allow them to effectively understand and respond to advertising.

However, recent literature has begun to address whether strategic processors in the formal operational stage of cognitive development (those aged 12 and over who are posited to be adept at recognising commercial content and retrieving AL) are as successful at retrieving their AL

in the online context compared to traditional contexts. Preliminary findings suggest they are not. For example, studies conducted in the context of contemporary advertising have concluded that: teenagers (i.e., strategic processors) struggle to identify embedded advertising (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018); tend to overestimate their ability to recognise advertising (Lawlor et al., 2016; van Dam & van Reijmersdal. 2019); and that even where critical processing of advertising is activated, it does not always lead to decreased persuasion (Zarouali et al., 2018a). Therefore, it is unclear how adept adolescents are at using their AL in the context of new advertising formats.

Overall, further research is warranted to investigate how teenagers critically reflect on specific advertising episodes in a SM context (situational AL) as well as their advertising knowledge within this context in general (dispositional AL). Further defining cognitive skills which must be considered are executive functioning and emotion regulation.

2.3.3 Executive Functioning & Emotion Regulation

To deploy AL as a defence mechanism, children must possess the cognitive ability to enact the 'stop-and-think' response (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). The 'stop' element refers to the ability to shift attention away from affective qualities of an advertisement to recognise commercial and persuasive intent, while 'think' refers to then selecting a relevant response. This ability is dependent on the development of executive functioning and emotion regulation skills, both of which are not expected to develop fully until late adolescence (Hudders et al., 2017; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Executive functioning skills may be described as "the monitoring and control of thought and action", which aid in carrying out purposeful, goal-directed thought (Moses & Baldwin, 2005, p. 194; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). This involves attentional flexibility, inhibitory

control, self-regulation, working memory and impulse control amongst other cognitive abilities (Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). In other words, while information processing is responsible for the retrieval of AL, executive functioning involves focusing on the advertisement and controlling impulsive responses which may lead to purchase intention.

Immature executive functioning skills are prevalent amongst children and young adults due to the ongoing development of the pre-frontal cortex (Moses & Baldwin, 2005). This may leave young people vulnerable to advertising in several ways. Firstly, perceptually heavy advertisements which are commonplace on SM use affective elements such as colour, music, and other distracting features, thereby making it difficult for young consumers to shift attention away from perceptually salient features of an advertisement to focus on the intent of the message (Moses & Baldwin, 2005). Even if they manage to identify intent and trigger AL, they may make purchase decisions against their better judgement due to under-developed impulse control and decision-making skills (Moses & Baldwin, 2005).

However, in familiar situations, executive functioning should be more automatically accessed. For example, in adherence with the PKM, if an advertising tactic is familiar, executive functioning should be enacted more successfully (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). With greater expertise in responding to a given advertising format, less demand will be placed on executive functioning because a critical response towards this type of advertising may already be in place (Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, in situations where an advertising tactic is unfamiliar and is cognitively demanding, executive functioning is often strained, inhibiting the enactment of the 'stop-and-think' response (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

The second aspect to the 'stop-and-think' response is emotion regulation which refers to the ability to control, regulate and manage emotional reactions or impulses (Rozendaal, Lapierre,

et al., 2011). This includes controlling both negative and positive emotions or reactions, e.g., feigning joy when receiving a disappointing gift (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, in a commercial context, emotion regulation may be most important in controlling positive reactions to entertaining advertising. Mature levels of this skill are not expected amongst young children but develop as cognitive abilities evolve and as children grow towards adolescence. Therefore, young people may struggle to control their emotional responses when exposed to emotionally pleasing attributes of new advertising formats and may therefore fail to use their AL skills (Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). As such, implicit advertising tactics such as affect transfer or the spill-over effect (where commercial messages benefit from positive feelings incited by an advertisement) will not be evaluated critically without developed emotion regulation and executive functioning skills (van Reijmersdal et al., 2012).

2.3.4 Critique of the Emphasis on Cognitive Development as a Facilitator of the Development of AL

The literature regarding cognitive criteria necessary for the development of AL places heavy focus on age (e.g., Piaget's (1971) framework and Roedder's (1981) stages of information processing). Additionally, while cognitive skills such as executive functioning, emotion regulation and information processing are fundamental in aiding critical reflection, it has been argued that they are not the only criteria on which AL is based. Many authors believe that the development and successful application of AL is dependent not only on cognitive capabilities and age, but also on social developments and attitudes (Hudders et al., 2016; Nairn & Fine, 2008). These authors argue that the use of age alone as a measure of ability (as cognitive theorists argue) is unreliable, most especially in the context of new advertising formats which aim to persuade on an implicit level (Nairn & Fine, 2008).

Due to the affective processes of persuasion at play in contemporary advertising, it is likely that young people will fail to activate cognitive defences and will instead focus on perceptually salient aspects of the message (Hudders et al., 2016). Correspondingly, it has been empirically found that age, and therefore cognitive ability, does not necessarily account for decreased susceptibility to advertising (Nairn & Fine, 2008). For example, Livingstone & Helsper (2006) found that older children are not necessarily less influenced by advertising than younger children. Similarly, Owen et al. (2013) found no disparity in understanding of intent of non-traditional advertising between younger and older age groups. Additionally, Ali et al. (2009) found that a sample of ten and twelve-year olds (cued and strategic processers) were unable to correctly identify a quarter of a sample of web page advertisements correctly, despite having reached the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. Furthermore, van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) found that adolescents (aged 12-16, strategic processors) overestimate their ability to identify the practice of influencer marketing (IM). Therefore, the assumption that as consumers increase in age, so too susceptibility to advertising decreases, is unsupported throughout the literature (Nairn & Fine, 2008).

Consequently, a school of thought has emerged which contends that using cognitive ability *alone* is an unreliable indicator of AL, particularly in the context of new advertising formats. These authors consider social developments and attitudinal mechanisms as an equally important predictor of AL level (Hudders et al., 2016; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Rozendaal et al., 2016). It has been posited that the emphasis on Piaget's 'ages and stages' approach is an unrealistic measure of AL level, due to its 'one size fits all' attitude, i.e., the assumption that adolescents aged 12 possess adult-like levels of cognitive development and therefore should have proficient levels of AL (Nairn & Fine, 2008). The PKM posits that as individuals have greater exposure to persuasion episodes and agents, they learn to recognise them (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017). With

greater familiarity and exposure to specific types of advertising, the ease with which AL is retrieved and deployed may be expedited (Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Therefore, AL may develop as young people acquire greater familiarity with consumption contexts, i.e., through consumer socialisation, which will be examined in the next section.

2.4. Consumer Socialisation as a Factor Affecting the Development of AL

Given the debate regarding the reliability of using cognitive development alone as an indicator of AL, a major alternative framework also discussed in the literature is that of consumer socialisation. Consumer socialisation has been defined as: "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974, p. 2). This socialisation is characterised by processes of trial and error while making consumption decisions and is influenced by two models of learning: cognitive development and social learning (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; John, 1999). Therefore, while still acknowledging the important role which cognitive function plays within a child's development into a competent consumer (and therefore their development of AL), it also emphasises social elements which may be at play, such as exposure to influential agents like parents, teachers, and peers.

The seminal model used to explain children's social development is the Social Learning Model (SLM) (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). While the cognitive element of consumer socialisation focuses on the development of cognitive schemas to aid in coping with different environmental factors (such as special offers, product features and advertising claims) the SLM instead emphasises sources of influence (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). These sources of influence are termed 'socialisation agents' and are responsible for outlining and influencing norms which in

turn affect behaviours, attitudes, and motivations of the young consumer. A socialisation agent includes any person or organisation involved in socialisation due to frequency of contact, an element of superiority over the individual, and control over rewards and punishment (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). This may range from parents and guardians to also include teachers, siblings, peers, and media (Moschis & Churchill, 1978).

While consumer socialisation may be heavily influenced by structures of imitation and learning (i.e., being taught specific skills from parents or other agents), it is also influenced by social processes like communication with peers (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). These social processes and socialisation agents may influence the recognition of bias and deception in advertising, general attitudes towards advertising in general, knowledge of specific tactics, and why they are in use. As per the SLM, this type of socialisation occurs through three processes (Moschis & Churchill, 1978):

1. *Modelling:* whereby the learner imitates the agent's behaviour.
2. *Reinforcement:* whereby the learner is subject to positive and negative reinforcement mechanisms (reward or punishment) by the agent.
3. *Social Interaction:* a combination of modelling and reinforcement.

Socialisation may also be influenced by social structural variables such as social class, sex, and family size, as well as factors like age and life cycle position (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). These variables both directly and indirectly affect socialisation by impacting the social learning processes, as well as the setting in which they take place. For instance, purchasing behaviours can be influenced by decision factors made by agents, including spending, and saving decisions, and brand/product preferences. The impact of social structural variables on the socialisation of consumer skills was found by Moschis and Churchill (1978) to be significant.

Elsewhere, socialisation is considered to rest predominantly on the development of social perspective taking, which refers to the ability to consider perspectives outside one's own (John, 1999). This ability is particularly relevant to the development of persuasion knowledge and moral AL, as the ability to understand the source's motive is a key attribute in understanding and morally evaluating persuasion attempts. Discernment of persuasive intent is also dependent on this skill, as one needs to be able to consider the advertiser's perspective to fully appreciate the motive (John, 1999). Furthermore, the ability to understand marketers' reasoning in utilising specific tactics, platforms and advertisements also requires detailed consideration of multiple perspectives (John, 1999). As a result, this type of advanced consumer knowledge may not be expected to develop until late adolescence (John, 1999). Selman (1980) presents five key stages relating to the development of social perspectives:

1. *Egocentric Stage:* (3-6 years) children can consider only their own perspective and are unaware of any other.

2. *Social Informational Role Taking Stage:* (6-8 years) children are aware that people may have different opinions but believe this is due to different information rather than different perspectives – they do not demonstrate the ability to think from another person's perspective.

3. *Self-Reflective Role Taking Stage:* (8-10 years) children can consider another person's perspective and understand that others have different opinions and motives even when exposed to the same information.

4. *Mutual Role Taking:* (10-12 years) children can consider another person's perspective at the same time as one's own, which is crucial during social interaction.

5. *Social and Conventional System Role Taking:* (12-15 years, and older) involves the ability to consider another person's perspective in the context of their social group, status, or other socialised factor.

Therefore, according to Selman (1980) children can only be expected to start understanding the persuasive intent of advertisements at ages 8-10, during the self-reflective role taking stage when they can consider multiple perspectives even while exposed to the same information (John, 1999). For example, they should begin to understand that their perspective about an advertisement for a chocolate breakfast cereal may not be the same as their parent's. Similarly, they should develop awareness that the marketer's motive may not be in their own best interest.

Furthermore, to understand more implicit processes of persuasion (e.g., contemporary advertising approaches such as influencer marketing) young people must be able to consider other peoples' perspectives more abstractly, and on a more detailed level (John, 1999). Therefore, it is not expected that this capability should develop until adolescence (the social and conventional system role taking stage encompassing ages 12-15), when perspectives can be considered in specific contexts.

Based on this, authors have categorised consumer socialisation according to specific stages.

2.4.1 Stages of Consumer Socialisation

Combining cognitive (information processing, emotion regulation and executive functioning skills) and social development (based on the SLM and Selman's [1980] stages), John (1999) distinguishes consumer socialisation into three key stages:

1. *Perceptual Stage:* (3-7 years) children have an egocentric perspective, whereby they perceive peripherally and often place emphasis on a single perceptual feature and differentiate between brands and products on this basis. Consumer decisions are therefore often made using very limited information.

2. ***Analytical Stage:*** (7-11 years) children in this period undergo substantial cognitive and social development. The analytical stage is characterised by shifts in information processing abilities and a shift in thought processes from perceptual to symbolic. In this stage, children develop a more thorough understanding of consumer practices, and can consider perspectives outside of their own. They demonstrate the ability to compare products based on functional factors such as price and can draw on their own experiences.

3. ***Reflective Stage:*** (11-16 years) in this stage adolescents' information processing and social skills are more sophisticated, which lend themselves to marketplace knowledge such as branding and pricing. The most distinct change occurs in thinking and reasoning processes, as adolescents learn to place more emphasis on social underpinnings and think in a more reflective manner. In this stage, a heightened awareness of other people's perspectives exists, as well as the desire to shape their own identity, resulting in more attention to the social aspects of consuming and conforming.

Those in the analytical and reflective stages of consumer socialisation should be more capable than younger children of critically analysing an advertising message beyond its perceptual features alone, to also consider its commercial nature. At this point, young people have developed the ability to consider advertising messages on a more abstract level, by considering aspects such as motive of the marketer and persuasive intent. The developmental changes which occur as a child moves from the perceptual to the analytical stage enable a more sophisticated understanding of advertising, thereby fostering the development of AL (Moore & Rideout, 2007). However, other deficiencies (e.g., the inability on draw on such knowledge unless explicitly reminded to do so) may still hinder the critical application of this skill. This

is expected to be especially prevalent in the context of embedded advertising (An et al., 2014; Hudders et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016).

Researchers have assumed that because adolescents are in the reflective stage of consumer socialisation (meaning they are more cognitively mature and have more experience with consumption than younger children), this means they are well equipped to use and retrieve AL to sufficiently cope with advertising (Zarouali et al., 2019). Because of this assumption, few studies include this age group in AL studies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Zarouali et al., 2019). This means that there exists little empirical evidence regarding the development and deployment of AL amongst this age group, thereby raising questions as to the validity of this assumption.

Furthermore, in the online environment where the border between commercial and non-commercial content may be blurred, current authors are questioning whether it is accurate to assume that teenagers are indeed equipped to understand advertising and exert control over advertising effects (Zarouali et al., 2019). Alongside this, a whole host of other forms of personal developments are ongoing during this stage which may inhibit adolescents' motivation to critically respond to advertising (such as identity formation). These will be discussed in depth in Section 2.5. Therefore, recent authors are revising the assumption that adolescents are not susceptible to advertising and are starting to conduct more research including teenage samples (e.g., Lawlor et al., 2016; Zarouali et al., 2018a).

Alongside more mature cognitive and social developments, it is also proposed in the literature that adolescents are more advanced in their ability to judge the moral appropriateness of advertising when compared to younger children (Zarouali et al., 2019). Given that AL is now widely acknowledged to include three dimensions – cognitive, affective, and moral (De Jans,

Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; De Pauw et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2017) the following section addresses the concept of moral reasoning.

2.4.2 Moral Reasoning as a Factor Affecting the Development of AL

Given that current literature acknowledges moral AL as a key dimension of AL (e.g., Hudders et al., 2017), it follows that young peoples' moral development must be considered when reviewing factors affecting the maturation of AL. Therefore, while consumer socialisation currently is understood to involve two developmental aspects (namely, cognitive and socialised), it is argued that a third is also necessary – moral development.

As discussed in Section 2.2.3, moral AL encompasses "the skills, abilities and propensity to morally evaluate advertising, as expressed by the beliefs and judgments people develop about the appropriateness of its tactics" (Zarouali et al., 2019, p.198). It therefore involves cognitive knowledge, such as the ability to understand that advertising is biased, and socialised factors, namely the ability to take the perspectives of others (De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017). The latter is integral to moral AL because when evaluating the appropriateness of an advertising tactic, one may consider the motives of individuals such as the brand owner or marketer (De Pauw et al., 2017). Therefore, factors already discussed including cognitive abilities like information processing (John, 1999; Roedder, 1981), and socialised factors such as social perspective taking (Selman, 1980) are integral to the development of moral AL. However, the ability to form a moral judgement about the appropriateness of advertising arguably requires another form of development – the development of moral reasoning.

Morality may be described as "individuals' prescriptive understanding of how individuals ought to behave toward each other" (Smetana, 2013, p.833-834). To judge whether advertising (or a particular advertising tactic) is fair or manipulative, young people require the ability to

reason about moral appropriateness (De Pauw et al., 2017). A framework which may explain how children develop moral reasoning is Kohlberg's (1984) moral stage theory (De Pauw et al., 2017). As noted earlier, empirical studies in an AL context are slow to incorporate moral AL, therefore Kohlberg's (1984) framework has only been applied in one AL study so far, namely by De Pauw et al. (2017) who used the framework to explain children's (aged 9-11) judgements of contemporary advertising.

Kohlberg (1984) proposed that moral reasoning develops linearly, from a focus on the self to eventually consider others (De Pauw et al., 2017). This framework involves three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, each of which contain two stages (Naito, 2013; Walker, 1984). Although there is disagreement at what age individuals inhibit certain stages (De Pauw et al., 2017), it is widely assumed that children inhibit the preconventional level, adolescents and adults have reached the conventional level, and a small minority of adults reach the preconventional level (Walker, 1984). The framework is outlined in Table 2.1.

As such, individuals in different stages of moral development are likely to have different ideas about what is socially acceptable and appropriate behaviour (Hudders et al., 2017). These ideas concerning what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, could be applied to advertising and thus contribute to moral AL.

For example, an adolescent in the conventional stage might consider advertising as fair based on a perception that it serves the social system. For instance, if exposed to an ad in the local newspaper for a local business, they may judge the ad as fair because it serves the business owner by helping them to achieve increased awareness; the newspaper owner because it provides them with revenue; and the local community, by providing information about businesses available to serve their needs. Taken together, they may perceive the ad as morally appropriate on the basis that it serves the social system of which they are a part.

Table 2.1: *An Overview of Kohlberg's (1984) Framework of Moral Reasoning.*

Level	Age range	Stage	Name & Description
Pre-Conventional	Children	1	*Punishment and Obedience:* this stage involves making moral judgements based on rules set out by authority figures (such as parents) (Naito, 2013). Conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' are made on an egocentric level, as actions are judged based on their perceived consequences from figures of authority (such as punishment) (Naito, 2013)
		2	*Individualism, Instrumental Purpose and Exchange*: Individuals at this level may begin to consider the perspectives of others, but not integrate them together (Naito, 2013). This lends itself to an understanding that people have different needs and values (Naito, 2013). Therefore, what is 'right' is dictated by one's own needs and values, and therefore can differ between people (Naito, 2013).
Conventional	Adolescents & adults	3	*Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity*: at this stage, moral judgements are made based on maintaining interpersonal relationships. 'Right' is "concern for shared feelings, expectations, and agreements that take primacy over individual interests" (Walker, 1984, p.678). Individuals understand that their actions should align with shared expectations of both particular and generalised others (i.e., known others like family members, as well as society at large), along with communities (Naito, 2013).
		4	*Social System & Conscience Maintenance:* At this point, 'right' means to serve the social system and to maintain positive relationships with others (Naito, 2013). Social systems may include families, communities, and countries (Naito, 2013) Individuals can take the point of view of others, such as a leader in an organisation, as well as others in their community (Naito, 2013).
Post-conventional	Small minority of adults	5	*Social Contract or Utility & Individual Rights:* moral judgements can now take the perspective of individuals/systems outside those held in one's own community and understand that different societies may have different value systems (Naito, 2013). 'Right' involves mutual standards agreed upon by society, including respect for basic human rights, dignity, and freedom (Naito, 2013; Walker, 1984).
		6	*Universal Ethical Principles:* people at this stage take a "moral point of view", in that moral reasoning is based on universal ethical principles which require personal commitment to justice (Naito, 2013, p.6). This means that if a law is perceived as unjust (i.e., if it violates universal ethical principles) then it might allow a person in this stage to disobey it (Naito, 2013). A person in this stage also takes the viewpoint of supposed 'rational' others in similar situations (Naito, 2013). Therefore, 'right' means accordance with abstract ethical principles (Walker, 1984).

Source: adapted from Naito, T., 2013. Moral Development. In: K. Keith, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1st ed. New York: Wiley, pp.891-897 and Walker, L. (1984). Sex Differences in the Development of Moral Reasoning: A Critical Review. *Child Development*, 55(3), 677-691. https://doi.org/10.2307/1130121

But consider if an adult in the postconventional stage was exposed to the same advertisement in the local newspaper. At this stage of moral development, individuals can consider perspectives outside of their own community, as well as ethics and human rights at an abstract level. The adult might notice the use of gender stereotypes in the ad. Although they understand that members of their community (like the business and newspaper owners) benefit from the advertisement, they may nonetheless judge it as inappropriate based on ethics. As such, because adults who reach the postconventional stage have a higher moral code which considers universal ethics over local perspectives, they might judge the advertisement as unfair.

Therefore, the stage of one's moral development is likely to have an impact on the development (as well as application) of moral AL. It should be noted that Kohlberg's (1984) theory has been subject to critique. For example, according to Kohlberg (1984), no one skips a stage or ever regresses to an earlier stage (Vitz, 1994). This means that events cannot be interpreted from more than a single stage (De Pauw et al., 2017). As such, the adult in the postconventional stage could not overlook their ethical code to pardon the local ad which uses gender stereotypes, even though they may empathise with perspectives in their community. Regardless, Kohlberg's (1984) stages approach is still recognised as a seminal theory with which to understand moral development in academic literature (De Pauw et al., 2017).

Based on Kohlberg's (1984) theory and assumptions that adolescents have reached the conventional stage (Walker, 1984), there may be many implications for how teenagers judge the appropriateness of advertising on SM. According to their stage of moral development, adolescents have a propensity to consider shared agreements within relationships; to serve the social system; and to empathise with others' point of view when forming moral judgements (Naito, 2013; Walker, 1984). It is therefore pertinent to examine this age group's moral AL in the context of the SM environment, where advertising can emerge from conduits who could be perceived as members of a shared social system (i.e., peers, brands and SM influencers). For

instance, the interactive relationship between marketers and consumers on SM where consumers are empowered to respond to brands (Gensler et al., 2013) could lead adolescents to judge the appropriateness of advertising from a relational point of view. Given that in the conventional stage, 'right' means to maintain positive relationships (Naito, 2013), this could lead teenagers to forgo any misgivings they have about the appropriateness of advertising *tactics* in use, in favour of empathising with the source of the advertisement. This is a particularly urgent topic to investigate in an environment where teenagers may feel parasocially connected to SM influencers they follow (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019)

As such, the unique nature of the advertising ecosystem in a SM context provides a pertinent area in which to examine moral AL, most especially for individuals inhibiting the conventional stage (i.e., adolescents). Currently, there is a dearth of knowledge in this area. AL research tends to overlook this age group in favour of including younger samples (Zarouali et al., 2019). This is despite the fact that adolescence continues to be a period of development, both socially and psychologically. There are specific developmental features of adolescence which may have an impact on teenagers' socialisation into consumers, and therefore their development and deployment of AL. This doctoral research will address the gap by exploring teenagers' moral AL in a SM context. In so doing, attention will be paid to how teenagers judge advertising (e.g., what factors do teenagers consider when judging the appropriateness of advertising?) as well as how this is deployed during advertising exposure.

2.5 Features of Adolescence which Impact Consumer Socialisation

Teenagers have received substantially less research attention in the AL literature in comparison to younger children. This is likely due to assumptions that because teenagers are more cognitively mature, it means they are more adept at retrieving and applying their AL. Indeed,

this could be the case in the context of traditional advertising. However, adolescents are avid SM users. For example, one survey in the US revealed that teenagers check their SM accounts on an hourly or more frequent basis (Statista 2020b). As of yet, it is unclear how adolescents cope with SM advertising which often has an embedded nature and can be fun and entertaining. Furthermore, such is the prevalence and importance of SM in modern consumers' lives, that authors have extended the consumer socialisation framework to include SM peer communication as a further socialisation agent (Wang et al., 2012). Therefore, if adolescents are being socialised by communication on SM, it prompts the question: how critical are they towards commercial messages which emanate from peers (like branded UGC), or indeed from figures they see as akin to peers, like influencers?

Content created and disseminated by peers on SM represents a form of interpersonal influence, which pushes people to conform with group norms and modify attitudes and behaviours based on peer expectations (Wang et al., 2012). This means that peer communication creates conformity pressures which can ultimately influence purchase decisions (Wang et al., 2012). Specifically, it has been empirically found that adults use SM peer communication as a means of learning about products/services (informational route), which in turn influences their product attitudes and purchase intentions through desire to conform with peers and social groups (conformity route) (Wang et al., 2012). If this is true for adults, it follows that this effect may be heightened for adolescents who are not as experienced and who are more concerned with fitting in with their peers than adults (Daniels & Leaper, 2006).

According to John (1999), within the reflective stage of consumer socialisation (ages 11-16) a heightened awareness of other people's perspectives exists, as well as a desire to shape one's own identity, which results in more attention paid to the social aspects of consuming and conforming (John 1999). Further defining features of adolescence are heightened self-consciousness and peer pressure (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Nairn & Fine, 2008). Taken

together, this may mean that SM peer communication plays an even greater role in the consumer socialisation process for teenagers, since desire to conform and self-consciousness are defining features of this age group (Choudhury et al., 2006; Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Therefore, in the context of SM, teenagers could be susceptible to advertising if it plays on conformity and peer influence.

Furthermore, in terms of development, adolescence is a turbulent time, marked by increased self-consciousness, a heightened need for peer acceptance, and identity formation (Choudhury, et al., 2006; Daniels & Leaper, 2006; Klimstra et al., 2010; Lloyd, 2002). Adolescence spans the age range of 10-18 (Curtis, 2015; State Adolescent Health Resource Centre [SAHRC], 2013). As children grow into adolescents and exert more autonomous control over their life, they become more self-conscious and pre-occupied with the opinions of others (Choudhury et al., 2006). According to Selman (1980), adolescents are in the social and conventional system role taking stage (ages 12 and up), which involves the ability to consider another person's perspective in the context of their social group, status, or other socialised factor. In terms of cognitive development, adolescents are in the formal operational stage (ages 11 to adulthood), whereby they are capable of complex thought about hypothetical and abstract situations (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). Taken together, this means that adolescents can conceptualise other people's thoughts and consider their perspectives (Choudhury et al., 2006; Lloyd, 2002). This lends itself to an ability to understand that others can have thoughts about their actions, behaviour, and appearance. When teenagers can understand this, they become preoccupied with it and believe they are the object of others' scrutiny (Choudhury et al., 2006). This results in heightened self-consciousness and a feeling of being the focus of attention, regardless of whether that is the case (Choudhury et al., 2006; Cody, 2013). This causes adolescents to feel and act as though they are on stage being watched by an 'imaginary audience' and, as such,

has been described as a phase of egocentrism (Choudhury et al., 2006; Cody, 2013; Elkind, 1967; Lachance et al, 2003; Lloyd, 2002).

Associated with a feeling of being scrutinised, adolescents have an increased need for belongingness, and therefore, peer acceptance (Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Peer acceptance, defined as "the degree to which an individual is liked or disliked by his or her peers", is related to a healthy self-concept and high self-esteem (Daniels & Leaper, 2006; Oberle et al., 2009, p.1330). When adolescents feel positively regarded by others, they experience high self-esteem (Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Correspondingly, if they feel negatively regarded by others, this perception may be internalised leading to low self-esteem and poor feelings of self-worth (Daniels & Leaper, 2006). Therefore, peers are of central importance in adolescents' well-being (Oberle et al., 2009). It has been documented that consumption and marketplace behaviour can be utilised by teenagers as a means of gaining peer acceptance (Cody, 2013).

Cody (2013) empirically demonstrated the interplay between both heightened self-consciousness and an increased desire for peer acceptance in the consumption behaviour of 'tween' girls (aged 11-12) about to enter secondary school in Ireland. It was reported that through imagining peer reactions to owned goods (such as school stationery) and the potential social consequences which could subsequently arise, the tweens altered their consumption behaviour to achieve peer acceptance (Cody, 2013). For example, one participant altered her consumption behaviour from buying "fancy girly" pencil sharpeners (in primary school) to buying plain stationery (when entering secondary) to be perceived as more mature and avoid ridicule from peers (Cody, 2013, p.84). As such, teenagers harness consumption as a means of gaining peer acceptance. This means they recognise that the goods they own can act as a symbolic representation of the self, and therefore can be interpreted to display identity (John, 1999).

Indeed, identity formation has been noted as the key developmental task during adolescence (Klimstra et al., 2010; Lloyd, 2002; van Doeselaar et al., 2020). As a child grows into a teenager, they begin to take autonomous control over their lives, and therefore start to define their identity (Boyes & Chandler, 1992). As such, they begin to decide who they are, and who they will be. Personal identity can be likened to a narrative and defined as "an internalized life story that answers the question who one is and integrates one's past, present, and future" (van Doeselaar et al., 2020, p.819). The process of creating this narrative and forming one's identity is influenced by both the direct environment of the adolescent (including family members and peers), as well as indirect environments, including the media (van Reijmersdal & van Dam, 2020).

Teenagers are constantly seeking out information about themselves from their direct environment to construct their identity. They firstly internalise their parents' views on who they are, then seek out and accept their peers' view of who they are, until they eventually determine their own view of themselves (Lloyd, 2002). The process of identity formation then continues to evolve over time as individuals incorporate new life experiences from their direct environment into their view of self (Lloyd, 2002).

In terms of their indirect environment, adolescents rely on information from the media as a tool for understanding themselves as well as others (Lloyd, 2002). SM has been noted as an important socialisation agent in the indirect environment (Wang et al., 2012). Adolescents are exposed to a near constant stream of information on SM, giving them direct access to the lives, thoughts, and opinions of not only peers which they know personally (direct environment), but also to a wider network of 'unknown' others such as celebrities and SM stars such as influencers (indirect environment). It is also possible to harness the interactive nature of SM to practice and rehearse interactions with peers (Lloyd, 2020; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). This is important within identity formation because adolescents experiment with behaviour to

ascertain what other people like/dislike about them (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). They can also witness the interactions of others on SM, like peers and influencers, to learn what is appropriate behaviour (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019), or indeed, what kinds of behaviour are rewarded by others. On SM, rewards can take the form of likes, follows and positive comments. Those who attract a lot of positive reinforcement on SM (i.e., who attract a large following and receive large quantities of likes and comments) are often influencers. Influencers are associated with a "luxurious life through high-end fashion items, holidays in exotic locations … and expensive dinners at famous restaurants" (Chae, 2017, p.247). As such, a lot of their content (and indeed, job description) is centred around showcasing the consumption of goods, services, and brands. Therefore, an adolescent could internalise that goods/services/brands can facilitate identity formation and attract positive peer interactions.

Indeed, consumers of all ages use goods not just for their utilitarian value, but as a crutch to aid in the management and construction of identity and self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Swaminathan et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2017). But this effect may be especially heightened for teenagers who are hyper-aware of others' perspectives and believe they are the focus of others' attention (Daniels & Leaper, 2006; John, 1999). For this age group, consumption may be especially valued for displaying group identity and achieving conformity with reference groups. Reference group influence is described as "the need for psychological association with a group either to resemble the group or due to a liking for the group" (Escalas & Bettman, 2005, p.379). Because teenagers have an increased desire for peer acceptance, their consumption behaviour is especially influenced by their peers and reference groups. These groups play a principal role in influencing the expressive aspects of their consumer behaviour (Lachance et al., 2003). The result is often that adolescents want *particular* goods from *specific* popular, prestigious brands displayed by their peers and reference groups, rather than generic products (Lachance et al., 2003). This in turn can place

economic burden on parents (Lachance et al., 2003). Given the self-expressive and performative nature of SM where users post about their lives and belongings, pressures to conform with the norms and expectations of peers are emphasised on this platform (Wang et al., 2012). Therefore, teenagers may feel pressured to consume the goods and services which are displayed by peers, reference groups and influencers on SM to construct and maintain their identity.

Taken together, defining features of adolescence including heightened self-consciousness and identity formation are likely to influence how teenagers function as consumers, and therefore their consumer socialisation. This contributes to an increased desire for peer acceptance and, therefore, conformity with the norms and expectations of reference groups. Consumption may be used as a means of navigating conformity with peers, since adolescents recognise the symbolic and expressive value within goods (John, 1999). Therefore, adolescents alter their consumption behaviour to align with the imagined reactions of peers to manage potential social consequences (Cody, 2013).

Although they are more cognitively developed than younger children, teenagers have not reached adult benchmarks of AL (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Pre-occupation with peer acceptance might make adolescents susceptible to advertising, particularly tactics which emphasise conformity or which harness peer communication (such as the utilisation of earned media or influencer marketing on SM). As Zarouali et al. (2018c, p.502) note: "peer influence might be an important force that affects the way adolescents respond to the ads they encounter on SNSs, possibly making them more vulnerable to persuasion effects". As such, not enough is known about adolescents' AL (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Zarouali et al., 2019), particularly in the contemporary media environment of SM where adolescents are targeted by advertising which leverages peer and reference group influence. Authors are therefore

emphasising the importance of AL research including adolescent samples (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020).

Recent studies have started to address the gap in research on teenagers' AL in the context of SM (e.g., De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; Lawlor et al., 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020), but these studies tend to focus on early adolescence, i.e., ages 10-14. Other studies in this context sample a very broad age range when studying the AL of teenagers, including samples aged 12-18 (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018); 12-17 (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020); and 12-16 (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Therefore, not enough is known about the AL of *middle* adolescents, namely young people occupying the middle teenage years. Only one study has investigated the AL of middle adolescents on SM – van Reijmersdal & van Dam (2020) who used two samples: one cohort aged 15-16 and another aged 12-14. Therefore, this is a largely under-researched area.

2.5.1 Middle Adolescence as a Pertinent Age Group for AL Research

Middle adolescence refers to those who are aged 15 to 17, according to the State Adolescent Health Resource Centre (SAHRC, 2013). There are two other stages of adolescence: early adolescence (aged 10-14) and late adolescence/young adulthood (aged 18-24) (SAHRC, 2013). Middle adolescents represent an important age group for inclusion in AL studies in the context of SM due to several characteristics associated with this age group (SAHRC, 2013):

1. *Adjusting to a sexually maturing body and feelings:* by middle adolescence, puberty is completed, and adolescents start to explore their ability to attract romantic partners, resulting in concerns about sexual attractiveness (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). The implication for an AL study is that such concerns can add to the already high levels of

self-consciousness felt by adolescents. This could make middle adolescents particularly vulnerable to advertising, particularly ads which make self-esteem and appearance appeals.

2. *Growth in abstract thought:* new thinking skills develop at this stage, whereby middle adolescents can think in multiple dimensions; about possibilities; and can see things as relative rather than absolute (SAHRC, 2013). This has implications for moral AL, as the ability to consider concepts in relative rather than absolute terms may lend itself to an ability to judge the appropriateness of advertising as it occurs in specific contexts, utilises particular tactics, or is targeted at specific groups.

3. *Self-involvement*: in middle adolescence, teenagers are noted as being very self-absorbed. Self-involvement alternates between a poor self-concept and unrealistically high expectations of oneself (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). Egocentrism continues, whereby there is a feeling of an imaginary audience (SAHRC, 2013). Taken together, this age group feels especially self-conscious in comparison to other stages (Spano, 2004), and therefore may be vulnerable to advertising which plays on this.

4. *Interest in moral reasoning*: middle adolescents are increasingly able to take the perspectives of others into account and therefore have an interest in moral reasoning, making them a particularly pertinent age group to focus on when exploring moral AL (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). At this stage, adolescents re-examine personal values and moral principles, develop their own ideals and select role models (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). The relationship between selecting role models and development of moral principles is an interesting interplay and could have implications for how they

respond to advertising which features role models like celebrities, influencers, and even fellow peers.

5. *Strong emphasis of the peer group*: at this stage, peer groups become especially important as teenagers seek strong alliances and have an increasing tendency to group peers into cliques, compared to other stages of adolescence (SAHRC, 2013). Therefore, the feeling of belonging to a particular group is paramount for teenagers of this age (Spano, 2004). This could leave middle adolescents reluctant to activate AL as a defence in response to SM advertising strategies which emphasise group membership and conformity. For example, brands often utilise earned media within their communications strategy on SM by providing consumers with a dedicated hashtag to use which signals membership in a type of 'branded' group. For instance, Nasty Gal (online clothing retailer) ask their SM followers to use the hashtag '#NastyGalsDoItBetter' when uploading UGC featuring their products. Regular consumers therefore fulfil the role of brand ambassador, signalling membership within this clique to their own peers. The result is that peers may also desire to belong to this clique, and therefore become a patron of Nasty Gal in order to upload their own branded UGC in order to signal membership of this group. Nasty Gal regularly rewards this behaviour by sharing the branded UGC on their own SM channels, thus showcasing the consumer as an exemplary 'Nasty Gal' within the clique. As such, owned media may emphasise conformity within peer groups, and middle adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to this kind of appeal.

Therefore, the middle stage of adolescence is marked by especially heightened self-consciousness and self-absorption; development of sexual identity; growth in abstract thought

and moral reasoning; as well as a particularly strong emphasis on belonging to social groups. Taken together, middle adolescents (aged 15-17) form a pertinent age group for inclusion within AL research, as these characteristics may affect their development and deployment of AL. Furthermore, this age group have also been reported to spend almost twice as much time online than their younger counterparts (EU Kids Online, 2020). Therefore, most middle adolescents spend more time online and using SM than younger children.

Although middle adolescents are more cognitively developed than younger children (e.g., a growth in abstract thought and a heightened ability to take others' perspectives), other developments which are ongoing may undermine their ability, or indeed, motivation to apply AL. Even though this age group are in the formal operational stage of cognitive development (John, 1999), aspects of advertising which appeal to identity formation, self-esteem or reference group influence could still evade critical reflection because middle adolescents are also deeply concerned with their attractiveness, being part of a clique and are highly self-conscious. Overall, middle adolescents have not received enough research attention in the literature, yet there are several hallmarks associated with this age group which could make them vulnerable to advertising, as discussed. This doctoral study addresses the gap by focusing on middle adolescence when exploring AL in the new media environment of SM.

2.6 Conclusion

AL is described in the literature as a skill which aids young consumers to 'cope' with advertising (Hudders et al., 2016; Young, 2003; Zarouali, et al., 2019) through the development and use of cognitive, affective, and moral information nodes (Hudders et al., 2017). This skill is essential to young consumers to empower their response to advertising and guard against implicit persuasion (Nairn & Fine, 2008; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006).

AL is recognised to manifest in two forms: (1) as an associative network about advertising in general (dispositional AL); and (2) as a behavioural response whereby this network is retrieved and applied during exposure to advertising (situational AL) (De Pauw et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019). The significance of classifying AL in this manner means that a clear distinction is drawn between conceptual knowledge about advertising, and the actual use of this knowledge as a response during exposure, addressing critiques present in the literature (e.g., Hoek et al., 2020; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Dispositional AL has been described as a prerequisite to situational AL (De Pauw et al., 2019), but so far there is a dearth of research which investigates both of these manifestations amongst a single sample of participants. Therefore, as of yet, it is unclear how these manifestations interplay or work together (Hudders et al., 2017).

Furthermore, there are three dimensions of AL: cognitive, affective, and moral (Hudders et al., 2017). Cognitive AL has received most research attention (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) but critics argue that cognitive ability does not necessarily lead to a reduction in advertising effects (Nairn & Fine, 2008). Affective AL is predominantly recognised as a learned disliking of, and scepticism towards, advertising (Hoek et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2016) which makes critical response a less cognitively taxing task for young consumers (De Pauw et al., 2017). However, a new school of thought acknowledges that attitudes towards advertising can be positive (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Hudders et al., 2017), therefore marking a lack of consensus as to what this dimension entails. Finally, moral AL refers to the ability and propensity to question the moral appropriateness of advertising (De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017) and is the dimension of AL which has received least research attention. This dimension may be particularly important, because if young people critique the appropriateness of incoming advertising messages, it may propel them to enact AL as a defensive filter (Hudders et al., 2017). However, this has yet to be explored within empirical research.

In terms of how the skill of AL is developed, it is said to rest on the establishment of several cognitive, information-processing and socialisation milestones which occur over time with age and exposure to socialisation agents (John,1999). Because of the more mature cognitive abilities of adolescents, as well as their increased experience with/exposure to advertising in comparison to younger children, there is an assumption in the literature that teenagers have competent levels of AL and are therefore less susceptible to advertising (Zarouali et al., 2019).

However, not enough is known about this. It could be that defining features of adolescence such as identity formation, heightened self-consciousness, and an increased desire for peer acceptance (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006) impede teenagers' ability or motivation to retrieve and apply AL. A research agenda exists for the exploration of middle adolescents' AL, as this age group have received little research attention, and are particularly concerned with conforming with peer groups and their own sexual attractiveness, resulting in increased self-consciousness in comparison to other stages of adolescence (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004).

Furthermore, although relevant cognitive structures may be in place, it is not guaranteed that AL and other consumer related abilities have developed by certain ages or are retrieved at appropriate times. It is posited that these skills occur over time with socialisation and exposure to specific advertising techniques (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2016; John, 1999; Nairn & Fine, 2008). For example, it has been found that even adults struggle to identify embedded advertising online when they are not socialised to such techniques (Spiteri Cornish, 2014).

Thus, it is imperative that the *criteria* necessary for the development of AL are disentangled from its *activation* as a defence mechanism (Hoek et al., 2020). Many authors imply that once cognitive and social criteria are in place, AL exists as an active defence mechanism, i.e., the cognitive defence view (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, it's retrieval and

application have been found to rest on external factors such as the context of the advertisement and the existence of cues, rather than being predicated on cognitive and social developments alone. The emergence of embedded advertising techniques (e.g., native advertising and IM) are therefore considered as possible 'road-blocks' hindering recognition of commercial content, thereby obstructing the successful application of a critical evaluation. In these cases, young people's AL may be inadequate at acting as a successful defence mechanism. Some authors have even posited that a different type of literacy may be required in these contexts (Lawlor et al., 2016).

Therefore, the application of AL may be significantly more complicated in light of advertising practices in use in the context of SM. The following chapter reviews the literature in this regard.

Chapter Three: Advertising Literacy in a Social Media Context

3.1 Introduction

To date, most of the research on AL has focused on traditional media platforms such as television, radio, and print media (Lawlor et al., 2016; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Owen et al., 2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2005). The context of television has received most research attention, while research on AL in new media contexts like SM has received less empirical research attention. This does not reflect the current advertising climate, where advertising can be interwoven within SM newsfeeds where it may not always be recognisable (Kim & Kim, 2021).

Therefore, this chapter focuses on reviewing the extant AL literature in the context of the contemporary SM landscape. Specifically, it will consider the nature of 'new advertising' contexts, before focusing on the blurred and oblique nature of SM advertising. Within this section, the range of media and voices which are blended within SM advertising strategies are explained through the lens of paid, owned and earned media. A discussion is next presented on the manifestations of SM advertising which have been considered in the AL literature (i.e., overt and covert advertising). Next, the nature of a primary form of covert advertising within SM, influencer marketing (IM), will be discussed, owing to the challenges it may pose for teenagers' AL. Following this, defining features of SM, including its opt-in nature, high levels of personalisation, and its facilitation of embedded advertising are discussed in terms of how they may implicate the development and deployment of AL. Finally, a conceptual framework is presented, which maps out the key variables and constructs discussed in the literature review (Chapters Two and Three), also proposing how they might relate to each other

3.2 Advertising in a 'New' Context

Young peoples' AL in the context of SM is an under-researched area (Lawlor et al., 2016). Considering that children and teenagers now largely do not engage with television but consume their media online (Ofcom, 2020) with 95% of children using SM by the time they turn 15 (Ofcom, 2021), this is a research gap which requires urgent attention. Given that this study focuses on SM advertising, it is important to investigate its nature and how it relates to other advertising formats.

While a plethora of terms can be used to describe advertising contexts which fall outside the parameters of traditional advertising, the most used term in the academic literature is '*new advertising*' (see Table 3.1). This categorisation includes SM advertising such as pop-up advertising, pre-roll advertising, native advertising, and influencer marketing; as well as other advertising contexts, such as advergames; product/brand placement in music videos, movies, games and online environments; and branded websites (De Jans, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2019; De Pauw et al., 2017; Freeman & Shapiro, 2014; Hudders et al., 2016; Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; van Reijmersdal et al., 2012).

Table 3.1 illustrates how the same authors use a number of terms interchangeably. For example, De Pauw et al. (2017) use the terms 'new advertising' and 'contemporary advertising' interchangeably, while Hudders et al. (2016) fluctuate between the terms 'embedded advertising', 'new advertising', 'non-traditional advertising' and 'contemporary advertising'.

New advertising formats break down or blur the boundaries between advertising and non-advertising content by embedding promotional material amongst interactive, engaging content (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2019; Hoek et al., 2020; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020; Verhellen et al., 2014).

Table 3.1: *Terms in Use in the Literature to Describe Advertising Contexts Outside the Parameters of Traditional Advertising.*

Term	Authors
New	De Jans, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2018; De Pauw et al., 2017; Freeman & Shapiro, 2014; Hudders, Cauberghe & Panic, 2016; Hudders et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Panic, Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2013; Rozendaal, Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2011; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2012; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020; Verhellen, Oates, De Pelsmacker & Dens, 2014
Contemporary	De Pauw, De Wolf, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2017; Hudders, Cauberghe & Panic, 2016; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Panic, Cauberghe & De Pelsmacker, 2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, van Reijmersdal & Buijzen, 2011.
Embedded	An & Stern, 2011; An, Jin & Park. 2014; Hudders et al., 2016; Hudders et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2013; Rozendaal, Slot, van Reijmersdal & Buijzen, 2013; van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, Hudders, Vanwesenbeeck, Cauberghe & van Berlo, 2020
Implicit	Büttner, Florack & Serfas, 2013; Freeman & Shapiro, 2014
Covert	Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Freeman & Shapiro, 2014; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Owen et al., 2013; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020
Non-traditional	Ali, Blades, Oates & Blumberg 2009; De Jans, Cauberghe, & Hudders 2018; Hudders et al., 2016; Nelson, 2016; Owen et al., 2013, Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Spiteri Cornish, 2014; van Reijmersdal et al., 2012; Vanwesenbeeck, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2016
Online	An et al., 2014; Büttner et al., 2013; Lawlor et al., 2016; Moore & Rideout, 2007; Nairn & Fine, 2008; Shin, Huh & Faber, 2012; Spiteri Cornish, 2014; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; van Reijmersdal, Fransen, van Noort, Opree, Vandeberg, Reusch, et al., 2016; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016

Source: developed by the author

3.3 The Blurred & Oblique Nature of SM Advertising

An emerging debate within the literature relates to the definition of SM advertising. Specifically, it is suggested that 'advertising' can be defined too narrowly in a SM context, whereby the tendency is only to consider paid media, thus overlooking the presence of owned and earned media (Voorveld, 2019).

In the past, marketing communications had a linear nature, whereby marketing managers used a one-to-many approach to disseminate firm-generated advertising (paid media) to target audiences via traditional media like newspapers, billboards, and television (Gensler et al., 2013). But only considering paid media in definitions of SM advertising does not reflect the current SM advertising climate which blends a range of voices and media to create an integrated brand story co-created by the brand, consumers, and online opinion-leaders like influencers. A more all-encompassing definition needs to take this into account (Voorveld, 2019). One such definition is provided by Alhabash et al. (2017, p.5), who define SM advertising as: "any piece of online content designed with a persuasive intent and/or distributed via a social media platform that enables Internet users to access, share, engage with, add to, and co-create". This definition therefore goes beyond paid media to also include owned and earned media as a form of SM advertising.

Essentially, on SM, brand-centred messages can emerge from the brand owner, but also parties external to the brand including influencers and consumers. This is significant because the AL discourse has traditionally and overwhelmingly focused on awareness and understanding of the advertiser's perspective. Messages which emerge from other parties, namely influencers and consumers, have received far less attention and this theme will therefore be developed through the lens of paid, owned, and earned media (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016).

3.3.1 Paid, Owned & Earned Media

Paid media refers to brand-driven advertising, in other words the practice where marketers pay SM platforms to behaviourally target consumers through a range of different advertising strategies (Alhabash et al., 2017). The use of overt (pop-up and pre-roll ads) and covert (native advertising and influencer marketing) advertising can be classified as paid media.

Furthermore, marketers put time and energy into curating owned brand profiles on SM where they share content designed to draw attention to the brand which users can interact with and contribute to (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016; Voorveld, 2019). This practice is known as 'owned media' (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016). Marketers utilise owned media to "engage with loyal consumers and influence individuals' perceptions about their products, spread information and learn from and about their audience" (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015, p.33). Owned SM profiles offer brands an opportunity to become involved in online communities, thereby fostering relationships with target consumers and increasing brand equity (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). This means that owned media is generally marked by relevance, novelty, and entertainment, which motivates consumers to engage with it (Alhabash et al., 2017).

Where users engage with or create eWOM and user-generated content (UGC) related to a brand, it is known as 'earned media' (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016). This can emerge from consumers, but also influencers where they curate brand-centred content without input or compensation from a sponsoring brand. Although earned media emerges from SM users external to the brand and is therefore not in the brand's control (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015), marketing actions are used to help stimulate it (Stephen & Galak, 2012). Brands can therefore use eliciting tactics to stimulate the creation of earned media, such as a branded competition which requires entrants to share brand-centred UGC on SM. Conversely, earned media can also be organically generated by users who enjoy creating their own (or adding to marketer-generated) brand stories (Gensler et al., 2013). This means that regular consumers can act as brand ambassadors in a SM context (Lawlor et al., 2016).

Earned media is an important element of SM advertising strategies because WOM is recognised to affect most consumer purchase decisions (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010) since consumers value the opinion of peers above brand-driven (paid and owned) media (De

Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Ye et al., 2021). Because of the heavy influence that earned media can have on consumer decision making (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010), brands leverage favourable earned media on SM by incorporating it into their own brand-driven (paid and owned) media strategies (Alhabash et al., 2017). As a result, the 'source' of SM advertising takes on a fluid nature.

For example, where brands share earned media within their owned SM channels, who is the source? Is it the brand who re-shared it, or the consumer who originally authored the content? If other consumers like, comment or re-share the content on their own SM profile, do they become the source? There are no clear, univocal answers to these questions. Such is the unique nature of SM advertising, where "distinctions between sender, message, channel, and user are blurring, if not fading away" (Alhabash et al., 2017, p.10). In a context where users, brands and influencers can all equally author, share, co-create and add to brand stories, "distinguishing persuaders from persuaded is hard – if not impossible" (Alhabash et al., 2017, p.10).

Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to a particular format of covert advertising, influencer marketing (IM), when discussing the paid, owned and earned model, because some authors have highlighted that IM is a "hybrid of paid and earned advertising" (Kim et al, 2021, p.121). The format of IM mimics eWOM in many ways, leading to palpable concern that it may not be recognised as paid media by young consumers (see Section 3.4.2). However, aside from its covert format, IM can also be compared to earned media in other ways. Although, within IM, compensation and editorial control are present from the sponsoring brand (De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2019), a good deal of editorial control still lies in the influencer's hands because they are trusted to know best what will appeal to their audience (Hudders et al, 2021), thus comparable to WOM. Furthermore, influencers have high credibility, owing to perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and knowledge (in a particular topic area) (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, IM requires especial attention in current AL research to

understand how young consumers cope with this hybrid advertising format (Ye et al., 2021), as well as to understand how they classify it (e.g., as paid media, earned media, or a hybrid of both). This classification could have important implications for the deployment of AL in this context, since if IM is seen as earned media (or indeed, as a hybrid of paid and earned media), then defence mechanisms may not be applied in the same way as they are to paid media.

Now that the paid, owned and earned nature of SM advertising has been discussed, the following section examines it's overt and covert manifestations.

3.4 Manifestations of SM Advertising

In broad terms, SM advertising can be classified into overt and covert formats. Overt advertising refers to advertisements which clearly identify the presence and nature of the ad. Such advertising often interrupts the user and therefore could be seen as disruptive in nature (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017). As such, these ads are viewed as being 'pushed' onto the consumer (Kelly et al., 2010). Examples include pop-up and pre-roll advertising which one must either watch, or else take an action to 'skip' the ad. Covert advertising, on the other hand, is embedded within SM newsfeeds and therefore is of a more implicit nature as it emulates the style of organic SM content (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). As a result, the commercial nature of the message or advertiser may be more difficult to identify for children and adults alike (Evans et al., 2018). Examples of covert advertising include native advertising and influencer marketing. These covert advertising approaches have been described as being embedded, subtle, hidden (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019) and also as "softer, less overt, and more authentic advertising approaches" (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p.2). Covert advertising has a "look and feel" as though it has been created by the publisher (e.g., influencer) rather than the advertiser, making

it challenging to identify the source and intent of the message (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020, p.292). Furthermore, because many consumers seek out and follow influencers they are interested in (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Ye et al., 2021), the term 'pull' can be used to describe the way in which consumers are drawn to such content (Halim, et al., 2008).

Table 3.2 classifies SM advertising according to its manifestation, push/pull nature, media categorisation and source. The remaining sections of this chapter are dedicated to identifying and explaining the implications which each characteristic of SM advertising within the Table (e.g., push/pull nature) may have on the development and deployment of AL.

Table 3.2: *Classification of SM Advertising Strategies.*

Advertising format	Manifestation	Nature	Media Categorisation	Source
Display ads (includes banner ads and side-rail ads)	Overt	Push	Paid	Brand
Pop-up ads	Overt	Push	Paid	Brand
Pre-roll ads	Overt	Push	Paid	Brand
Native advertising (includes sponsored newsfeed posts & sponsored 'stories')	Covert	Push	Paid	Brand
Promoted tweets/accounts/trends	Covert	Push	Paid	Brand
Social ads	Overt and/or covert	Push	Paid	Brand
Influencer Marketing	Covert	Pull	Paid	Influencer speaking on behalf of brand
Affiliate Marketing	Covert	Pull	Paid	Spokesperson speaking on behalf of brand
Owned Media	Covert	Pull	Owned	Brand
Social Games	Covert	Push	Owned	Brand
Earned Media	Covert	Pull	Earned	• Consumer/SM user • Influencer engaging in organic WOM

Source: adapted from the following:

Lawlor, M., Dunne, Á., & Rowley, J. (2016). Young consumers' brand communications literacy in a social networking site context. *European Journal of Marketing*, *50*(11), 2018-2040. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ejm-06-2015-0395

Stephen, A., & Galak, J. (2012). The Effects of Traditional and Social Earned Media on Sales: A Study of a Microlending Marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *49*(5), 624-639. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1480088

Tuten, T., & Solomon, M. (2018). *Social media marketing* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Voorveld, H. (2019). Brand Communication in Social Media: A Research Agenda. *Journal of Advertising, 48*(1), 14-26. doi: 10.1080/00913367.2019.1588808

Overt manifestations of SM advertising will first be discussed.

3.4.1 Overt Advertising on SM

Overt advertising disrupts the SM user as it requires an action (such as a click) to exit the ad and tends to envelop users' screens. Pop-up advertisements can be categorised as overt as they are windows that appear on a webpage which force the user "to interrupt their task, scroll past ads, or close the pop-up/pop-under windows" (McCoy et al., 2007, p.85). Furthermore, pre-roll advertising refers to video ads which play before selected editorial videos on SM (De Pauw et al., 2017). These kinds of advertising could be viewed as invasive because they 'invade' the users' online space and disrupt their activity. For example, pre-roll advertisements sometimes contain timers which prevent users from exiting until the timer has elapsed.

Surprisingly, little AL research has been conducted in the context of overt advertising on SM. This could be because most AL studies conducted in a SM context have only emerged in recent years (circa 2016). Therefore, these studies have tended to focus on more recently developed advertising strategies, like native advertising and IM. However, of those which do report on overt advertising, the consensus is that consumers can easily recognise these ad formats and tend to feel negative towards them (De Pauw et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2010; Lawlor et al., 2016; Spiteri Cornish, 2014). Negative attitudes are associated with the interruptive nature of such advertising (De Pauw et al., 2017), as well as perceived irrelevance (Kelly et al., 2010; Lawlor et al., 2016; Spiteri Cornish, 2014).

Although most studies reported that overt advertising was easily recognised by participants (De Pauw et al., 2017; Spiteri Cornish, 2014), one study found that an adolescent sample (12-14) overestimated their ability to identify it (Lawlor et al., 2016). Specifically, although the participants described such advertising in conversation, when it came to participant observation it emerged that they did not always recognise it when they were exposed to it (Lawlor et al., 2016). This is interesting and suggests that a gap may have been present between the

participants' dispositional (general knowledge) and situational AL (retrieval and application of AL during exposure), furthering the impetus for more research which reports on both manifestations of AL amongst young consumers.

Overall, arising from studies which investigate consumers' cognitive and affective AL in the context of overt advertising, a consensus is that consumers are aware of these formats, but that they find them irritating and strive to avoid them (Kelly et al., 2010; Spiteri Cornish, 2014). However, not enough is known about moral evaluations of these strategies. Hudders et al. (2017) contend that moral AL determines how cognitive and affective AL are applied. If a consumer evaluates an advertisement as fair (e.g., by drawing on the perspective of the business owner), it could cause them to empathise with the marketer's agenda and therefore to evaluate the advertisement positively, even where it disrupts their media consumption. As such, further exploration of AL in the context of SM overt advertising is warranted since it has received relatively little research attention.

A further manifestation of advertising on SM is covert advertising.

3.4.2 Covert Advertising on SM

Online users are rarely engaged in one task, but rather are often multi-tasking or engaging in frequent task-switching (Alhabash et al., 2017). In other words, they are often engaged in multiple activities at the same time online and spend an average of just 19 seconds on a single task (Alhabash et al., 2017). Given that consumers dislike overt advertising and view it as a type of clutter (De Pauw et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2010; Lawlor et al., 2016; Spiteri Cornish, 2014; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016), it is likely they will not pay attention to it and will instead switch to another task. In the new advertising climate, consumers are empowered to decide for themselves what information they avoid (e.g., by installing ad-blockers) and which information

is needed within decision-making (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). Thus, marketers have developed softer and more authentic ways to reach their target audiences online, and on SM (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). As such, they have developed "covert and embedded" advertising approaches which have an integrated nature and are less disruptive to SM users (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020, p.353). As a result, consumers may need to develop new techniques and skills to cope with advertising which is not easily recognisable (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020). Native advertising and IM are covert advertising formats on SM.

Native Advertising: Native advertising takes the form and function of non-advertising content (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016, p.1459) and accounted for approximately 60% of all US digital-display ad spending in 2019 (Hwang & Jeong, 2020). It is referred to interchangeably as 'sponsored content' and 'sponsored posts' within the literature (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Native advertising has been described as "cohesive", "integrated" and as resembling "news, feature stories, and product reviews" (An et al., 2019, p.998), thereby acting as a means of reaching target audiences in a more embedded and less disruptive fashion. Other authors describe it as a form of advertising which is "cohesive with the page content, assimilated into the design, and consistent with the platform behaviour" (Hwang & Jeong, 2020, p.212). Although native advertising might result in less irritation from audiences thanks to its integrated nature, there is concern regarding consumers' ability to recognise it as a form of advertising (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2016; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Pauw et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2021; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016).

Specifically, it has been said that "native advertising can confuse consumers about a communication source and the payment nature by blurring the editorial-commercial content boundary" (Kim & Kim, 2021, p.406). As such, the appropriateness of this kind of advertising

has been questioned in the literature, because if a consumer cannot identify an advertisement, it follows that they will fail to enact critical reflection in line with the PKM (Boerman et al., 2017; De Pauw et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020). A predominant area of research in this context has therefore focused on testing the effectiveness of disclosures at expediting ad recognition (see Section 3.6.3).

Preliminary empirical results suggest that even adults struggle to identify native ads. For example, in a paper which sampled adults (aged 19-73 years), just 7% in the first study and 18.3% in the second study identified native ads as a form of advertising (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). These findings are worrying because if adults struggle to identify native advertising, it is likely that this will be heightened amongst younger cohorts. Authors have expressed concern in this regard about adolescents in particular (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020; Zarouali et al., 2017). Adolescents have high exposure to covert advertising as a result of their heavy use of SM, but a response to these ad types requires high amounts of cognitive elaboration and emotional disengagement which adolescents may not possess (Hudders et al., 2017; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020).

Native advertising may also be considered a "double-edged sword" (Lee et al., 2016, p.1426), given that although it is non-intrusive (thus escaping consumer irritation associated with overt advertising), it could be viewed as manipulative (Hwang & Jeong, 2020). Specifically, consumers may perceive it as a way for marketers to disguise their promotional messages and subsequently consider this to be deceptive. As such, an area deserving of research attention is the exploration of how consumers evaluate the appropriateness of native advertising (i.e., moral AL) as this may shed insight into their motivation to critically reflect upon it (Hudders et al., 2017). Indeed, one study reported that where the format of native advertising was highly similar to surrounding editorial content, adult participants judged it as deceptive (Hwang & Jeong, 2020).

A format of covert advertising which evokes particular concern within the literature is IM.

Influencer Marketing: The contemporary advertising environment has adapted to include endorsements from online role models known as SM influencers. IM has been labelled as a type of native advertising because it generally aims to mimic organic, editorial posts and appears on SM without interrupting the user's experience (De Veirman et al., 2017; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). As such, it has been classified as a type of covert advertising (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Ye et al., 2021).

IM is "a relatively new marketing communication tool" (Ye et al., 2021, p.161) and can be defined as "a form of marketing in which brands forge alliances with SM influencers to promote their products or services" (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018, p. 309). It can also be described as where influencers are "approached by advertisers to endorse products, brands, organizations, or ideas on their SM profiles" (Hudders et al., 2021, p.2). Elsewhere, authors focus on the attractive source characteristics of influencers and define IM as a form of advertising whereby "marketers reach their target audience effectively and deliver a message through a trusted source" (Kim & Kim, 2021, p.405).

Influencers are compensated to endorse brands, either with money or in kind (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). Therefore, influencer content can be considered advertising when two conditions are present: (1) compensation and (2) editorial control. The level of editorial control within IM differs on a case-by-case basis (Hudders et al., 2021). In some cases, the influencer may be provided with just a general set of instructions, whereby they are entrusted to act as content produces and strategists, free to direct the content according to their own style and preference (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). But in other cases, editorial

control may be stricter, whereby the influencer's role is comparable to a celebrity spokesperson and content cannot be posted without being vetted and approved by the sponsored brand (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). IM can take a plethora of formats, including sponsored vlogs (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018); 'grid posts' on Instagram; and 'story' posts (which disappear after 24 hours).

Because consumers understand that brand-driven advertising is biased to portray products favourably, they often value the opinions of peers more (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Ye et al., 2021). A predominant way in which consumers receive the opinion of their peers is through word-of-mouth (WOM). The importance of WOM has been recognised by marketers for decades and it is heralded as one of the most powerful influences on consumer purchase decisions (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010). A way of eliciting favourable electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is to utilise influencers (De Veirman et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2019). To achieve a similar appearance to eWOM, IM is designed to "mimic and blend with organic, non-sponsored posts, appearing in users' news feeds without interrupting their social media experience, unlike non-integrated social media ads" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019, p.2).

Because consumers seek out influencers they admire and find entertaining, IM allows marketers to tap into a highly engaged audience (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Ye et al., 2021). The power of IM stems from the influencer's aspirational reputation and expertise (i.e., source credibility) (Kim et al., 2021), which leads to the perception that IM is more trustworthy than traditional advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Ye et al., 2021).

A key difference between IM and native advertising is that within IM, advertising does not emerge from the brand directly, but rather another source is used to disseminate this covert form of advertising – the influencer. Therefore, in the SM environment, consumers must be

aware that advertising can emerge from sponsored figures external to the brand, whose content they have opted-in to, and actively sought out. Alongside this, influencers are often vague about their relationship with a sponsoring brand (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019) or do not appropriately disclose sponsored content (De Veirman et al., 2019), thus increasing the likelihood that this form of covert advertising goes under the radar (Kim & Kim, 2021). Aside from this, influencers can be sought to endorse brands when they are deemed to be highly congruent with the brand and are 'experts' in the product area, thus bridging the gap between eWOM and advertising (Kim et al., 2021). As such, there is concern in the literature that IM may not be recognised as advertising, but instead as an organic and therefore credible form of eWOM (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; Ye et al., 2021). Consequently, there is a risk that this kind of covert advertising may lead to "deceptive persuasion" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019, p.95).

Children and adolescents are noted as an especially vulnerable group in an IM context (De Veirman et al., 2019). The embedded nature of IM (e.g., a YouTube video or Instagram post) makes it difficult to recognise, but also lowers young consumers' motivation to identify it as advertising since it is integrated in fun-related, interactive, and engaging content (Hudders et al., 2017; De Veirman, et al., 2019; Nairn & Fine, 2008). What is more, the presence and role of IM across SM platforms is especially visible in a teenage context. For example, according to Morning Consult (2019), 72% of US millennials and Gen Z follow influencers. Elsewhere, in a survey of approximately 400 young consumers aged 6-16 years in both the UK and the US, 28% of the sample indicated that friends were the biggest influence on their spending, whilst 25% identified influencers (Wunderman Thompson Commerce, 2019).

Owing to the palpable concern in the literature regarding the challenges IM may pose to the development and deployment of AL (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017; De

Veirman & Hudders, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; Ye et al., 2021), as well as the prevalence of this advertising format amongst teenagers, it is necessary to pay especial attention to this format of covert advertising in this doctoral research. The consideration of IM is also important because collaborative arrangements between influencers and brands means that influencers are essentially conduits or spokespeople for brands, whereas AL was traditionally examined in terms of advertising emanating directly from brands. Alongside this, the attractive source characteristics of influencers may lower young consumers' motivation to critically reflect on the sponsored messages they disseminate. As such, the following section further examines the nature of IM.

3.5 The Nature of Influencer Marketing as a Form of Covert Advertising

To understand the challenges which IM may pose for teenagers' AL, this section will discuss the characteristics of SM influencers, the nature of the relationship between consumer and influencer and how teenagers may utilise influencers for social learning. The section concludes by emphasising the characteristics of this covert advertising format which may militate against AL.

3.5.1 Who are SM Influencers?

Many terms have been given to influential SM users, including 'blogger', 'vlogger', 'YouTuber' and 'Instafamous', though the most widely used term in both theory and practice is 'influencer' (Ye et al., 2021, p.160). Freberg et al. (2011, p. 90) define SM influencers as a category of "independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs,

tweets, and the use of other SM". These individuals are recognised as influential figures on SM, and as such, are regarded as a kind of 'celebrity' to a niche audience (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019). Influencers are seen to include "celebrities, brand community members, bloggers, and experts specialised in specific topics" (Kim & Kim, 2021, p.406) and are considered role models by their followers (De Veirman et al., 2019). Characteristics associated with influencers are: access to a large network of followers (De Veirman et al. 2017; Hudders et al., 2021); the perception of being trustworthy and credible (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al. 2017; van Dam & van Reijmersdal 2019;); time dedicated to actively broadcasting their lives and engaging with their audiences, thereby achieving a close connection with their followers (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Lee & Eastin, 2020); as well as being content producers (Shan et al., 2019).

Influencers are heralded as experts within their domain (such as beauty, fashion, gaming, fitness, health, or food), and their opinion is seen as important to many (Hudders et al., 2021). Central to this status is the creation of an authentic identity, which relates to developing a distinct public image distinguishing them from others (Hudders et al., 2021). This authenticity often emanates from sharing posts which are perceived as being more candid, real, natural, genuine, and personal (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kim et al., 2021), thus contributing to the perception that IM is more authentic than brand-driven advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021).

According to Source Credibility Theory, those with a large number of followers are perceived as attractive and trustworthy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Source credibility refers to how individuals perceive information based on the (1) attractiveness, (2) trustworthiness, and (3) knowledge/expertise of the source (De Veirman et al., 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Influencers are seen as aspirational yet relatable (*attractive*) to their followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019); as *trustworthy* individuals (Campbell & Farrell, 2020;

Hudders et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021) and as ***knowledgeable*** in a niche area (Hudders et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021), thus scoring high on source credibility (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Source credibility translates into positive advertising outcomes, enhancing advertising effectiveness (De Veirman et al., 2019).

3.5.2 The Relationship Between Influencers and their Audiences

Based on the characteristics of influencers, it is perhaps not surprising that followers often develop strong, parasocial relationships with them, frequently perceiving them as being akin to a friend (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman, et al., 2019; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Time spent interacting with influencers and gaining insights into their personal lives provides consumers with opportunities to learn about and identify with them, resulting in influencers being viewed as peers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Hudders et al., 2021; Shan et al., 2019). Eventually, after repeated exposure, the influencer becomes an important part of daily life for their followers, who consider the influencer a friend (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kim et al., 2021). This is known as a parasocial relationship and contributes to making the influencer a particularly important source of information who can impact consumption decisions (De Veirman, et al., 2019).

Because influencers present themselves as having a lot in common with their audience, this contributes to the trustworthiness of recommendations they share and their persuasive appeal, as well as helping to cultivate a strong bond with their audience (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). Influencers engage with their followers by answering their messages, responding to comments, asking them to co-create content, as well as through livestreaming (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011).

Consumers are empowered on SM to choose the information they are exposed to (Kelly et al., 2010; De Veirman et al., 2017) lending itself to the ability to pick and choose what influencers to opt-in to based on personal preference (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Consumers choose to follow influencers based on the niche areas they specialise in (Kim et al., 2021), as well as on the basis of sharing similar traits like age, geographic location and life stage (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This contributes to the close relationship felt by the audience with the influencer and makes targeting afforded through influencers particularly valuable. Audiences are invested in the content which influencers share and may relate closely to them, thus making it possible for brands to target niche groups by utilising these figures (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

While young people turn to influencers for entertainment purposes, they also use information gained from them to assist purchase decision-making (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). As such, influencers are often seen to lend a helping hand by offering useful information which reduces consumer uncertainty (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). This is true even for adults, as empirically demonstrated by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) who found that adults turned to influencers to inform their decisions.

As such, many followers view influencers aspirationally and strive to emulate them (Campbell & Farell, 2020; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Hudders et al., 2021). This means that cultural associations can be transferred from an influencer to a product, whereby consumers are motivated to purchase promoted brands to acquire a desired association (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019). This is known as meaning transfer (De Veirman, et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021). Indeed, buying products based on recommendations from influencers has been shown to increase the self-esteem of adult consumers for this reason (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Altogether, influencers are often seen as important opinion-leaders to their audience, and also are part of "a reference group to consumers, on whom they can exert aspirational, informational, or attachment-driven persuasion" (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p.6). This may make advertising they disseminate (IM) especially powerful in terms of its influence on audiences. This effect may be heightened for teenagers who use influencers for social learning.

3.5.3 Influencers as a Source of Social Learning for Teenagers

Consumer socialisation theory posits that consumers learn consumption-related behaviours through imitating the behaviour of external, environmental sources known as socialisation agents, i.e., social learning (De Veirman et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2012). Given that peer acceptance is especially important for adolescents (Daniels & Leaper, 2006; State Adolescent Health Resource Centre, 2013; Spano, 2004); that influencers have high source credibility (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Kim et al., 2021); form part of reference groups for their followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020) and can be perceived as akin to a friend (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019); it follows that influencers have a heavy influence over teenagers' behaviours, attitudes and norms, possibly even acting as socialisation agents. Teenagers may therefore strive to conform with influencers, modelling their behaviour and utilising them as a source of social learning (De Veirman, et al., 2019).

Teenagers have a high exposure to influencers (Morning Consult, 2019) who are a big influence on their spending (Wunderman Thompson Commerce, 2019). Influencers tend to clearly illustrate what products they use as well as how to use them, thus making it possible for young consumers to model their behaviour (De Veirman, et al., 2019). Given young consumers may desire to emulate the behaviour of these figures, they may be unmotivated to engage in critical

reflection on (sponsored) recommendations they share. As such, the following section highlights the prominent ways in which IM challenges the AL of teenagers, providing urgency for an in-depth exploration of this covert advertising format.

3.5.4 How IM May Militate Against the AL of Teenagers

Having discussed IM as a covert advertising format (see Section 3.4.2); the characteristics of influencers themselves (see Section 3.5.1); the relationship between influencers and their audience (see Section 3.5.2); and how influencers may be used for social learning by teenagers (see Section 3.5.3) it is evident that IM may militate against AL in two predominant ways:

1. IM has a *covert, embedded nature*: Where influencers are paid to speak about a brand on SM, it may be perceived as a form of peer communication or eWOM due to its integrated nature, and design as similar to organic influencer content (De Veirman et al., 2017; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2021). IM has a subtle, less overtly promotional nature than brand-driven advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020) and is designed to appear as more similar to personal influencer content, rather than advertising (Kim & Kim, 2021). In particular, where the promoted brand is congruent with the influencer (i.e., the fit between influencer and product is consistent), this increases the likelihood that IM is misinterpreted as organic content, and as a result reduces resistance and counterargument from audiences (Kim & Kim, 2021). As such, it has been described as a hybrid of paid and earned media (Kim et al., 2021) (see Section 3.3.1 and 3.4.2). This has led authors to advise that it may lead to "deceptive persuasion" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019, p.95).

2. IM emerges from an ***attractive source*** external to, but working on behalf of, the brand: The attractive source characteristics associated with influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) (see Section 3.5.1) lead consumers to pay more attention to IM than traditional advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Therefore, influencers often receive higher responsiveness and trust from their followers in comparison to brand-driven advertising which struggles with consumer avoidance on SM (Kim & Kim, 2021). IM is considered as similar to eWOM by many authors (e.g., Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; Ye et al., 2021). In WOM recommendations, "the listener puts more weight on the *sender* of the message than other aspects of the communication" (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011, p.315). Because teenagers can have parasocial connections with influencers (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2019; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019) adolescents may be unmotivated to engage in counterargument against messaging which emerges from these attractive sources. The relationship young consumers have with the source (i.e., influencer) may instead bear most weight when evaluating the message and result in increased persuasion and advertising effects (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is clear that the ability to respond critically to this kind of covert advertising may not be a straightforward task for middle adolescents who are highly self-conscious and who are particularly concerned with conforming with peers and belonging to a clique (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). Empirical research regarding this advertising format is emerging in recent years, and in an AL context has focused mainly on consumers' ability to recognise and understand IM (cognitive AL) (e.g., De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Hoek et al., 2020; Lou et al., 2020; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; van Reijmersdal & van Dam,

2020). Most of these studies investigate the impact of different disclosure conditions in the context of IM (see Section 3.6.3). To the author's knowledge, only one study has taken a broader approach and reported on all three AL dimensions (cognitive, affective, and moral) in an IM context.

Specifically, van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) indicated that adolescents (aged 14-16) may not be adept at recognising IM (cognitive AL), but they generally feel positive about it (affective AL) and judge it as fair (moral AL). Taken together, this may suggest that adolescents are vulnerable to this kind of covert advertising, since they appear to be positively disposed towards a form of marketing that they fail to always clearly recognise. A resulting implication could be that adolescents are unwilling to apply AL as a defence since they evaluate IM favourably, and in some cases may be unable to do so because they do not recognise IM as advertising. After all, a pre-requisite to critical reflection is the ability to identify advertising (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020).

These findings are comparable to a certain degree to those reported by Djafarova & Rushworth, (2017) who reported on an *adult* sample. They found that although adults were aware of the financial incentive present in IM for influencers, this did not impact the credibility of recommendations given (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, further research is required to understand young consumers' evaluations of this advertising strategy, and to investigate the possible effect of such evaluations on advertising response.

Indeed, the findings from both van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) and Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) support the argument put forward regarding how IM may militate against AL because of attractive source characteristics and its embedded nature. Specially, it could be deduced that the embedded nature was found to pose problems for the cognitive AL of van Dam & van Reijmersdal's (2019) teenage participants, and the attractive and engaging nature of the source

influenced affective and moral AL to be less critical. Similarly, the attractive source characteristics and associated high credibility of influencers left adult consumers unwilling to engage in counterargument in the study conducted by Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), even though they understood influencers were financially compensated.

There is no study to serve as a direct point of comparison for the research carried out by van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) since no others have focused on exploring the three dimensions of AL in the context of IM specifically. However, De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018) investigated the dispositional cognitive, affective, and moral AL of teenagers (aged 12-18) in the context of the 'current commercial media environment', of which IM is one part. They found that adolescents reported low levels of cognitive AL, but high levels of critical moral and affective AL (in that they reported disliking and being sceptical towards advertising). This contrasts with van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) who found that adolescents generally liked IM and did not tend to be sceptical towards it (only in limited situations). Therefore, further research on adolescents' AL in the context of this covert advertising format is required to more clearly understand their ability to identify, understand and critically reflect on this practice, given its challenging nature (i.e., attractive source characteristics and embedded nature).

Indeed, specific calls have been made in the literature to further investigate the AL of young people in the context of IM. For example, Ye et al. (2021) acknowledge that children and adolescents are a vulnerable group who are targeted by IM and therefore call for research to investigate how this group are affected by IM, as well as how their AL might be improved in this context. Furthermore, they note that the "videos, photos, and texts that influencers post on social media and the corresponding reactions by consumers could also be a promising data source for investigating influencer marketing" (Ye et al., 2021, p.172). Most studies in the past have relied solely on consumer self-reporting (Ye et al., 2021) therefore there is a gap for a study to include consumer responses to influencer content as they happen in the moment. These

authors also highlight the requirement for research to shed deeper insight into how the connection between consumer and influencer may impact persuasion knowledge (Ye et al., 2021) and therefore, AL. Elsewhere, De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson (2019) highlight that most research in the context of IM focuses on adult audiences, with only a limited body of knowledge dedicated to understanding how young consumers are affected by IM. This doctoral research will contribute to these gaps by exploring teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of overt and covert SM advertising, thus taking IM into consideration.

3.6 SM's Defining Features: Implications for the Development & Deployment of AL

Having discussed the various media (paid, owned, and earned) utilised in SM advertising approaches and the manifestations of advertising (overt and covert) on SM, it is clear that this media environment has a unique nature in comparison to traditional advertising platforms where advertising is clearly delineated from editorial content. There are many defining features of SM which could pose difficulties for the deployment of AL. These include the opt-in nature of SM; the personalised nature of advertising; and the embedded nature of advertising which emanates there. This final section of the chapter will discuss each in turn.

3.6.1 The Opt-In Nature of SM

By way of avoiding online clutter, consumers in large numbers have installed ad-blocking software (Voorveld et al., 2018). As of 2016, there were 500 million downloads of Adblock Plus (Todri et al., 2020). Consumers download such software because of ad annoyance (Todri

et al., 2020) and concerns relating to security/privacy and invasive advertising (Frik et al., 2019).

Therefore, to overcome the problem of consumers' lack of motivation to pay attention to advertising, marketers have had to adapt their communications on SM to develop content which integrates persuasive brand messaging into novel, entertaining and relevant material, to motivate consumers to pay attention to it (Alhabash et al., 2017; Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Lang, 2006). This marked a shift in SM advertising approaches, whereby marketers have changed the advertising landscape from one where advertising was 'pushed' on consumers (Kelly et al., 2010), to one where consumers can actively seek out and opt-in to content perceived as relevant and useful, including advertising.

For instance, SM users *choose* to follow brand, peer, and influencer profiles, and therefore decide to opt-in to content which emerges from them. Therefore, IM, owned media and earned media can be characterised as 'pull' communications strategies. Pull-based communication provides content to users "based on their willingness and request" (Halim et al., 2008). In these contexts, commercial messages are embedded amongst reviews, tutorials, entertaining videos/visuals, and other kinds of novel and relevant content. As such, users are motivated to engage with it (Alhabash et al., 2017; Eckler & Bolls, 2011) and therefore opt-in.

This contrasts with push advertising strategies, like pop-ups, pre-roll advertising and native advertising, which consumers have little or no say in being exposed to. Although native advertisements have a less disruptive nature than overt advertising since they take "the form of a regular SNS post and are well-embedded in the overall layout of a social network (i.e., on a user's news feed in between other seemingly similar organic posts)" (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020, p.361), the user still has no say in whether they are exposed to this kind of advertising or not. Instead, native ads are placed on users' newsfeeds based on behavioural targeting

(Alhabash et al., 2017), rather than any decision on the consumers' behalf to seek out or opt-in to this content. Therefore, since the user has no facility to opt-in or out of native ads, they can also be conceptualised as push advertising.

In a context where marketers formulate pull advertising strategies to motivate consumers to opt-in, it is plausible (and arguably likely) that consumers may value and enjoy advertising they engage with as a result. This calls into question the application of AL in this context. Specifically, it is arguably a very different task to apply AL as a critical filter against brand messages which manifest in push advertising, than it is to do so in the context of pull advertising content which the user has actively sought out.

A further defining feature of SM which could challenge the deployment of AL is the significant level of personalisation that this online environment facilitates.

3.6.2 The Personalised Nature of SM

To entice SM users to pay attention to advertising, marketers use certain tactics to increase their motivation (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Lang, 2006). One such tactic is increasing the relevance of advertising through personalisation. Advertisers now have access to specific information about individual consumers using tools like cookies, analytics and other tracking, profiling, and targeting practices to enable personalisation of advertising (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). This information can then be used to target consumers with advertising more effectively and systematically, often unbeknownst to the young consumer (Shin et al., 2012; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020).

There are two types of personalisation in use by marketers: targeting (i.e., personalising according to disclosed interests and demographics) and retargeting (i.e., personalising based on specific behaviours exhibited by an online user, such as clicking on or searching for an item)

(Zarouali et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2018b). Concerns are that sophisticated profiling enabled by SM could inhibit young peoples' ability to respond critically to advertising (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Brahim Zarouali acts as a seminal author in this area.

Overall, findings on targeted and retargeted advertising on SM suggest that young people may be vulnerable to this practice. Most studies investigate the situational AL of young consumers in this context, i.e., identification and critical response during exposure. They suggest that adolescents have a higher purchase intention for retargeted ads compared to non-retargeted ads (Zarouali et al., 2017) and struggle to critically respond to situational examples of targeted advertising (Zarouali et al., 2018a; Zarouali, Poels, et al., 2020). Some studies give insight into dispositional AL (i.e., general knowledge, feelings, and evaluations) and also suggest that this manifestation is quite low when it comes to (re)targeted SM advertising (e.g., De Pauw et al., 2017).

For instance, De Pauw et al. (2017) found that children (aged 9-11) did not understand or had not reflected on how retargeting works, although many could recall times when they had experienced it. This suggests that even though children are exposed to retargeting on SM, they do not understand it and therefore have a low dispositional AL when it comes to this strategy. Other studies indicate that this remains true for both teenagers and adults. Specifically, Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al. (2020) found that both adolescents (aged 12-17) and adults (aged 18-25) struggled to understand data collection tactics used within targeted advertising (like collection of real-time location and social contacts). It was only at the age of 20 that this knowledge matured. Taken together, research findings indicate that children, adolescents and even adults up to a point have a low dispositional AL when it comes to targeted advertising as they do not understand how their data is collected, or what kinds of data are being collected and subsequently used within SM advertising.

As such, the targeted and personalised nature of SM poses challenges for the development of dispositional AL (because consumers do not understand how it works) and the deployment of situational AL (because consumers are unmotivated to respond critically to advertising which is tailored to them). Therefore, there is an urgent requirement for further study on both manifestations of AL in this context to more deeply understand how consumers evaluate this strategy. The present study will contribute to achieving this knowledge.

Throughout studies in this area, there is tension between perceived benefits associated with targeted advertising (such as relevance) and detriments (such as privacy intrusion) (Zarouali et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2018b). The privacy calculus model is suggested by Zarouali et al. (2018b) as a theoretical framework which explains how people evaluate situations where their privacy is at stake. This involves conducting a cost-benefit analysis, whereby individuals will evaluate the perceived cost of the invasion of privacy against the benefit it provides (Zarouali et al., 2018b). If costs are seen to exceed benefits, this may result in reactance (Zarouali et al., 2018b), which describes a loss of control and jeopardization of autonomy, and causes unfavourable evaluations (Zarouali et al., 2018a). However, consumers may accept targeted advertising if benefits are seen to exceed costs. This could also have implications for AL, as if benefits are seen to outweigh costs it could lower consumers' motivation to apply AL as a critical filter in this context.

Another defining feature of SM is the integrated and embedded nature of advertising in this venue.

3.6.3 The Embedded Nature of Advertising on SM – the Importance of Disclosures

SM affords marketers with subtle and embedded ways of disseminating advertising. To trigger AL in this context, it is posited that cues/disclosures help to expedite this process (An & Kang,

2013; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). The purpose of a disclosure is to make the "distinction between advertising and content clear so that the commercial nature can be understood by the intended audience" (An & Kang, 2013, p. 656) and to "activate people's understanding of the persuasive nature of sponsored content" (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016, p. 1459). Therefore, the aim of providing a disclosure is to expedite the process of identifying an advertisement, and subsequently trigger critical reflection (i.e., to activate situational AL). Without a disclosure, advertising could be mistaken as organic/editorial content. Disclosures indicate the presence of an external source of interest and compensation (Kim & Kim, 2021) and their use is noted as essential by regulatory bodies like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI).

However, a problem arises due to a lack of uniformity in disclosure format on SM. Using a content analysis, An et al. (2018) reported that disclosures used to signal native advertising were problematic in terms of placement, proximity and clarity. A predominant problem was that disclosures often used terms which the company had invented themselves (such as "brand voice") rather than terms like 'advertisement' as recommended by the FTC (An et al., 2019). Overall, without consistent provision of disclosures (as well as uniformity in their format), it may take young people longer to understand what they mean and subsequently to learn to apply AL on exposure. In line with this, Wojdynski & Evans (2016) reported that native ad disclosures were more effective at expediting ad recognition amongst adults when they used the words 'sponsored' and 'advertising' (rather than 'brand-voice' and 'presented by').

The context of IM, another kind of covert advertising, is also an important area of concern for advertising regulators, who stipulate guidelines for disclosing it. For example, in 2018, the ASAI published a bulletin specifically addressing "bloggers" (i.e., influencers), and outlined appropriate ways to disclose IM (ASAI, 2018). In line with academic literature (e.g., De

Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2019) they stipulate that influencer content is a marketing communication where two conditions are present:

1. Where the influencer is *paid* (via cash or in kind) (ASAI, 2018).
2. Where there is an element of *control* present, i.e., where the influencer is obligated to create content or post a review, for which the brand may have direction over (ASAI, 2018).

According to the ASAI (2018, p.6), methods outlined as appropriate to clearly disclose IM are "hashtags such as #ad; #sp; #spon; #workwith; #paidpartnership, #brandambassador". This is interesting, because use of the term "sponsored" to disclose advertising has been noted elsewhere as deceiving (An et al., 2019). According to the FTC, this term can mislead consumers into thinking that content is just *sponsored* by a brand, rather than being controlled in part by them (An et al., 2019). Therefore, it is noteworthy that the ASAI actively recommend the use of this word as a clear disclosure since they list "#sp" and "#spon" as acceptable disclosures of IM (ASAI 2018, p.6). The lack of consistency across international regulatory bodies is alarming, given that one body deems this disclosure as deceptive (FTC), while another actively recommends it's use (ASAI).

Some academic studies have made recommendations regarding IM disclosure format based on their empirical findings. For example, in terms of expediting *recognition* and *understanding* of IM, authors suggest that disclosures should be placed before advertising content (rather than concurrently) (van Reijmersdal et al., 2020). In contrast, in the context of native advertising, Wojdynski & Evans (2016) reported that disclosures were more effective when they were middle-positioned (rather than top- or bottom-positioned). This also contrasts with guidelines issued by the FTC, as they recommend disclosures to be placed at the top of native advertising (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). Therefore, there is a lack of consensus across research studies. However, perhaps the most striking finding from Wojdynski & Evans (2016) is that only very

few adult participants were successful at identifying native ads (just 17 out of 242 participants in study 1). As such, even adults struggle to identify covert advertising on SM, despite the use of disclosures.

An associated area of interest has been testing the ability of disclosures at expediting the *activation* of AL as a defence, such as triggering scepticism and negative brand attitudes (commonly conceptualised as affective AL by many authors). Some studies concluded that disclosures successfully activated this (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019), but others found that disclosures were not enough and that AL interventions (informational vlogs) were also required (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; Lou et al., 2020). Others reported that disclosures were not effective at increasing cognitive *or* affective AL in an IM context (Hoek et al., 2020), suggesting this is an area of concern.

Even where studies have found that disclosures lead to activation of AL, it does not consistently lower advertising effects (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Specifically, even though counterargument was activated, it was not always followed by negative brand attitude or purchase intent in one out of two studies conducted by van Reijmersdal et al. (2016). Similar findings have been reported on adult samples. For example, Kim & Kim (2021) found that where the advertised product was considered highly congruent with the influencer (i.e., where there was a good fit), adults can perceive IM as a genuine recommendation, thereby reducing negative effects of advertising recognition even when a disclosure was present. In other words, although adults recognised IM as advertising thanks to the presence of a disclosure, this did not necessarily result in counterargument when a high level of congruence was present (Kim & Kim, 2021).

These studies call into question seminal knowledge from the PKM, i.e., that recognition of advertising leads to the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (i.e., critical reflection and

counterargument) (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The studies indicate that even if consumers recognise IM, they may not always seek to detach themselves from it. This warrants further exploration, as it suggests important differences regarding the use of persuasion knowledge in the context of IM in comparison to traditional advertising. Indeed, authors have cautioned that persuasion knowledge may not be successfully applied in the context of IM, due to desirable meanings associated with the source (i.e., meaning transfer) (Kim et al., 2021).

Altogether, the embedded nature of SM advertising has attracted attention from AL researchers due to concerns about young consumers' ability to recognise and understand that they are being advertised to, as well as the tactics at play against them. As is clear from the discussion, results are inconsistent regarding the role of disclosures in activating AL in the context of covert advertising. As this chapter draws to a close, the research agenda and conceptual framework of the present study is next presented.

3.7 Research Agenda & Conceptual Framework

As presented by the discussion within this chapter, the SM landscape provides a very different context for engaging with advertising than traditional means like television or print media. On SM, the user controls the information flow through a new push-pull model (Kelly et al., 2010). This means that consumers can avoid unwanted messages (like overt advertising) in favour of 'pulling' other kinds of advertising towards them by ***opting-in*** to follow chosen brand profiles, influencers, and peers. Pull advertising is often more covert, informative, relevant, entertaining, and novel (Alhabash et al., 2017) because it is embedded in enjoyable contexts (Hudders et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008). But the literature has focused on push advertising, given that most empirical research has been conducted in the context of traditional advertising (Nairn & Fine,

2008; Owen et al., 2013; Lawlor et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2005).

Figure 3.1 reflects the author's conceptual framework. The purpose of this framework is to present a map of the constructs and concepts which emerged in the literature review with a view to illustrating the author's research agenda. The upper part of the framework reflects the 'push' nature of traditional advertising formats which assumes a passive recipient who may be able to recognise the commercial nature of this ad (cognitive AL), which may lead to a perception of the ad being irritating or intrusive (affective AL), resulting in a possible evaluation of the ad as being manipulative (moral AL). Taken together, these three nodes of AL are viewed in the literature to facilitate a change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994) whereby the recipient may be critical towards, and consequently, evade or reject the advertising episode (Hudders et al., 2017).

On the other hand, where consumers actively seek out and opt in to receiving and consuming commercial content (Alhabash et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2010) (e.g., relevant product information emanating from a brand's profile on SM, or from a SM influencer collaborating with a brand), their cognitive, affective, and moral evaluations of such content may be different.

Specifically, the lower part of the framework reflects the present author's perspective. Namely, when consumers *choose* to opt-in to a brand, influencer, or peer profile on SM, they may not expect advertising to emanate from these sources, nor might they recognise the format which it takes. Thus, the risk exists that they may not recognise the content as advertising (cognitive AL). Alongside this, they may enjoy the content (affective AL) since they have chosen to opt-in to it, and altogether consider the experience fair (moral AL). This may leave consumers with

a less critical response, and ultimately, the evasion of the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thus, the consumer's *active* role in seeking out (advertising) content on SM may fundamentally alter the way in which AL is retrieved and applied.

Figure 3.1: *The Conceptual Framework of the Research*.

AL as it is conceptualised in a traditional context (the 'push' model) ...
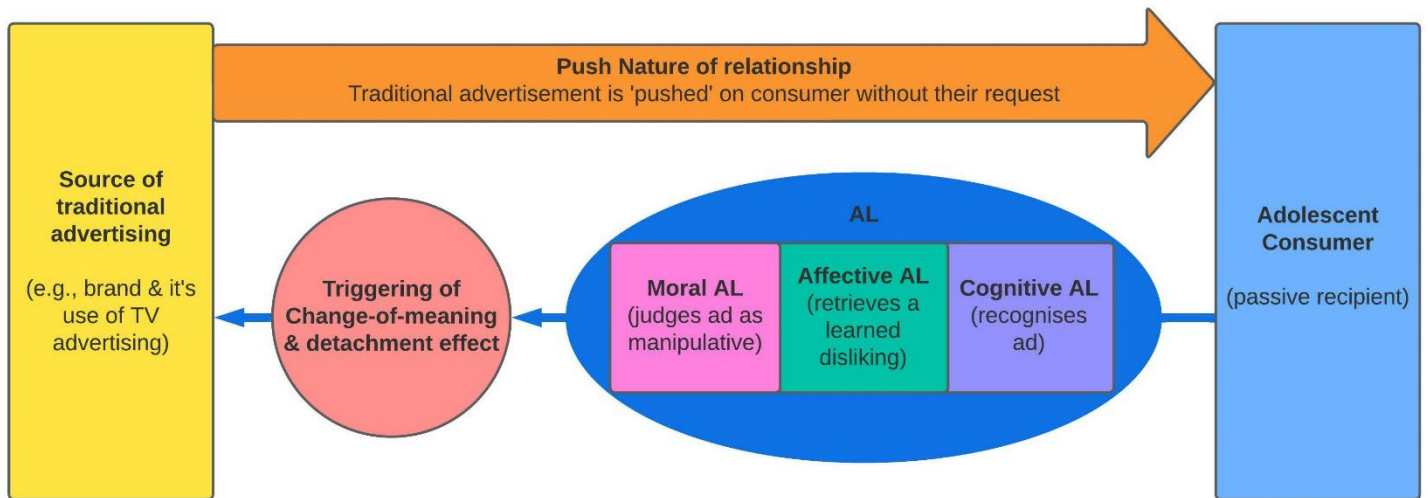
AL in a social media (SM) context (the 'pull-push' model) ...
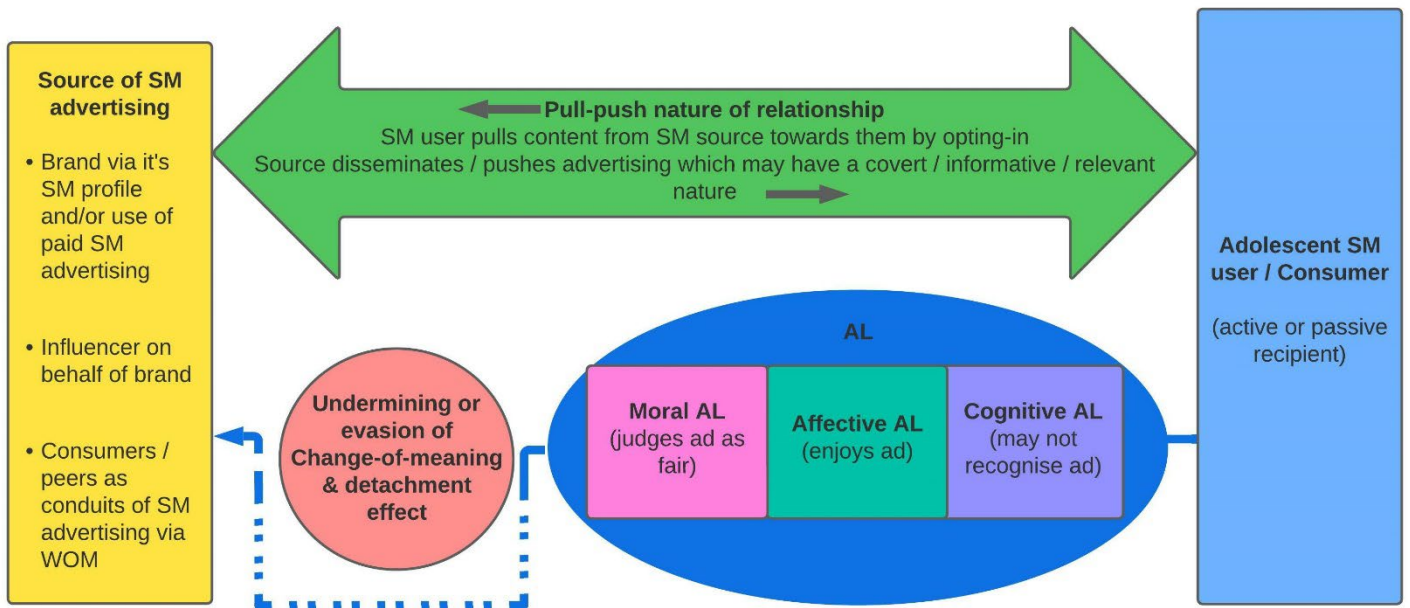
Source: developed by the author

Even in new advertising contexts, most authors conceptualise the young consumer as a passive conduit which advertising passes through. This is evident in the prevailing definition of affective AL as relating to a learned disliking of advertising (Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) to guard against implicit persuasion. Therefore, the literature has not paid enough attention to the possibility that young consumers are *actively seeking out* and pulling advertising towards them in new environments such as SM. The opt-in nature of SM therefore means it is very plausible that young consumers may favourably evaluate SM advertising in general, thus constituting a ***positive dispositional affective AL***. Specifically, it can be assumed that a user chooses to follow a brand, peer, or influencer profile because they positively evaluate the source in some way and desire to be exposed to the content they share.

Furthermore, since advertising can emerge from a range of attractive sources, this could have implications for moral AL in this context. Teenagers are in the conventional stage of moral development, meaning moral judgements are made based on sustaining interpersonal relationships and considering others' point of view (Kohlberg, 1984; Naito, 2013; Walker, 1984). Therefore, it is likely that their dispositional moral AL could consist of judgements which evaluate SM advertising as fair, given it can emerge from sources whom they feel connected to (such as peers or influencers). As a result, they might be more inclined to empathise with the *source* of advertising rather than reflecting on the appropriateness of the *tactics* in use. Therefore, adolescents could be unmotivated to critique the appropriateness of SM advertising and as such may have a ***positive dispositional moral AL***.

Furthermore, given concerns in the literature regarding the covert nature of SM advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016; Ye et al., 2021; Zarouali, Poels, et al., 2020), it is plausible that adolescents may not fully understand the range of ways in which the marketer advertises to them on SM. For example, knowledge of the commercial nature of native advertising, IM, owned and earned media could be limited since these advertising

methods are seamlessly integrated within newsfeeds and can emerge from external parties including influencers and peers. Thus far, it is unclear whether young people's cognitive AL has evolved to understand the blurred boundaries and opt-in nature of SM advertising. As a result, there may be a lack of knowledge of the *commercial nature* of the ad (***low dispositional cognitive AL***) but positive feelings towards and evaluations of the *content* of the ad (***positive dispositional affective and moral AL***).

Taken together, the dispositional AL of young consumers may be relatively uncritical towards SM advertising. Therefore, there is an urgent gap for an in-depth exploration of dispositional AL in particular (Zarouali et al., 2019). Dispositional AL acts as a pre-requisite for situational AL (De Pauw et al., 2019) and so informs critical response during exposure. If young people have limited knowledge (cognitive), feel positive about (affective) and judge SM advertising as fair (moral) as they consider it generally (i.e., dispositionally), then it follows that they may not respond critically when actually exposed to it (situational AL), since their dispositional AL might not be critical in nature.

In particular, the ***change-of-meaning*** and ***detachment effect*** (Friestad & Wright, 1994) could be ***undermined***. As discussed, the PKM proposes that when an advertisement is recognised, the change-of-meaning principle occurs and the detachment effect is triggered, whereby targets are offput and irritated by the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). But the author would argue that where SM advertising emerges from an attractive source (like a peer, influencer, or favoured brand profile), feelings of being deterred and wanting to detach oneself (detachment effect) may be undermined or indeed evaded, because the adolescent could instead feel positive about the experience (affective AL). Furthermore, low dispositional cognitive AL about SM advertising could also mean the situational message is not recognised as an advertisement. Identification of advertising is a pre-requisite for the change-of-meaning (An et al., 2014; Friestad & Wright, 1994), so if this does not take place situationally it will also lead to the

detachment effect being evaded. Finally, if the content emerges from an attractive source, the adolescent might be reluctant to morally critique the practice, which could also lead to the detachment effect not being deployed. If consumers do not seek to detach themselves from SM advertising, then critical reflection may not take place, and instead advertising claims may be passively accepted.

3.8 Conclusion

Consumer's understanding of advertising is captured within the theoretical lens of AL which can be defined as "the knowledge, abilities and attitudes that may help them cope with advertising" (Zarouali et al., 2019, p.197). It is important to investigate consumers' AL because an absence of AL may render young people susceptible and vulnerable to advertising effects (Spiteri Cornish, 2014).

On SM, advertising often has a pull nature, whereby consumers freely opt-in to receive commercial updates from brand profiles, peers, and influencers. This is in direct contrast to advertising in traditional venues like television or print media, where advertisements intrude into the consumers' space without their consent. Additionally, on SM, the marketer blends paid, owned, and earned media to co-create advertising with consumers and third-party endorsers like influencers (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016; Stephen & Galak, 2012). This means that on SM, advertising includes not only paid media, but also owned and earned (Alhabash et al., 2017; Voorveld, 2019). Thus far, only one empirical study in an AL context has taken owned and earned media into account and it reported that adolescents did not understand the commercial nature of earned media (Lawlor et al., 2016). Therefore, a significant gap exists in extant literature for a study which considers the pull nature of SM (paid, owned, and earned) advertising.

Furthermore, SM advertising can manifest both overtly (e.g., pop-up and pre-roll advertising) and covertly (e.g., native advertising, and IM). A format of covert advertising which is beginning to cause particular concern in the AL literature is IM. Two overarching challenges are posed by IM, namely (1) the attractive source characteristics of influencers (e.g., Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Kim et al., 2021) and (2) it's embedded nature (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2021). Combined, this advertising strategy may militate against the AL of teenagers who may use influencers for social learning purposes (De Veirman et al., 2019) and who may not fully understand IM as a form of advertising (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019).

Therefore, the covert and opt-in nature of advertising on SM may challenge the development and deployment of AL in this context, as well as the high levels of targeting afforded by this ecosystem. This has been empirically found to ring true not only for children and teenagers (De Pauw et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016; Zarouali et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2018a), but even adults (Kim & Kim, 2021; Spiteri Cornish, 2014; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). The conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1) proposed at the end of this chapter draws both Chapter Two and Chapter Three together by highlighting how SM advertising may challenge AL and ultimately lead to the evasion of the change-of-meaning and detachment effect, thus impacting critical reflection. The framework highlights how teenagers may have an uncritical dispositional AL regarding SM advertising, which may subsequently lead to less critical responses at the time of exposure (situational AL).

Therefore, the author poses the following research question - "*what is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*" To gain a rich insight into how teenagers recognise, understand, feel about, and evaluate SM advertising, the research will be qualitative in nature, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The design of the empirical research is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the decisions taken and the stages followed in this PhD's research process. A thorough review of the literature (Chapters Two and Three) allowed the author to explore the theoretical background and gaps in the AL literature. Accordingly, the author generated the following research question - "*what is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*"

The careful decisions made in relation to the methodological exploration of this question are presented in this chapter. As such, the chapter commences by presenting and rationalising the research question, aim and objectives. This is followed by a discussion of the paradigm underpinning the research as well as the research approach. The research design is next discussed, including the range of qualitative techniques available, followed by an examination of the methods chosen. Discussion is next provided on sampling considerations and gaining access to participants. The ethical principles underpinning the research are then discussed, and an overview of the fieldwork itself is provided thereafter. Subsequently, an overview of the process employed for data analysis is given. Finally, criteria utilised to evaluate the quality of the research are considered.

The discussion commences by detailing the research question, aim and objectives.

4.2 Research Question, Aim & Objectives

Together, the research question, aim and objectives could be considered the invisible hand which guides the research. As Agee (2009, p.431) notes: "good questions do not necessarily

produce good research, but poorly conceived or constructed questions will likely create problems that affect all subsequent stages of a study". Therefore, it is critical that the question, aim and objectives which guide the research are clearly thought through and justified. These are now outlined, including a rationale for each.

4.2.1 Research Question

Developing a clear research question is vital as it sets the scene for the research aim and objectives, thus narrowing the research scope and guiding every methodological choice which is made during the study (Doody & Bailey, 2016). As such, it is vital that emphasis is placed on developing an appropriate research question. The overarching research question of the current research is as follows:

> *What is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*

The emphasis in the literature to date has been on investigating AL in the context of traditional media such as television advertising. However, children and teenagers are increasingly embracing new, online platforms (An & Kang, 2013; Dahl et al., 2009) and SM in particular, including platforms such as Instagram and YouTube (De Veirman et al., 2019). The facility for embedding advertising in entertaining, immersive, and interactive contexts on these platforms has been widely recognised (e.g., De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Meyer et al., 2019; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2021).

SM advertising can have an overt, obtrusive format in some cases (McCoy et al., 2007; Kelly et al., 2010), but it is also increasingly presented in softer, more authentic ways, known as covert advertising (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Such

advertising can be disseminated by traditional sources including brand owner, but also via novel sources like peers and SM influencers (see Section 3.3). Subsequently, a major research gap relates to how young consumers may retrieve and use their AL as a defence in an online environment where commercial messages can manifest both overtly as well as covertly, and from both traditional and novel sources. It is therefore clear that SM may pose challenges for the development and deployment of AL (see Section 3.7). But overwhelmingly, most AL research focuses on young children (Zarouali et al., 2019).

Not enough is known about teenagers' AL in this new media environment. Adolescents have been overlooked in the literature for years (Zarouali et al., 2019), even though they are still developing cognitively (Nairn & Fine, 2008). Recent calls have been made in the literature for their inclusion (see Section 2.5) amidst a backdrop of reports which reveal that adolescents spend a great deal of time on SM (Ofcom, 2021; Statista, 2020b).

A concern is that teenagers are particularly involved with the social elements of consumption (John, 1999), and as such, may be especially vulnerable to peer influence (Zarouali et al., 2018c). Of especial note is *middle* adolescence, namely young people aged 15-17 years (see Section 2.5.1). This age group may be particularly receptive to conformity appeals, which are rampant within the paid, owned and earned advertising strategies in use on SM (see Sections 3.3 and 3.5).

Therefore, not enough is known about how this age group develop and deploy AL in the context of overt and covert SM advertising. This is despite the fact that authors have labelled SM advertising as 'risky', given it uses tactics (like profiling and IM) which may be difficult for teenagers to understand and critically reflect on (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020).

4.2.2 Research Aim

The research aim is the study's overall purpose, and states what is to be accomplished in general terms (Doody & Bailey, 2016; Malhotra, 2019). In qualitative enquiry, the aim may seek to understand complex phenomena and generate new ideas (Doody & Bailey, 2016). The aim of the current research is as follows:

> *To investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on social media platforms.*

Dispositional AL refers to one's ***general*** knowledge, attitudes and judgements regarding advertising which develops over time (Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019). On the other hand, situational AL refers to the recognition of an advertisement ***during exposure*** to a specific persuasive attempt and the accompanying critical reflection which takes place (Hudders et al., 2017). Therefore, the cognitive, affective and moral nodes of AL can occur within two different spheres – those relating to knowledge about advertising which is formed and learned over time, but also relating to the use of this knowledge situationally when exposed to advertising (see Section 2.2). There is a pressing gap in the extant literature for an investigation of both manifestations of AL within a single study (Hudders et al., 2017), since most studies focus on investigating situaional AL alone (Zarouali et al., 2019). Until research sheds insight into how these manifestations work together and inform one another, it is difficult to make enlightened recommendations on how to empower young consumers to make critical responses to advertising. This research addresses this gap by investigating dispositional and situational AL in the context of overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on SM.

 Now that the overarching research question and aim have been discussed, the three research objectives are considered.

4.2.3 Research Objectives

The development of the research aim leads to determining the research objectives, which are more specific than the aim, closely related to the research question and cover all aspects of the problem (Doody & Bailey, 2016). As such, they set specific parameters for the researcher in terms of narrowing the research scope. Three research objectives (RO) have been developed for the present research.

> **RO1:** *To investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on social media.*

Cognitive AL refers to the ability to understand advertising, including aspects such as understanding advertising's selling and persuasive intent, and the persuasive tactics used in advertising (Friestad & Wright 1994; Livingstone & Helsper 2006; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) (see Section 2.2.1). However, cognitive AL, namely possessing the relevant knowledge about advertising, does not always equate with critically applying this knowledge as a defence mechanism (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). A prerequisite to activating AL is the ability to identify a message as advertising (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017). In the context of SM, this may not be a straightforward task (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016) because advertising can have a covert nature (see Section 3.4.2) and may emerge from online role models known as influencers (see Sections 3.4.2 and 3.5) as well as owned brand profiles and fellow consumers via eWOM (see Section 3.3). Therefore, consumers require cognisance of not only overt advertising in this arena, but covert, embedded and innovative approaches.

Therefore, attention must be paid to investigating teenagers' ability to (1) *recognise* SM advertising in order to activate AL, but also (2) to *understand* the nature of SM advertising. Given the innovative nature of SM advertising, the ability to understand factors such as selling intent and persuasive tactics may be challenging. For instance, where young people choose to

follow entertaining profiles on SM (such as peers, brands, and influencers) it may be difficult for them to discern persuasive intent within the content shared. Where consumers do not *understand* the tactics in use against them, they may be unable to make a critical response.

The second research objective of the research is as follows:

RO2: *To examine teenagers' attitudes towards advertising on social media.*

Most extant research studies conceptualise affective AL as holding solely negative attitudes towards advertising (e.g., irritation, scepticism) and subsequently investigate it from this viewpoint only (see Section 2.2.2). There are few exceptions (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). But recent conceptual papers have emphasised that attitudes towards advertising in new media environments could also be positive in nature (Hudders et al., 2017).

As such, there is a gap in the literature for an in-depth examination of teenagers' affective AL on SM, taking into account the enjoyable and opt-in nature of advertising in this arena. By understanding the attitudes and emotions evoked by SM advertising (be they positive or negative), it may be possible to gain insight into young peoples' motivation to apply AL as a critical filter. For example, the literature proposes that if children have negative attitudes (in the form of learned disliking) towards advertising, then it follows they will be more critical towards it (Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Equally, the present author queries that if young people have positive attitudes towards SM advertising, this could mitigate their willingness to detach themselves (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and ultimately, to critically respond (see Section 3.7).

The final research objective of the current research is:

RO3: *To examine teenagers' moral evaluations of advertising on social media.*

Moral AL is a multi-dimensional concept, in that it can consist of evaluations of advertising as unfair and inappropriate, or on the other hand, as fair and suitable (De Pauw et al., 2017) (see Section 2.2.3). If young consumers question the moral appropriateness of SM advertising and the result is that they consider it unfair, then such judgements might facilitate the activation of AL as a critical defence (Hudders et al., 2017). On the other hand, if a young consumer evaluates SM advertising as appropriate or fair, it could lead them to be less critical. For instance, based on empathy with the advertising source, adolescents might overlook cognitive knowledge (e.g., understanding of bias) and affective AL (e.g., dislike of advertising) to instead respond passively in line with advertising's goals. Therefore, it could be that moral AL is a defining dimension of AL which influences advertising response (Hudders et al., 2017).

Although the ability to morally evaluate marketers' tactics has been noted as a hallmark of persuasion knowledge for more than two decades (Friestad & Wright, 1994), it has received scant research attention (Zarouali et al., 2019). How young people morally evaluate advertising is critical because this ability to critique incoming advertising may facilitate the deployment of defence filters or coping mechanisms such as scepticism, avoidance, or self-regulation measures (e.g., to ignore persuasive attempts).

The research gaps present within the literature which are addressed by the research question, aim and objectives are summarised in Figure 4.1. Now that the overarching research question, aim and objectives have been discussed, the paradigm underpinning the research is next presented.

Figure 4.1: *Gaps Present Within the Literature Which are Addressed by the Present Research.*
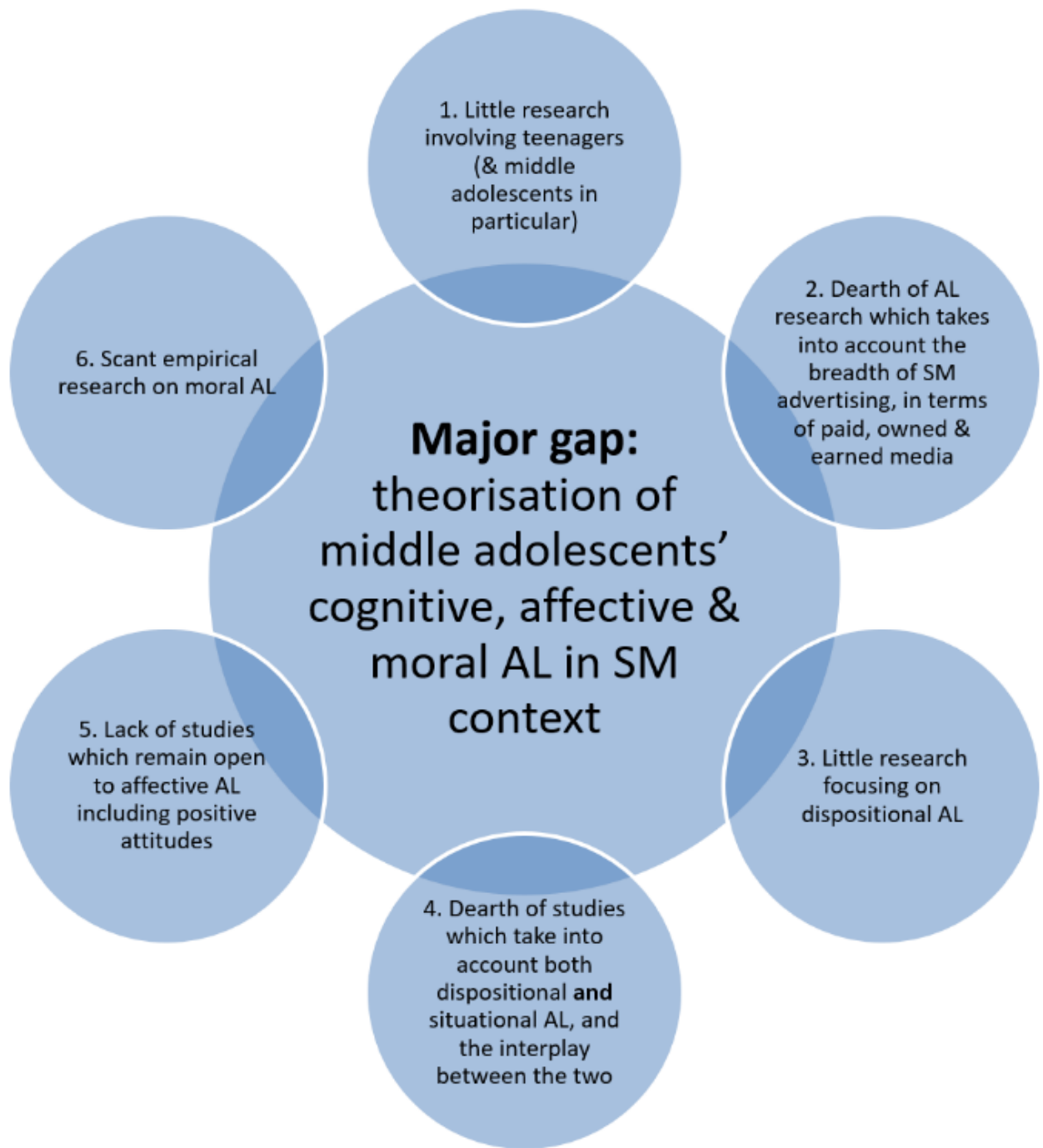
Source: developed by the author.

4.3 The Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p.97). Ultimately, one's research paradigm relates to questions concerning 'what is truth?' (ontology) and 'how best can one come to know it or seek it out?' (epistemology). Therefore, ontology relates to assumptions about the nature of reality, while epistemology refers to how the researcher can come to know and learn about that reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ormston et al., 2014). The concepts of ontology and epistemology are fundamental within research and form the basis of researcher philosophy. How one deals with these concepts and answers questions relating to ontological and epistemological concerns comprises their research paradigm.

Two dominant research paradigms include objectivism and constructivism (Gray, 2014; Grix, 2002; Healy & Perry, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). Those with an objective position view reality as a one-dimensional, singular concept (Grix, 2002; Healy & Perry, 2000). They believe that reality (and therefore data) is static – i.e., the researcher's interference during data collection does not change or interfere with the data (Healy & Perry, 2000). In other words, they believe that reality is independent of and external to the researcher – data exists in one 'true' form regardless of being observed, interpreted, or collected by the researcher (Grix, 2002). Therefore, their belief is that any researcher conducting the same research under the same conditions will reach the same conclusion (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004).

An opposing ontological position is constructivism. Constructivism sees reality as constructed in the mind of social actors as they interact with the world (Gray, 2014; Ponterotto, 2005). Opposing the idea that meaning simply exists within phenomena and experience (ready to be uncovered by a researcher), constructivism sees meaning as created (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Carson et al., 2001; Gray, 2014). It holds that reality is constructed by individuals through

their interactions with the world, and such realities come to the fore through the researcher-participant dialogue – i.e., meaning is often outside the awareness of individuals and is brought to consciousness through dialogue with the researcher (Carson et al., 2001; Gray, 2014; Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, various meanings can exist in response to the same phenomena as constructed by different subjects (Gray, 2014). Thus, the researcher does not simply 'discover' the meaning within participants' experiences - rather they interpret and construct meaning out of the insights shared by participants. Therefore, a constructivist stance sees knowledge as subjective and multidimensional, and readily acknowledges the importance of the researcher-participant interaction. It considers reality as something which is continually accomplished and constructed by social actors, rather than something which is external to them (Bryman, 2016).

Alongside ontology, epistemology also informs the research paradigm. Epistemological positions include interpretivism and positivism (Carson et al., 2001; Ormston et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Those with an interpretivist view believe that reality is a subjective experience – i.e., that there is no one singular (or correct) reality or truth, rather 'truth' is dependent on individual lived experiences, and the subsequent interpretation carried out by the researcher. Therefore, this worldview contends that there is no external reality which can be revealed through research, rather there are multiple, context-specific realities (Ormston et al., 2014). Aligning with constructivism, an interpretivist position is one which believes that "reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined" (Carson et al., 2001, p. 7).

On the other hand, positivism aligns with an objective ontology and believes that research should seek to reveal truth by making "law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.113). Therefore, it seeks to determine "how things really are" by predicting research outcomes (through hypotheses) and minimising or eliminating the researcher's influence on the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994,

p.111). The object and researcher are recognised as separate entities, whereby if the researcher is seen to have influence over the object, it is considered a threat to validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Those with this position therefore seek to establish facts and laws which are generalisable to large populations and are thereby considered 'objectively' true (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders et al., 2019). This epistemological position is favoured by researchers in the AL field.

4.3.1 Research Paradigms & AL Research

Empirical research in the field of AL is overwhelmingly underpinned by a positivist philosophical stance which utilises quantitative methodology. Aligning with their deductive approach, most authors seek to 'test' or measure children's AL. In this regard, many utilise an experimental research design (e.g., Ali et al., 2009; Verhellen et al., 2014; Zarouali, Poels, et al., 2020) or a questionnaire (e.g., De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Freeman & Shapiro, 2014; Spielvogel & Terlutter, 2013).

Because of the predominant positivist stance employed by research studies in this area, authors have often overlooked the multi-faceted nature of consumers' interactions with advertising and have instead focused on measuring specific components of AL (e.g., An & Stern, 2011; Rozendaal, Buijzen & Valkenberg, 2011; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016). For instance, as Chapter Two revealed (see Section 2.2.2), when investigating affective AL, most studies test for the presence of solely negative attitudes, such as dislike and/or scepticism (e.g., De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). This means that the possibility of positive attitudes towards advertising is largely unaccounted for. As discussed, it is imperative this possibility is explored as it could have an important impact on the application of AL as a critical filter.

In addition, SM is a relatively new media environment (Keegan & Rowley, 2017), with AL research situated in this venue only emerging in recent years. Therefore, this is arguably a new research context, whereby theorisation of AL has not yet been fully achieved. Theory is built inductively, whereby the researcher collects evidence from the field, analyses the data and uses the findings to build (or add to) theory (Ormston et al., 2014). However, in the context of AL on SM, most extant research is deductive, whereby researchers identify components of AL already present in the literature and attempt to measure their presence amongst a group of consumers. Therefore, there is a gap for a 'bottom up' approach (Ormston et al., 2014), which inductively seeks to theorise AL in the context of SM. Given the innovative nature of SM advertising which blends a range of paid, owned, and earned media (see Section 3.3), the AL of SM users needs to adapt in tandem with these new developments. After all, AL should not be a static skill, but rather has to be dynamic in order to cope with advancements in advertising approaches (Malmelin, 2010). Therefore, it is proposed that the three dimensions of AL (cognitive, affective, and moral) need to be investigated utilising an interpretive research paradigm to examine the new components which may be present across these dimensions.

What is more, enquiry regarding moral AL is in an emerging stage, with only a handful of studies providing insight into this dimension (e.g., Adams et al., 2017; De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; De Pauw et al., 2017). Therefore, it is unclear how young consumers seek to judge the appropriateness of advertising (e.g., what factors do they consider?) as well as the impact this has on advertising response. An interpretivist research paradigm would allow deep insight and understanding of these judgements.

Recently, authors have begun to acknowledge how interpretive research may add to AL literature. For example, Zarouali et al. (2019) posit that a qualitative methodology may shed light into the multifaceted ways in which young people engage with advertising and allow researchers to explore the deeper meanings which young consumers associate with such

content. This may be particularly relevant when investigating the AL of teenagers. For instance, it has long been recognised that consumers may utilise advertising for more than information but may put it to use within social interaction (Bartholomew & O'Donohoe, 2003; Lawlor & Prothero, 2008). Additionally, authors have reported on the active role consumers can take in the context of advertising, where young adults have been found to enjoy figuring out the marketers' strategy and interpreting hidden meanings buried with the ad (O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998).

Given the growth in abstract thought associated with middle adolescence (SAHRC, 2013) as well as the more mature cognitive skills associated with this age group in comparison to younger children (John, 1999), it may be the case that middle adolescents are indeed taking an active rather than passive role in the context of SM advertising. In other words, rather than passively consuming this content and falling victim to implicit persuasion (Nairn & Fine, 2008), they may be actively utilising advertising to achieve their own goals by explicitly processing the content. An interpretive approach could allow insight into this. Finally, the interactive rather than linear relationship between marketer and consumer on SM (Gensler et al., 2013) may indeed lend itself to deeper meanings and uses inherent within SM advertising. For example, in a context where consumers choose what firms, peers and influencers to co-create brand messages with, it could be that such content has self-expressive values.

An interpretive research agenda may allow these deeper meanings and uses to be illuminated. Interpretive approaches allow participants to illustrate their experience using their own lens, rather than deductively testing their experience through the lens of the researcher. In this regard, authors celebrate the use of interpretive approaches in business and management fields for their ability to address the "new and the different" (Parker, 2014, p.13). Given the innovative nature of the SM advertising model (Gensler et al., 2013; Keegan & Rowley, 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016) and the labelling of this environment as 'new' in the AL literature (see

Table 3.1 in Section 3.2), an interpretive approach will allow deep and contextualised insights (Parker, 2014) into the complexity of adolescents' encounters with advertising in this new arena.

For these reasons, the current research is inductive in nature, underpinned by a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology.

4.3.2 The Paradigm of the Present Research

Although the predominant positivist paradigm utilised throughout the literature has led to many valuable contributions relating to children's ability to recognise advertising and enact scepticism, the present research has a broader purpose. Specifically, it seeks *to investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational AL in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on SM platforms*.

As outlined, most research which has been carried out in the field of AL is aligned with an objectivist ontology. The present research rejects the objectivist position in favour of a constructivist ontological position, underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology. This means that the author seeks to explore the multiplicity of experiences which exist for research participants and to co-produce meaning out of their lived experiences, rather than deductively testing for a set of pre-determined meanings.

While the objectivist standpoint considers reality (or data) to be unchanging regardless of observation or interference from researchers (Healy & Perry, 2000), the interpretivist view conceives reality as multidimensional and subjective, dependent on both the researcher's interpretation and the participants' lived experience. This means that reality is seen to be an ever-changing construct produced and continually revised by social actors (Grix, 2002). In this way, interpretivists see the world as a place where there is not one superior reality to be found

or uncovered, rather that multiple, subjective realities exist (Carson et al., 2001; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Therefore, interpretivists seek to *understand* what is happening in a given context, rather than trying to 'uncover' truth (Carson et al., 2001; Gray, 2014).

Taken together, a constructivist ontology underpinned by interpretivism involves an appreciation for: multiple, varying realities; the researcher's involvement and interpretation when seeking knowledge; the context in which the data was collected; and that different actors may have different perspectives (Bryman, 2016; Carson et al., 2001). Essentially, it seeks to explore 'meaning', whereby meaning refers to a subjective experience, created and sustained by different people under different circumstances at different times (Saunders et al., 2019). In this way, interpretivists seek to explore and understand the social realities of individuals within their subjective lived experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Since this perspective believes that reality can only be interpreted, findings reported within interpretive studies are acknowledged as subjective to the social actors whom they were collected from (since it is their perspective of 'truth' as defined by their lived experience). Therefore, it is acknowledged that such knowledge is not generalisable to a larger public, but rather relates to a deep understanding of a small population at a given point in time (Saunders et al., 2019).

More specifically, and in view of the SM context of this study, the research paradigm aligns with the social constructionist school of thought. Social constructionism is defined as "a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences" and is concerned with "the shared social aspects of all that is psychological" (Galbin, 2014, p.82-83). This stance believes that constructs such as the self and emotion are not innate to individuals, but instead are socially constructed or produced through interaction with others (Galbin, 2014). As such, 'meaning' comes about as a result of discourse and is moulded by interactions over time (Galbin, 2014). In this way, ideas and versions of our 'self' can be continually revised and have multi-faceted meanings sustained

through the things we say and our interactions with others (Hackley, 1998). This means that identity can be sustained, altered and indeed, challenged, through our narration of ourselves and how others narrate our story. Social constructionism contends that such stories are not necessarily fiction, but rather because reality is constructed through discourse, we select who we are over an array of alternative versions and present this through social interaction (Hackley, 1998).

This means that in a SM context, meanings relating to both individual and group identity are continually revised and sustained through interaction and the narratives one shares about oneself on SM. To produce desired meanings, one may continually display who they are on SM by presenting themselves to, and interacting with, peers (e.g., by creating and sharing content with one's network of followers about oneself, as well as through interacting with content shared by others). But arguably, one can now also narrate the story of oneself by interacting with brands and influencers on SM (e.g., by opting-in to, re-sharing and contributing to brand and influencer profiles which are associated with a desired set of meanings). In this way, SM facilitates the ability to 'type oneself into being' (Lawlor et al., 2016, p,2029).

Because constructivism and social constructionism see reality as being in a constant state of flux (Bryman, 2016), social actors both continuously reconstruct reality, but also *inform* one another of such revisions through interaction. This is a cyclical process whereby "expressing ideas makes them tangible and shareable which, in turn, informs" (Ackermann, 2001, p.4). Therefore, individuals *learn* socially constructed meanings from each other.

This worldview therefore allows for the possibility that adolescents may seek to create and maintain meaning and identity through consumption (and by sharing consumption practices on SM). Within the reflective stage of consumer socialisation, emphasis is placed on social elements of consuming (John, 1999). Through interaction, teenagers may learn socially

constructed meanings from each other which are associated with certain consumption practices, items or indeed brands (Cody, 2013). Therefore, adolescents recognise that consumption can act as a means of self-expression (Lachance et al., 2003) which may be used to aid the management and construction of identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Swaminathan et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the social constructionist perspective proposes that individuals learn meaning through social exchange. In a SM context, it is feasible that adolescents may achieve such learning from peers they follow, but also from brands and influencers whom they have sought out and opted-in to. This aligns with the social learning perspective, which posits that consumers learn through interaction with socialisation agents such as caregivers, siblings, and teachers (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). But more recently, the literature also acknowledges that social learning takes place from communication on SM (Wang et al., 2012) which could include communication from brands, and disseminators of brand messages such as influencers (see Section 3.5.3). A social constructionist approach therefore allows the perspective to be taken that consumers do not only process advertising on a cognitive level (Hackley, 1998) but instead may interpret it for meaning on other levels, perhaps as a form of social learning. In this manner, the full spectrum of their AL needs to be examined, not just in terms of how they understand the nature of advertising within SM (cognitive), but also how they feel towards it (affective) and how they evaluate it (moral). Equally, it is important to investigate the nature of their understanding towards SM in general (dispositional AL) as well as to specific advertising episodes (situational AL). The research approach is next presented.

4.3.3 Adoption of an Inductive Approach

In line with the research paradigm, an inductive approach is employed by the current research. This can be described as "a 'bottom-up' process through which patterns are derived from observations of the world" (Ormston et al., 2014, p.6). Rather than setting out to disprove or legitimise a particular theory, inductive reasoning attempts to establish "patterns, consistencies and meanings" (Gray, 2014, p. 18). Within the present study it is hoped that a process of inductive reasoning will allow the theorisation of AL in the context of SM to move from fragmented details to a connected and thorough understanding (Gray, 2014). Thus, while the theory of AL underpins the study, the author is not seeking to test, prove or confirm AL in this context. Rather, through a process of inductive reasoning, it is hoped that patterns and meanings may be observed and established which can be used to gain a deeper understanding of teenagers' AL in this media environment.

For instance, the author will not deductively seek to test the presence of particular components of AL within the participants' associative network about advertising. Rather, participants will be enabled to display their knowledge, attitudes, and evaluations through open dialogue. Afterwards, the dialogue will be interpreted for patterns and meanings, and these meanings will be used to establish a framework of AL in this context.

The idea of the researcher bringing an established theoretical framework into the research process can sometimes be assumed as a deductive approach only. Indeed, this is the case when the researcher attempts to test or measure theory. However, an interpretive approach can acknowledge prior theory in an inductive manner because the way in which the researcher uses the theory is different to that of a positivist researcher (Carson et al., 2001). An interpretive researcher may be guided by prior theory to develop a preliminary framework in the early stages of the research, which can then act as a guideline with which to define the territory of

the research scope and interest (Carson et al., 2001). Thus, whilst being guided by theory, the interpretive researcher is open to what the site and participants have to tell them (Carson et al., 2001). Once the data has been collected and analysed, the findings which emerge may be used to build theory, or to add to the existing theoretical framework of AL. In this way it follows inductive reasoning by collecting evidence first to then add to theory (Ormston et al., 2014). In this way, theory is *built*, rather than being *tested* deductively

However, it is acknowledged that there are critiques in the literature that it is not possible to have a *purely* inductive approach (Ormston et al., 2014). Critics argue that when inductive researchers analyse data, it is impossible to totally bracket their prior theoretical knowledge and approach data with an entirely blank mind (Ormston et al., 2014). The questions researchers ask participants and the resulting categories they employ during the process of analysis are influenced by work already reported in their field (Ormston et al., 2014). Therefore, while it is acknowledged that a *purely* inductive approach is unfeasible, this research does approach the data from an inductive rather than deductive approach in so far as is possible.

This is associated with researcher reflexivity, whereby the role and perspective of the researcher in relation to the research process is acknowledged (Ormston et al., 2014). Knowledge uncovered through interpretive research is a reflection of the researcher's location in time and space (Bryman, 2016). As noted, according to the research paradigm, the researcher plays a key role in construction of knowledge, since they interpret and construct meaning out of insights shared by participants. As such, they are implicated in construction of knowledge through the choices they make throughout the research process, the stance they adopt in relation to what is observed, and the way they report findings (Bryman, 2016). In terms of the current research, the author strives to achieve "empathic neutrality" in so far as possible, whereby the author aims to "avoid obvious, conscious or systematic bias and to be as neutral as possible in the collection, interpretation and presentation of data" (Ormston et al., 2014, p.22). However,

it is acknowledged that this cannot be fully achieved according to the research paradigm, since the idea of 'objective' knowledge is rejected. Rather, the researcher takes a reflexive role regarding the influence their beliefs and prior knowledge may have on the research process (Ormston et al., 2014).

The author proposes that this inductive approach to AL has been largely overlooked within the AL literature. Rather than deciding what facets of AL are important and attempting to 'test' the presence of those, the author will allow participants to present their skills, abilities, and experiences with SM advertising to inductively understand the nature of AL in this new context. Therefore, to facilitate an inductive approach, a flexible methodology is required which allows the subjective experiences of participants to be appreciated and accounted for. An exploratory research design which utilises qualitative methodology aligns with this approach.

4.4 Qualitative Methodology

Authors use the term 'new advertising' to describe advertising contexts which fall outside the parameters of traditional contexts (see Table 3.1). SM has irrevocably changed the relationship between marketers and consumers (see Section 3.3) and has been described as representing a "paradigm shift" within the field of marketing (Keegan & Rowley, 2017, p.16). Empirical research conducted in this contemporary media environment arguably constitutes a new research area, given it is still in the early stages of development (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). This is given further credence considering that authors query whether the framework of AL is fit for purpose in the context of SM and may need to be revisited in this new online context (Lawlor et al., 2016). Where relatively little is known about a given phenomenon, exploratory

research is most appropriate given it seeks to provide insight and understanding (Malhotra, 2019). Therefore, an exploratory research design is employed by the present study.

Methods aligned with interpretive paradigms and exploratory research designs are qualitative in nature, thanks to their non-restrictive, exploratory boundaries and their applicability to theory building (Parker, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative research places "emphasis and value on human interpretation of the social world and the significance of both participants' and the investigator's interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Ormston et al., 2014, p.11). Qualitative enquiry is concerned with the collection of rich data, rather than numerical (Ormston et al., 2014). Accordingly, during analysis of qualitative data, emphasis is not placed on numerical or statistical prevalence of patterns, but rather capturing important meanings relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The focus within qualitative inquiry is on the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a phenomenon, as opposed to quantitative research's emphasis on 'how many' (Agee, 2009; Bailey, 2014; Ormston et al., 2014). Qualitative research aims to make sense of phenomena using interpretive practices in order to make the world visible and to understand subjective lived experience (Ormston et al., 2014). The objective is not simply to reveal the occurrence of phenomena, but rather interpreting their importance (Agee, 2009). In so doing, emphasis is placed on understanding practices and routines which quantitative inquiry may ignore "as incidental" (Parker, 2014, p.14). In this way, qualitative researchers bring intense curiosity to business research fields, allowing the revelation of "complexity, depth, detail, richness, texture and meaning" (Parker, 2014, p.14).

Due to its interpretive nature, qualitative aims and objectives seek to learn about the social world of research participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities and nuances of subjective experience (Ormston et al., 2014; Parker, 2014). Aligned with the

social constructionist perspective of the current study, qualitative research questions place emphasis on understanding the intentions and perspectives of social actors within interaction (Agee, 2009). Given the innovative nature of SM advertising and the associated challenges it may pose for enacting a critical response (see Section 3.7), the researcher requires an in-depth insight into participant perspectives to understand the nuances of coping with advertising in this venue. Qualitative methods therefore lend themselves to achieving the aim and objectives of this study.

To achieve deep understanding of social actors, qualitative methods are adaptable and flexible to account for emergent issues (Ormston et al., 2014). This means that research questions and data collection procedures can be adapted as the research unfolds to address emerging areas of interest. This is suited to the current research which investigates AL in a new media context (SM) as it will allow the researcher to adapt to unexpected and/or surprising issues introduced by participants. As such, the process of carrying out qualitative research is iterative, whereby the researcher should engage in an ongoing process of questioning and adapting to accommodate the continual revision of meaning produced by social actors (Agee, 2009).

This means that qualitative methods can be challenging for the researcher to implement, given their flexible and therefore unpredictable nature (Houghton et al., 2010). Many challenges associated with qualitative research relate to ethics, including informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and conducting risk-benefit ratios (Houghton et al., 2010). The latter refers to weighing up potential harm for the participant when taking part in the research (e.g., becoming distressed) against benefits (Houghton et al., 2010).

Another challenge within qualitative research design is the relationship between researcher and participant (Houghton et al., 2010). In qualitative research, there is little social distance between researcher and subject (Saunders et al., 2019) where participants are viewed as co-

creators of knowledge (Cody, 2015; Sherrington et al., 2017). Given the close nature of the relationship, there is potential for participants to be affected psychologically and emotionally (Houghton et al., 2010). While it is integral to build trust and rapport with qualitative research participants to gain more informed research (Fontana & Frey, 1994), steps must be taken to ensure that the relationship does not become exploitative (Houghton et al., 2010), particularly when conducting research with minors (Cody, 2015; Sherrington et al., 2017). The researcher must be mindful of managing the relationship so that participants feel comfortable and that power imbalances are attenuated (Cody, 2015), while also ensuring boundaries of the relationship do not become blurred (Houghton et al., 2010). The steps taken to address these ethical concerns and therefore to alleviate the challenges of conducting qualitative research are discussed in Section 4.6.

To summarise, while it is not without challenges for the researcher, qualitative research was identified as the most appropriate for this doctoral research given its close alignment with interpretive, exploratory research designs (Saunders et al., 2019) and its ability to allow insight into "the 'microscopic' details of the social and cultural aspects of individuals' lives" (Agee, 2009, p.431). The range of qualitative methods considered by the author are next presented.

4.4.1 Qualitative Methodology – Data Collection Methods Considered for this Study

Qualitative methodology is wide-ranging and includes an array of approaches associated with different disciplines (Ormston et al., 2014). Much like other business fields, AL research has been "in the grip of the dominant positivist quantitative research paradigm" (Parker, 2014, p.13) (see Section 4.3.1). Therefore, there are only a limited number of studies in the AL literature which utilise qualitative methods (see Table 4.1). These include observational methods (including participant observation), reflective diaries, focus groups, and individual

interviews. Given that these methods were considered appropriate for the exploration of AL by authors in the field, the present author considered the possible suitability of each to the current research.

Table 4.1: *Studies Which Utilise Qualitative Research Designs in the AL Literature.*

Authors & Year	Methods employed	Sample age	Research context
Bartholomew & O'Donohoe (2003)	Photo diaries, individual interviews & focus groups	10-12	Traditional media
De Pauw, De Wolf, Hudders & Cauberghe (2017)	Focus groups	9-11	"New advertising tactics" (p.8). Used stimulus material including brand placement, advergames & retargeted pre-roll SM ads
Kelly, Kerr & Drennan (2010)	Focus groups and individual interviews	13-17	SM (MySpace & Facebook)
Lawlor & Prothero (2008)	Focus groups and individual interviews	7-9	Television
Lawlor, Dunne & Rowley (2016)	Focus groups, individual interviews & participant observation	12-14	SM (Facebook & Bebo)
O'Donohoe & Tynan (1998)	Group discussion & individual interviews	18-24	Traditional media
Ritson & Elliott (1995)	Participant observation & individual interviews	16-18	Traditional media
Spiteri Cornish (2014)	Individual interviews	22-60	Online advertising targeting children (including banners, pop-ups and advergames)
van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019)	Focus groups	12-16	IM (sponsored influencer YouTube videos)

Source: developed by the author

Observational Methods: Observational methods include practices such as participant observation, or in an online context, netnography. Participant observation facilitates the researcher in viewing and experiencing reality in a specific social setting, as viewed and experienced by the research participant (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For example,

observational methods were used by Ritson & Elliott (1995) who observed 16–18-year-olds for one day a week over a period of five weeks during free periods at school. Participant observation was also utilised by Lawlor et al. (2016) who observed 12-14-year-old's Bebo profiles twice a week for a period of three months.

There is also a strong case for netnographic research in this area. Netnography is a methodology "that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets, 2002, p.2). Often, this involves observation of discussion forums and is said to allow access to rich and naturalistic data (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Therefore, it could be relevant to this study if a forum was located which would allow the researcher to observe social interactions at play which illuminate AL in practice.

However, the present author discounted both methods for the following reasons. Although observational methods have been fruitful in terms of observing AL as it is retrieved during exposure (Lawlor et al., 2016) or as displayed while interacting with others (Ritson & Elliott, 1995), these methods are limited in their ability to allow access to dispositional AL (i.e., one's understanding of advertising in general). This is because both methods place emphasis on observing participants at the point of exposure to advertising (situational AL). Since the researcher is interested in exploring both manifestations of AL (situational and dispositional), they are ruled out for this study.

Reflective Diaries: A further qualitative method considered for this study was the reflective diary. Qualitative diaries allow insight into taken-for-granted experiences of participants, allowing the participant to guide the content of the research in their own words, and in their own way (Bartlett, 2011; Cody, 2015; Kenton, 2010). The use of this method has been

suggested as a way to capture the rituals and experiences of everyday life, as well as allowing insight into participant perceptions of events in their everyday lives (Kenton, 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2013). To apply this method to the context of adolescents' AL, participants could potentially be asked to keep a diary and to utilise prompts provided by the researcher to stimulate reflection regarding AL.

However, this method may not be suitable for an adolescent sample. Requesting teenagers to spend time reflecting on their AL in diary format might be perceived as a type of 'homework' they have to submit to the researcher. Barton (2015) cautions that minors may feel worried when taking part in research due to a perception that they need to provide correct or 'right' answers to the researcher. If adolescents perceived the diary task as a type of homework, they may assume that the researcher will analyse it on the basis of providing 'right' answers, causing them unnecessary worry and stress. One of the ethical pillars underscoring the research (see Section 4.6.1) is minimising the level of risk & discomfort for research participants. Due to the risk that diaries could be burdensome for teenagers, they were ruled out as an appropriate method for the current research.

Focus Groups: According to Table 4.1, the focus group method is a popular option for qualitative researchers in the AL field. This is reflective of marketing literature more broadly, where the most used qualitative method is focus groups (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). AL authors value the social context of focus groups which they note as reflecting the free-flowing nature of SM (Lawlor et al., 2016; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019) and allowing research to take place in a "social milieu" (Lawlor & Prothero, 2008, p.1207). Thus, a key reason that focus groups have been utilised in an AL context is because they allow insight into peer interaction

(De Pauw et al., 2017; O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998) where group members 'feed' off one another (Mack et al., 2005).

The current research acknowledges that for teenagers, consumption and advertising can be deeply entwined with identity formation, presentation, and management (Cody, 2013; Lachance et al., 2003) (see Section 2.5). Thus, the aspect of social interaction within focus groups is problematic rather than beneficial to this research. Specifically, since teenagers are undergoing a period of deep self-consciousness (Choudhury et al., 2006; Elkind, 1967; Lloyd, 2002) they may feel uncomfortable discussing topics associated with identity in front of peers. Furthermore, they may also be ill at ease attempting to articulate understanding (and indeed, lack thereof) of SM advertising practices amongst peers. Indeed, an AL study which utilised focus groups with adolescents has called for future research to use individual interviews to avoid peer influence amongst this age group (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019).

A study which explored the merits of both focus groups and individual interviews at addressing the same market research issue revealed that while focus groups may have benefits relating to the practicalities of conducting research (including faster data collection), individual interviews were superior in their ability to uncover important underlying findings (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Specifically, focus groups findings were influenced by pressures to conform with others (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Follow-up individual interviews revealed that the adult participants had substantially different views than they had expressed in focus groups, due to the pressure of acquiescing with group consensus (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). This was particularly true for data relating to attitudes and beliefs (Stokes & Bergin, 2006) which has specific implications for the current research in terms of research objective two (which focuses on affective AL, including attitudes) and research objective three (which focuses on moral AL, including beliefs). Overall, individual interviews were deemed to allow greater depth and detail than focus groups; greater insight into attitudinal subtleties; as well as overcoming conformity

pressures (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). As such, focus groups are not considered appropriate for the current research, but rather individual interviews are identified as more suitable to achieving the aim and objectives of the study.

The following sections detail the research methods which comprised the research design of this research, namely individual interviews (Section 4.4.2) which also involved the use of an elicitation technique (Section 4.4.3).

4.4.2 Qualitative Method Employed in this Study – Individual Interviews

Because most qualitative studies in the AL field appear to place emphasis on focus groups (see Table 4.1) in line with qualitative market researchers more broadly (Stokes & Bergin, 2006), few have used in-depth interviews. Only Spiteri Cornish (2014) utilised individual interviews as a stand-alone method, but sampled adults, rather than children and adolescents. Other AL studies used interviews, but as a follow-up to focus groups (Lawlor et al., 2016; O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998), thus suggesting their use as complementary to group discussion. Therefore, few AL studies place emphasis on allowing young consumers to portray their *individual* experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and evaluations of advertising in the one-to-one environment of interviews. This suggests that researchers have placed most value on exploring peer interaction amongst young consumers, over and above their individual accounts. But young consumers, whose voices are often "muted" in consumption fields (Cody, 2015, p.283), deserve to have their individual perspectives heard. In fact, the predominant use of focus groups in qualitative research in this field means that there is a gap for generating insight into individual perspectives.

Research suggests that while focus groups with minors give rise to greater elaboration of ideas, individual interviews provide more relevant and unique ideas (Heary & Hennessy, 2006).

Individual interviews bring about more in-depth responses and greater elaboration of ideas, including nuances and contradictions (Kelly et al., 2010; Mack et al., 2005). This allows more detailed insight into individual experiences with, and interpretations of, advertising (O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998) since participants can discuss "thoughts, feelings and ideas freely and in-depth" (Spiteri Cornish, 2014, p.443).

Aligning with the ethical principles guiding this research (see Section 4.6), the study aims to take a child-centric approach. Critiques are present within interpretive literature that the field of marketing tends to treat minors as 'subject' rather than 'participant' within empirical research, and that steps are not taken to attenuate the power imbalance between adult researcher and child/adolescent participant (Cody, 2015). The result is that there exists limited research which "attempts to understand consumption from the child's perspective" (Cody, 2015, p.283). This study addresses these critiques by utilising individual, in-depth interviews to allow adolescent participants to illustrate and present their experiences as consumers as they see fit, by dictating the flow of conversation and being afforded the facility to answer openly (not within constrictive, quantitative margins). Individual interviews also address power imbalances, as "during in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student" (Mack, et al., 2005, p. 29). By maintaining a neutral manner and listening attentively, the researcher may display motivation to *learn* from the participant (Mack et al., 2005), thereby positioning the participant as expert.

In particular, interviews are deemed appropriate for the current research on the basis of the 'me' element of SM for adolescents. It is proposed that the one-to-one nature of individual interviews provides a fairer setting for adolescents to illustrate their knowledge, feelings, and evaluations of SM advertising, including more personal perspectives relating to social learning and conformity pressures (see Sections 2.5 and 3.5.3). Advertising to minors has been labelled as a sensitive topic in the literature (Spiteri Cornish, 2014), thus requiring the more personal

and confidential setting of individual interviews, rather than group settings. Interviews allow for a vivid picture to be gained of participant perspectives and experiences, and as such are proposed as the most suitable method when exploring issues of a personal and sensitive nature (Mack et al., 2005; Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Since adults have been found to obscure their answers in focus groups to acquiesce to the group consensus (Stokes & Bergin, 2006), it follows that this effect will be heightened for teenagers who can become "distracted, self-conscious, embarrassed, flirtatious" within focus groups (Insights in Marketing, n.d.) in line with their stage of development.

In particular, qualitative interviews enable participants to share meanings, understandings and values held by them, instead of acting as a conduit from which information is extracted (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Seidman, 2005). The open, flexible nature of qualitative interviewing allows the participant to explain their social (media) reality, but also allows the researcher to interact with the participant for meaning to be brought to consciousness (Ponterotto, 2005). Interviews allow "detailed and complex characterisation of a given behaviour (Spiteri Cornish, 2014, p.443), enabling access to deep insights with which to aid theory building. Interviews are particularly useful in this regard because they give the researcher a means to understand complex behaviour without imposing "a priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.366). Using this method, the goal is to *understand* individual experience, rather than emphasis being to *explain* (Fontana & Frey, 1994) or to measure (Prothero, 1996). Since relatively little is known about young consumers' AL in the context of new advertising formats on SM (such as owned and earned media) (Lawlor et al., 2016) it is necessary to place emphasis on *understanding* knowledge, feelings, and evaluations which teenagers possess about these new advertising techniques.

Within individual interviews, participants are *empowered* to give an insightful, in-depth, and comprehensive account of their experience (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). This emerges because

participants are given the opportunity to reflect on and analyse their own personal motivations, thoughts and ideas on a given topic, often for the first time (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). In addition, interviews afford participants the unusual feeling of truly being *listened* to (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). The use of the interview method therefore addresses critiques in marketing literature that young consumers' voices are often overlooked (Cody, 2015). Furthermore, the decision was taken to conduct the interviews in the participants' schools so as to offer them a familiar setting in which to interact with the author (see Section 4.6.1).

Specifically, semi-structured interviews are identified as appropriate for this research. Semi-structured interviews allow participants the freedom to express themselves and to highlight personal areas of interest (Horton et al., 2004), while still ensuring themes are addressed which relate to the overall research question, aim and objectives. Thus, semi-structured interviewing gives freedom to both participant and researcher, the latter enabled to question responses in greater depth (Horton et al., 2004) ensuring the research process is both "naturalistic and interactive" (Saunders et al., 2019, p.179). The semi-structured approach is detailed further in Section 4.4.4 which discusses the theme sheet which was developed for the interviews.

Although there are many benefits associated with individual interviews, that is not to say that they do not also have limitations of their own, of which the chief criticism is that they do not shed insight into peer interaction (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Therefore, this disadvantage must be weighed up in the context of the specific research question (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). In the case of the present research, the research question is interested in the AL of teenagers - middle adolescents in particular. A detailed overview of the characteristics of this age group has been provided (see Section 2.5.1), which includes heightened self-consciousness and especial emphasis on belonging to a peer group (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004). Therefore, this group are likely to be very susceptible to group conformity which could impact their portrayal of honest accounts in a focus group session. Individual interviews allow (young) participants to

express themselves without worrying about the pressures of conforming with peers (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Interviews are therefore a more appropriate method for answering the research question of the current research.

Taken together, the benefits associated with individual interviews outweigh their limitations for the current research and were therefore considered the most suitable method. The following section provides an overview of elicitation techniques, which will be utilised at the end of each individual interview.

4.4.3 Data Collection Techniques Employed in this Study – Elicitation Techniques

It has been noted that adolescent participants may struggle to fully articulate themselves in response to verbal questioning alone (Barton, 2015). Rather, they may find it easier to articulate themselves in response to stimulus materials (Barton, 2015). Elicitation techniques refer to "research tasks that use visual, verbal, or written stimuli to encourage people to share their ideas" (Barton, 2015, p.180). Essentially, it involves exposing participants to stimulus material to elicit discussion on a particular topic. This method is regarded as useful at facilitating participants to express themselves about phenomena they might not usually engage in dialogue about (Barton, 2015). Although adolescent consumers are likely to have high exposure to SM advertising given their heavy use of such platforms (Ofcom, 2020), they may not be used to articulating their knowledge, feelings, and evaluations about SM advertising to other people. Therefore, they may benefit from having visual material to directly respond to and discuss. Additionally, the visual stimuli reflect the visual nature of SM platforms such as Instagram.

Furthermore, although academics are generally versed in presenting their thoughts and opinions in response to verbal questions, not all research participants are as readily able to engage in lengthy verbal exchanges in response to questioning (Barton, 2015). This is

especially true for children and teenagers, who can feel as though they are being tested on their ability to supply 'correct' answers during a research study when the researcher uses dialogue alone (Barton, 2015). Providing stimulus material to minors can therefore help to empower them to articulate their knowledge and experience more comfortably and accurately regarding a particular research phenomenon (Barton, 2015). For these reasons, the use of an elicitation technique which exposes adolescents to SM advertising could aid them to illustrate their AL.

The use of elicitation is said to make the "research process more transparent, comfortable, and authentic" by removing ambiguity and allows participants to engage in tasks which mirror their daily life (Barton, 2015, p.181). For instance, utilising advertising as stimulus material allows participants to inhibit the role of *responding* to specific examples of advertising (situational AL), after they have engaged in dialogue about knowledge of advertising more generally (dispositional AL) during the earlier stages of the interview. Furthermore, when working with an adolescent sample, it is recommended that multiple methods are used to accommodate differences in competencies and skill sets across the sample (Cody, 2015). In other words, some participants might articulate themselves well in response to verbal questioning, but others might find it easier to have visual material to which to respond.

Elicitation can also attenuate power imbalances, as well as helping adolescents feel less self-conscious. Barton (2015, p.182) notes:

> *"Looking at photographs can cover otherwise awkward silences, and there is no need for direct eye contact. Participants even become less self-conscious about notetaking or recording equipment because questions focus on materials rather than the respondent. Even when researchers probe participants' responses, the presence of physical materials—particularly visual images—can make this process less threatening."*

Given that adolescence is a period marked by heightened self-consciousness (Choudhury et al., 2006; Cody, 2013; Elkind, 1967), the use of stimulus material may therefore help them feel more comfortable and less absorbed in self-scrutiny. The use of elicitation can also help the research process to feel less like "schooling", which the use of verbal questioning alone can feel like to minors (Barton, 2015, p.182).

Therefore, the research design (individual, in-depth interviews which utilise elicitation) addresses the aim and objectives of the present research by allowing insight into the participants' associative network about SM advertising (i.e., their dispositional AL) as they present it openly and without boundaries during qualitative interviews. But it also allows insight into the participants' activation and retrieval of this knowledge suppository during exposure to specific forms of SM advertising (i.e., their situational AL) during elicitation. Therefore, these methods address the aim by paying attention to the both the dispositional manifestation of AL (through in-depth interviews), but also allowing insight into the situational manifestation (through elicitation). An in-depth overview of how elicitation was put into practice during the current research is offered in Section 4.4.5. But first, the following section addresses the development of the theme sheet for the individual interviews.

4.4.4 Theme Sheet for In-Depth Interviewing

An integral element of carrying out semi-structured, in-depth interviews is to prepare a theme sheet designed to guide the discussion (Bryman, 2016; Carson et al., 2001; Saunders et al., 2019). A theme sheet (or topic guide) is a list of topics, questions and probes used by an interviewer (Malhotra, 2019). As recommended by many authors (e.g., Bryman, 2016; Mack et al., 2005; Saunders et al., 2019), the theme sheet used in this research acted as a guideline only and it's use varied from interview to interview to allow the flow of conversation to be

dictated by the participants. This ensured that while the interviews dealt with similar themes, the process itself was flexible (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, in line with suggestions in the literature (Bryman, 2016; Mack et al., 2005) the author was able to adopt a flexible approach to follow up areas of interest introduced by the participants (Horton et al., 2004). Furthermore, the question order often varied in the interviews to that which is on the theme sheet, as well as the wording (Bryman, 2016)

This represents the semi-structured approach of the interviews. Specifically, because qualitative research is more interested in the participants' point of view (rather than the researcher's), it is encouraged that tangents which are introduced by participants are followed so as to give insight into what *they* see as relevant and important to the research topic (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, while the theme sheet acted as a guide to ensure similar topics and areas of importance were drawn upon in each interview, it did not act as a script. This aligns with the flexible, open nature of qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Ormston et al., 2014; Ponterotto, 2005).

The theme sheet used in the current research can be found in Appendix A. A number of guidelines were followed when formulating the questions. For example, the questions were designed to be open-ended in nature, e.g., 'Do brands use SM? In what ways do they use it? Can you tell me a little about that?'. The use of open-ended questions is in line with the interpretive nature of the research. Specifically, given the flexible nature of qualitative research, questions should be framed in a way which gives the participant "a great deal of leeway in how to reply" (Bryman, 2016, p.468). This aligns with the goal of qualitative research to provide rich insights into lived experience (Ormston et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the author ensured to use language which the research participants could easily comprehend (Bryman, 2016). The theme sheet (and interview questioning) avoided the use of

marketing jargon to instead use everyday language which would be easily understood by adolescents. For instance, rather asking participants about their understanding of marketplace behaviours such as market segmentation and targeting, the author asked questions like "What way do brands act on SM? Do they act the same way on TV? Can you tell me a bit about that?", "Why do you think marketers/brands use SM?" and "Have you ever felt that marketers are trying to target you? In what way?". In this way, while still addressing areas of interest for the research, questioning remained broad, flexible, and worded in a way that was easily understandable for adolescent participants.

Additionally, within qualitative interviewing it is important to avoid leading questions (Bryman, 2016). As discussed, the qualitative researcher is interested in learning from the participant and therefore has greater interest in what the participant sees as important in relation to the research focus (Bryman, 2016, Ormston et al., 2014). In this way, the researcher does not predetermine or seek to test what they see as an answer to the research question – such an approach would be deductive and unaligned with the interpretive paradigm. This relates to researcher reflexivity by ensuring to avoid bias in how questions are phrased. Therefore, the author was careful to ensure that questions were phrased in a neutral, open manner, thereby avoiding leading questions. For example, questions included "what types of advertising have you noticed? How do you know that it's advertising?" rather than a leading line of questioning which could be "do you think it's difficult to recognise advertising on SM because of its covert nature? Do you agree that it's unfair?".

In terms of conceptualising the questions to be included in the theme sheet, the author was guided by the research objectives (see appendix A for the theme sheet which gives a breakdown of the questions as well as the research objectives they were aligned with). Therefore, the goal was to include questions relating to the participants' recognition and understanding of the

nature of advertising on SM (RO1); their attitudes towards it (RO2); as well as their moral evaluations of it (RO3).

For instance, the author wanted to include questions relating to the participants' awareness that advertising can emerge in paid, owned and earned formats in the SM ecosystem (RO1). Questions included asking about how brands use SM and how they act in this ecosystem, therefore leaving it open to the participant to discuss paid and owned formats. Questions also involved asking if they or their friends engage in sharing brand-centred UGC (earned media). The author was also interested in exploring attitudes towards SM advertising, and so asked questions like "how do you react to advertising on social media?", "Do you ever find it irritating? When? Can you give an example? and "are there ads that you enjoy on SM? Can you give an example?". Other questions sought to invite participants to share their views about the fairness and appropriateness of SM advertising (RO3). These questions included "why do you think marketers/brands use social media?" and "do you think people get paid to post about brands on social media? Can you tell me a little about that? How do you react?". While the latter also addresses RO1 (cognitive AL), it also invites participants to give their views about the practice of IM, thus encouraging reflection on moral AL. These questions were formulated to gain an understanding of the participants' knowledge suppository about SM advertising in general (i.e., their dispositional AL).

At the end of each interview, elicitation was used to facilitate the exploration of AL as an applied response during exposure to a specific advertising episode (i.e., situational AL). Questioning varied depending on how the participant responded to the stimulus material (examples of IM), but a general line of questioning is included in the theme sheet (see Appendix A). The aim for this section of the interview was to investigate participants' recognition of advertising in practice (RO1), but also their affective (RO2) and moral (RO3) responses. An overview of the elicitation technique is next discussed.

4.4.5 In-Depth Interviewing: Elicitation Technique

The use of an elicitation technique served two purposes, (1) the stimulus material allows the participants to fully articulate themselves in a comfortable and authentic manner (Barton, 2015), and (2) it allows insight into AL as it is activated and retrieved during exposure. The decision to make influencer marketing (IM) the focus of the elicitation techniques was made for the following reasons. In Chapter Three, a strong case was made that covert forms of advertising such as IM militate against teenagers' AL due to their embedded nature and attractive source characteristics (see Section 3.5.4). As a result, calls have been made for further research on how adolescents are affected by this covert advertising practice (see Section 3.5.4). Influencers are recognised as being a big part of teenagers' lives (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019), and therefore, adolescents have been identified as a main target group of IM (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). The characteristics of adolescents (see Section 2.5) could make them particularly susceptible to this covert advertising practice. For example, given their strong desire for group conformity and the parasocial relationships they may form with influencers, they may find it difficult, or indeed be unwilling, to activate AL in this context (see Section 3.5.4). After all, this kind of covert advertising manifests in the profiles of influencers whom teenagers have actively *sought out* and *opted-in to*, thereby lending itself to consumer-brand engagement (see Section 3.6.1). Taken together, this pull-based, covert advertising format was identified as a pertinent context to investigate the activation of AL in practice.

Alongside this, the format of IM lends itself to being drawn upon in real time in its natural setting (i.e., as it appears within an influencer profile) during the data collection process. Specifically, a predominant form of IM is the posting of sponsored content as a permanent post on influencer profiles (see Appendix I for an example). This means that IM can be revisited time and time again on a laptop, and its format will stay static. The same cannot be said for the likes of pop-up, pre-roll, or native advertising, which instead have a push nature and therefore

specific instances cannot be revisited in their naturalistic setting – rather the researcher would be limited to using screenshots only. Therefore, IM was chosen as the material to use for elicitation.

In terms of how elicitation was operationalised during data collection, towards the *end* of each individual interview, the author introduced visual examples of IM. While some AL researchers introduce stimulus material early (e.g., De Pauw et al., 2017) others introduce material later in the discussion (e.g., Lawlor & Prothero, 2008; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Introducing stimulus material at the end of the interview ensures that participants are not led or directed in their earlier discussions (Lawlor & Prothero, 2008) and that they have the opportunity to discuss their own examples and experiences of SM advertising, before the author introduces specific examples at the end of the interviews.

Therefore, at the end of each interview the author asked the participants if they were comfortable to look at examples of SM content. Once they consented, the author utilised a laptop to access influencer profiles. The decision on what profiles were visited was informed by (1) what influencers were mentioned by participants during the interviews, and (2) if no specific influencer was emphasised, the author made the selection based on a pre-selected sample she had identified. If specific influencers were mentioned during the interview (in the case of scenario one) then the profiles which were drawn up were those specifically mentioned by the participant. In terms of scenario two, to select a sample of influencer profiles to utilise, a similar approach was taken to Gannon & Prothero (2018) by implementing purposive searching guided by journalists' lists of the most followed and popular influencers in Ireland. This was to ensure that the influencers had a well-known status, in the hope that the participants would be familiar with them. Indeed, this was often the case.

Guided by lists such as "Ireland's top 10 'influencers' in numbers: who are they and how are they doing it?" published in The Irish Independent (McBride, 2017) and "The Top 100 Irish Digital Influencers of 2017" published on Goss.ie (Ryan, 2017), well-known influencers such as Suzanne Jackson, Rob Lipsett, James Kavanagh, Roz Purcell, and Terrie McEvoy were identified and chosen. Examples of IM were located on their profiles and using purposive qualitative sampling in line with Gannon & Prothero (2018), five were selected to be included on the basis that they portrayed a range of different advertising disclosures (see Appendices I-M). The reasoning for placing an emphasis on influencer content containing disclosures is now discussed.

A key area of interest for AL researchers is to investigate the effectiveness of SM disclosures at triggering ad recognition and critical reflection (see Section 3.6.3). Disclosures in use to declare IM are not uniform, but rather can vary widely. For example, they vary in the wording they use (e.g., #ad, #sp, #spon). They also vary in terms of their placement, e.g., whether they are present in hashtag format and are therefore present *underneath* a visual (see Appendix L), or whether they are present *above* the visual using the phrase 'paid partnership' (see Appendix I). Importantly they can also vary in prominence, whereby in some instances the disclosure may be clearly portrayed (see Appendix M for an example), while others appear as buried within a block of text and so could be considered less prominent (see Appendix J). Situational AL is predicated on recognition of advertising – to activate critical reflection, the advertisement first must be recognised (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how adept adolescents are at recognising IM across the use of various disclosures. The author also had printouts of the pre-selected sample on hand in case of technology issues (e.g., Wi-Fi connection issues).

Where the participant spoke about an influencer who was not in the pre-selected sample, their profile was visited using the laptop and the author located an example of IM on their profile in

the moment. This reflects the challenging nature of conducting qualitative research (see Section 4.4) as it required quick adaptability from the author. However, the author began to gain familiarity with influencers popular with the cohort during the process (e.g., Ellie Kelly and Keilidh Cashell were often mentioned in addition to those within the pre-selected sample), therefore the author studied these profiles outside of the interviews so that she could select an example more quickly from their profiles in subsequent interviews.

The pre-selected sample can be viewed in Appendices I-M, whereas a sample of those selected during the interviews based on participant preference are available in appendices N-S. As is evident, there was overlap between the influencers introduced by the participants and those preselected by the researcher. This approach ensured that each participant responded to IM in the context of familiar influencers during elicitation, as well as being exposed to a range of disclosures. If a participant was particularly enthused with a specific influencer, sometimes multiple examples of IM from the same influencer were introduced. This flexible approach is in line with the interpretive paradigm underpinning the study.

Although within the preselected sample the researcher had examples of IM from Snapchat (see Appendices K and M) and Instagram (see Appendices I, J and L), during the interviews it became apparent that the participants overwhelmingly engaged with influencers (and advertising) via Instagram, over other SM platforms. This emerged because they segregated each SM platform according to uses, where for instance Snapchat was utilised to keep in contact with peers, while Instagram was used to consume content from influencers, celebrities, and brands (see Section 5.1.2). Therefore, the visuals selected by the participants are from Instagram (see Appendices N-S), thus reflecting that this is the platform where they indicated they engaged with influencers most often.

In terms of the task the participants were asked to do during elicitation, when the author located the profile and content to show to the participant, they were asked to have a look at the content on the laptop screen (or in some cases, printout) and to take their time. Once they spent some time absorbing the material, they were asked to share their views on the nature of the content and what they thought about it generally. For example, the author asked questions like "What do you think this is about?", "Why has the influencer shared this?" and "Do you usually read all the text on these kinds of posts?" (see theme sheet in Appendix A). Therefore, a primary area of interest was the participants' ability to recognise the content as sponsored, and also their views on it more generally.

The author did consider taking a different approach during elicitation, namely using the laptop to ask participants to pick out an example of IM on the profile of an influencer they follow. However, this approach was ruled out because it presupposed that they had a developed understanding of covert advertising to be able to seek it out. Furthermore, such an approach might be more aligned with a deductive line of thinking (i.e., where the participants are being tested specifically on their ability to pick a 'correct' visual).

On the other hand, exposing participants to an example of covert advertising and inviting them to share their views on the nature of the content does not presuppose any level of AL and is more aligned with the inductive approach of the study. In this way, the participants could introduce any line of conversation which they desired. This allowed them to demonstrate their AL more flexibly and could allow insight to new components/dimensions of AL, rather than focusing solely on components already accounted for in the literature. Further considerations relating to data collection were sampling and gaining access to participants.

4.5 Sampling Considerations

A strong case has been made for conducting AL research with middle adolescents (see Section 2.5.1). Therefore, the present study sought to sample teenagers aged 15-17 years for data collection. Non-probability sampling is considered the norm for qualitative research since interpretive research is interested in gaining rich insights into a contextualised sample, rather than generalising findings to a broader population (Parker, 2014; Saunders et al., 2019). In particular, purposive sampling was implemented in this study, which refers to selecting participants based on their relevance to the research question (Bryman, 2016; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019). More specifically, purposive sampling refers to selecting participants according to "predetermined criteria relevant to a particular research objective" (Guest et al., 2006, p.61).

The present research was interested in exploring the nature of middle adolescents' AL in the context of SM (see Section 2.5.1). Therefore, two criteria were necessary for inclusion in the research (1) that the participant was aged between 15-17 and (2) that they used SM regularly. Based on these criteria, it was decided that students in fourth (Transition Year) or fifth year of their secondary school education would form a pertinent group to include in the study. This is because these students are likely to be in the desired age range (i.e., aged 15-17), and given figures relating to SM usage amongst Irish and European teenagers (e.g., CSO, 2019; EU Kids Online, 2020; Okoh, 2022), are very likely to use SM. Teenagers are avid SM users, with one study reporting that 97% use at least one SM platform and 45% are almost constantly online (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Elsewhere, the average Irish teenager has been reported to check SM a minimum of sixty times a day (Okoh, 2022). An important criterion for this research was that the participants use SM, so upon receiving a parental consent form to take part in the research (see Figure 4.3) each teenager was asked whether they actively use SM.

Unsurprisingly, in all instances, each teenager confirmed regular use of SM. An overview of the rationale for focusing on the chosen age group is provided in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: *Rationale for Sampling Middle Adolescents (aged 15-17) in the Present Research.*

Adolescence: AL literature	Adolescence (ages 10-18): defining features	Middle adolescence (aged 15-17)
Few studies which include adolescent sample	Heavy SM users (Mayo Clinic, 2019; Ofcom, 2020)	Teens as avid users of SM (Okoh, 2022); key target market for brands and influencers (De Jans et al, 2018)
Recent calls for their inclusion in empirical research (e.g., De Jans et al, 2018; Zarouali et al, 2019)	Identity formation as key task (Klimstra et al, 2010; Lloyd, 2002; van Doeselaar et al, 2020)	Dearth of AL research focusing on this stage of adolescence
Acknowledgement that adolescents have not reached an 'adult benchmark' of AL (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al, 2020)	Heightened self-conscious & egocentrism (Choudhury et al, 2006; Cody, 2013; Elkind, 1967)	Adjusting to a sexually maturing body and feelings (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004)
May be vulnerable to SM advertising which leverages peer influence (Zarouali et al, 2018c)	Desire for peer acceptance (which impacts self-esteem) (Daniel & Leaper, 2006)	Growth in abstract thought (SAHRC, 2013)
	Use consumption as a means of expression (Lachance et al, 2003)	Self-involvement & heightened self-consciousness in comparison to other stages of adolescence (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004)
		Interest in moral reasoning (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004)
		Strong emphasis of peer group & belonging to clique (SAHRC, 2013; Spano, 2004)

Source: developed by the author.

4.5.1 Sample Size

In terms of how many middle adolescents should be included in the research, there are varying perspectives in the literature on what constitutes an adequate sample size in qualitative research (Boddy, 2016). It is noted that within non-probability samples used in interpretive research, the number of participants will be dependent on the research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). More specifically, it depends on "what you need to find out, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done within your available resources" (Saunders et al., 2019, p.315). For a homogenous group (i.e., a group who share similar traits, such as a group of Irish secondary students aged between 15 and 17), guidance is that between 4 and 20 participants is sufficient (Saunders et al., 2019). Elsewhere, Sandelowski (1995) suggests a sample size of 10 when dealing with a homogeneous population, whereas Guest et al. (2006) concluded that 12 interviews were optimal for the purpose of their data analysis. Elsewhere, Green and Thorogood (2018) concluded that little new information emerged in their research after interviewing 20 participants.

Therefore, the general goal before starting data collection was to interview at least 20 participants to achieve credibility (Saunders et al., 2019) based on recommendations in the literature (e.g., Green & Thorogood, 2018). However, this was noted as a rough guideline only, so that the author had a number to provide to school principals. This was a question often asked by principals, but the author ensured to clarify this as an approximate number. More specifically, the final number of participants to be interviewed would depend on achieving data saturation. Data saturation refers to identifying the point in the interview process whereby little or no new information or themes emerge (e.g., Guest et al., 2006). Accordingly, the final sample size was 29 participants overall which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section.

4.5.2 Gaining Access to Participants

As outlined, the author had a rough goal to interview approximately 20 participants, in line with recommendations regarding sample size from the literature (e.g., Green & Thorogood, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). However, the final number would be decided by meeting the criteria of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). A school setting for the interviews was deemed appropriate to conduct the research as it would provide a familiar and neutral environment for the participants (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012) in line with the ethical approach underpinning the study (see Section 4.6). To conduct research with minors, it is necessary to undergo Garda-vetting, which is the vetting of researchers by the national police and security service in Ireland. This vetting requirement applies to any individual working with or conducting research with young people under 18 years in Ireland. The author therefore secured Garda-vetting (see Appendix B) before approaching schools (the process for securing Garda-vetting is outlined in Section 4.6.1).

In order to gain access to research participants, the author contacted school principals via email to gain their permission to conduct research in their schools. Gaining access to schools turned out to be a lengthier process than perhaps anticipated. It is thought that this may have been due to reluctance on behalf of principals to disrupt the regular school routine of pupils. Out of 45 schools contacted, approximately one quarter responded, and 4 schools agreed to take part. While outlining a desire to access adolescents aged between 15-17, the author made clear to school principals that they were free to limit the researcher's access to be solely with fourth year (Transition Year) students. Indeed, three out of four schools followed suit by doing so. Fourth year in secondary school in Ireland is known as 'Transition Year' (TY). This is a non-examination year, which "is designed to act as a bridge between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, n.d., para.1). Therefore, principals were more comfortable allowing TY students to take time out of

the school day because they were not preparing for exams. Between January and May 2018, access was negotiated to four schools in Ireland: two located in Co. Dublin and two located in Co. Leitrim.

The process employed for gaining access to participants is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: *Gaining Access to Participants.*
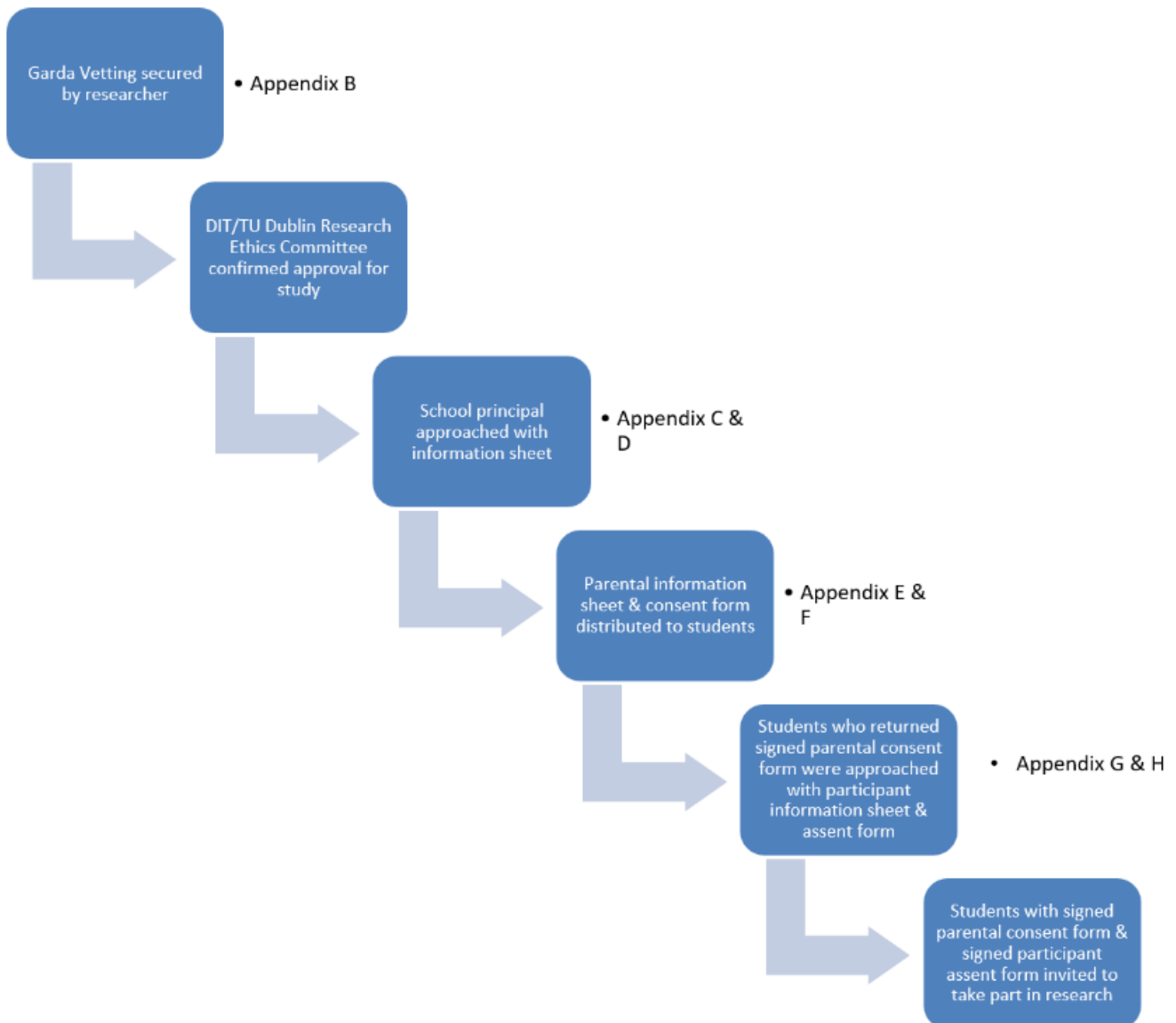
Source: developed by the author.

Essentially, the process began by securing Garda-vetting and approval for the study from the Research Ethics Committee in the author's educational institution (see Section 4.6.1). The author then began the process of contacting school principals via email to gauge their interest

in taking part in the research (see Appendix C). Within the email, an information sheet designed for principals (see Appendix D) was enclosed which explained the research process, including the purpose of the study and topics which would be discussed in the interviews. Some principals requested a follow-up telephone call for more information about the study, with which the author was happy to comply. Pending the principal allowing access to the school, students were then approached with a parental information sheet (see Appendix E) and parental consent form (see Appendix F). Because the students are minors, the author had to first secure informed consent from parents/guardians before seeking interest from the participants themselves. Once signed parental consent forms were returned by the students, they were then asked to read an information sheet designed specifically for them (see Appendix G). If they were still happy to take part in the research, they were then asked to sign an assent form for themselves (see Appendix H). As such, in line with the ethical approach underpinning the study (see Section 4.6.2), only those who provided both a signed parental consent form and an assent form for themselves were invited to take part in the research.

The two-pronged process for navigating consent (i.e., attaining parental consent first before approaching the teens for their own assent in taking part in the research), while ultimately unavoidable, turned out to cause some delays and difficulties for the research process. Specifically, this related to difficulty ensuring that those who wanted to take part in the research remembered to return a parental consent form. On several occasions, on days the school had specified as appropriate for the author to conduct interviews, many students who were willing to take part in the research failed to remember to return parental consent forms and therefore could not take part. Although the author did remind students, and also asked school principals to give reminders, such obstacles are unavoidable when dealing with a youthful sample. However, this was particularly problematic in the second school visited, where only two students had remembered to return parental consent forms on the date the author visited the

school. Unfortunately, in that particular school, it was specified by the principal that the author had only one day of access. Therefore, only two students were interviewed in the second school. Such are the unavoidable hazards of conducting research with minors. This may be worthwhile to note for researchers in the future who could possibly take steps to mitigate such problems (e.g., by organising an information evening where parents/guardians could sign forms on the spot, or by organising text reminders to be sent by the school). Indeed, text reminders were implemented by the third and fourth school (both located in Co. Leitrim) where eight and nine students were interviewed, respectively.

The final sample size was 29 participants overall (see Table 4.2 for an overview of the participants). It was at this point that the data was deemed to have met saturation criterion as well as being able to provide a novel and 'richly textured understanding' (Sandelowski, 1995, p.183) of the teenagers' AL. This number is also aligned with recommendations from the literature, as Boddy (2016, p.430) notes "any qualitative sample size over 30 … becomes too unwieldy to administer and analyse". By the time the author had finished conducting interviews in the fourth school, it became apparent that patterns and themes which had been present in the earlier schools were being reflected, and that experiences and meanings introduced by the participants were no longer completely novel compared to other interviews. As such, because the author was seeing similar instances and experiences again and again, data saturation was deemed to have been achieved (Guest et al., 2006). The ethical approach underpinning the study is next presented.

Table 4.2: *Overview of Participants (Anonymised).*

School & location	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Year in School
School 1 (Dublin, Ireland)	David	Male	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Kate	Female	17	5th Year
	Dawn	Female	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	James	Male	17	5th Year
	Alice	Female	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Jack	Male	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Natasha	Female	17	5th Year
	Rachel	Female	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Sarah	Female	17	5th Year
	Ciara	Female	17	5th Year
School 2 (Dublin, Ireland)	Grace	Female	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Ruth	Female	15	
School 3 (Leitrim, Ireland)	Rob	Male	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Fred	Male		
	Owen	Male		
	Kelly	Female		
	Tracy	Female		
	Ava	Female		
	Naomi	Female		
	Una	Female		
School 4 (Leitrim, Ireland)	Hannah	Female	16	4th Year (Transition Year)
	Shane	Male		
	Conor	Male		
	Michael	Male		
	Aisling	Female		
	Ellie	Female		
	Shauna	Female		
	Ross	Male		
	Emily	Female	15	

Source: developed by the author.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The process put in place for conducting the interviews was guided by the ethical principles underpinning the research. This study held the well-being of young people as its primary concern. Ethics are an integral part of all research but given there may be a perceived power differential between researcher and young participants (Cody, 2015), they take on especial importance in research involving minors. As mentioned, teenagers are defined as children (i.e., under the age of 18 years) by the Child Care Act 1991 ("Child Care Act, 1991, Section 2", 1991), the Children Act 2001 ("Children Act, 2001, Section 3", 2001) in Ireland and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990 ("Convention on the Rights of the Child", 1990). This research sought to take a child-centric approach (Cody, 2015; Sherrington et al., 2017) by employing research methods which allow the child to act as co-creator of knowledge (rather than a conduit from which knowledge is extracted), but also by taking a participant-first approach when considering the fairest and most comfortable way in which the research design could be implemented in practice. This meant outlining three overarching pillars to guide the ethical approach of the study: (1) minimising the level of risk and discomfort for the participants; (2) achieving informed consent; and (3) providing anonymity and data protection.

4.6.1 Minimising Level of Risk & Discomfort

The first ethical pillar underpinning the research was to minimise the level of risk and discomfort for the participants. Before data collection could begin, ethical approval had to be sought from DIT's (now TU Dublin) Research Ethics Committee (REC). DIT, as the author's educational institution was known at the time, subsequently acquired university status becoming TU Dublin, hence the reference to both names. Ethical approval was confirmed in December 2017. In order to receive approval, the REC recommended that Garda-vetting was

secured by the author. This is in line with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p.4) who also recommend that "Garda-vetting and employment checks are carried out on study personnel". The purpose of Garda-vetting is to minimise the level of risk posed to children and vulnerable persons when interacting with personnel in organisations. The process carries out inquiries with by An Garda Síochána (the national police service in Ireland) to check for a criminal record on behalf of the applicant. Specifically, the process followed by the author to achieve Garda-vetting clearance was as follows:

1. The author contacted the admissions office in the then DIT (now TU Dublin) as they are the office responsible for organising Garda-vetting on behalf of students. A 'vetting application form' was provided to the author, who filled it in and provided proof of identity.

2. DIT validated the author's proof of identity and subsequently forwarded an online vetting form to the author.

3. The author completed the form and submitted it to DIT.

4. DIT reviewed the form and submitted it to the National Vetting Bureau.

5. On processing the application, the National Vetting Bureau released a vetting disclosure to DIT.

6. DIT confirmed that the author had successfully been Garda-vetted and was therefore cleared to take part in research with minors (see Appendix B).

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p.2) also state: "a key ethical consideration in research involving children is the level of risk to which children may be exposed". To further minimise risk or discomfort for participants in this research, the research took place in a safe, neutral, and familiar setting – in the participants' school. The topics which were discussed (see Appendix A), as well as material used to stimulate discussion, were identified as suitable for the age group involved.

A further step taken to minimise risk to the research participants was during the conduct of the interviews. Specifically, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p. 5) state: "researchers can engage one-to-one with children provided they are always in sight of others". To address this in the research, social spaces within the schools were sought out (e.g., assembly areas, meeting rooms, or classrooms near to the participant's class) and an open-door policy was implemented so that both the author and the participant were visible to third parties. The students were accompanied to and from their classrooms by the author.

Additionally, the Esomar World Research Codes and Guidelines: Interviewing Children and Young People (World Esomar Research, 1999, p.5) suggests that: "steps are taken to ensure that the child or young person is not worried, confused or misled by the questioning". To adhere to this, the topics and wording of questions chosen for the interview were composed so as to be easily understood by 15-17-year-olds (see Appendix A) and were accompanied by visual examples suitable for that age group. The use of stimulus material is also said to help minors to feel more comfortable articulating themselves, as well as to feel less self-conscious (Barton, 2015).

4.6.2 Informed Consent

The second ethical pillar underpinning the child-centric research approach was to ensure that informed consent was achieved prior to inviting the participants to take part in the research. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p.2) stipulate that: "for consent to be valid, it has to be informed", and proceed to advise that "parental and/or guardian (informed) consent is required for a child (defined in Ireland as a person below the age of 18) to participate in research". The process employed to achieve informed consent was illustrated in Figure 4.3 (see Section 4.5.2). Namely, after ethical clearance was secured from the REC, the author

contacted school principals via email (and sometimes follow-up phone call) to gauge their interest in taking part in the study (see Appendix C). A dedicated information sheet was provided to the principals (see Appendix D). When interest from schools was expressed, the author visited the schools and introduced herself to the students. The author then sought informed consent from parents/guardians via detailed information sheets (see Appendix E) and consent form (see Appendix F). After consent was provided from parents/guardians, those students who had obtained permission and returned the consent form were approached with a detailed information sheet designed for them (see Appendix G), as well an assent form (see Appendix H). Only those students whose parents/guardians provided consent in addition to their own assent were invited to take part in the research process. Therefore, a lengthy process was employed to ensure that consent on behalf of schools and guardians, as well as assent on behalf of the participants, was informed.

4.6.3 Anonymity & Data Protection

The final ethical pillar guiding the research was to ensure that anonymity and data protection were afforded to the research participants. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p. 3) outline: "data should be collected with the consent of the participant and the researcher should also explain who will have access to the data and why". The process of achieving consent has been outlined, and each of the information sheets designed for principals, parents and participants gave details about who (the author and the research supervisor) would have access to the data.

Furthermore, the Data Protection Act (1988) states that on behalf of data controllers: "appropriate security measures shall be taken against unauthorised access to, or alteration, disclosure or destruction of, the data and against their accidental loss or destruction". The data

collected (i.e., the audio recordings and transcripts) were accessed only by the author and were stored in an encrypted format (a password protected Google-drive folder). During the process of analysing the data, some data excerpts were shared with the research supervisor (who was named on the information sheets as having access to the data), but altogether no one but the researcher herself had access to the data in terms of being able to cause "alteration, disclosure or destruction" (Data Protection Act, 1988).

Additionally, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2017, p. 6) states it is necessary that: "researchers, research institutions and organisations provide transparency about how to access or make use of their data and research materials". Likewise, the IUA Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland (Irish Universities Association, 2013, p.5) outline a principle that researchers should adhere to: "honesty in presenting research goals and intentions, in precise and nuanced reporting on research methods and procedures, and in conveying valid interpretations and justifiable claims with respect to possible applications of research results". In this research, honesty with participants was a primary focus from the outset. The teenagers involved in the study were informed of the exact research question, how the information they provided would be used and that (with their permission) the interview would be voice recorded using a Dictaphone and then stored in a password protected encrypted format (a password protected google-drive folder). Results are reported honestly and are available to participants should they request them using the contact details provided in the information sheet (see Appendix G). The interview recordings and transcripts will be kept until final examination of this thesis.

Finally, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012, p. 3) put forth: "the principle of anonymity is that individual participants should not be identifiable in research documentation". Anonymity and confidentiality were provided to all participants through the use of pseudonyms

when reporting the findings of the research, and through omitting any identifiable markers from the findings. In this way, it is ensured that privacy is afforded to each research participant.

The process of conducting the qualitative interviews is presented in the following section.

4.7 Qualitative Data Collection: Conducting the Interviews

In terms of conducting the interviews, after each school principal had given permission for the research to take place, the author first visited the relevant school to introduce herself to the students. In school one, access was granted to both TY and fifth year students, in each of the other schools, access was limited to TY alone. During this introduction, the students were invited to ask questions about the research and were provided with parental information sheets and consent forms. The author then returned on another day (specified by the school) to collect the returned parental consent forms, provide participant information sheets, and assent forms to those who returned the parental consent forms, and to start conducting the interviews. In school two, a single day of access was specified, in school three, access was granted across two days for interviewing, and in schools one and four, the author interviewed across three school days.

In each school, a social space with an open-door in view of others was secured. In school one this consisted of a boardroom near to the principal's office. In school two, the interviews were held in a meeting space within the school secretary's office. In school three, a social space in the entrance hall opposite to the principal's office was secured, and in school four, the interviews were held in a computer room. In each space, both researcher and participant were in view of others. To conduct the interviews, the author escorted each student (who had a signed parental consent and participant assent form) from their class to the space dedicated for the interview. Once seated, the author again explained the purpose of the study, invited the

participant to ask any questions and asked them if they would be comfortable to have the interview recorded via Dictaphone. In every case, the participants agreed. The interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length, with most lasting an hour. Once finished, the author escorted the participant back to their classroom.

The interviews were an enjoyable experience, and the author was delighted that the participants felt comfortable to share frank, honest and deep accounts of their experience with SM advertising. Rapport-building was considered an integral element within the research process (Fontana & Frey, 1994) to achieve "casual, comfortable conversation" (Cody, 2015, p.292). To achieve this, the author engaged in light-hearted small talk with the participants as she escorted them to the interview. Recommendations for building rapport suggest that the process should involve both researcher and participant giving and receiving information (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). Therefore, the author ensured the conversation was reciprocal as she escorted the participants to the social space for the interview, sharing details about herself as well as asking the participants about themselves. This involved talking about light-hearted issues such as the Christmas period (since in school one, the interviews were conducted in January) or in schools three and four, the upcoming summer holidays. Topics also included favourite subjects in school, experiences of TY, the weather, and simply how the day was progressing.

Furthermore, the style of dress the interviewer chooses can influence the atmosphere of the interview (Cody, 2015). To ensure that the adolescents felt comfortable and relaxed, the author made a conscious choice to "dress in a younger style" (Cody, 2015, p.292). Specifically, the author chose to wear garments such as jeans rather than office-style clothes to ensure that she was not perceived as a teacher figure. Visual cues of friendliness are also important in building rapport, such as smiling and maintaining eye contact (Bryman, 2016), which the author ensured to exhibit. The theme sheet is also important to consider, as eye contact during the interview

will be impeded if the researcher is too reliant on it (Cody, 2015). Therefore, the author had memorised areas of interest and used the theme sheet as a guide only.

It should be noted that there are critiques present in the literature regarding rapport-building in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Elmir et al., 2011). Specifically, critics argue that if the participant feels too friendly with the researcher, they may strive to answer questions in a way which pleases the interviewer (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, some authors argue that rapport can be seen as a form of coercion rather than support (Peckover, 2002). But in the school environment, adolescents are used to perceiving adults present (i.e., teachers) as inhibiting a power role since they have access to rewards and sanctions. Therefore, the author felt it was important to establish a friendly relationship with the participants to help them feel at ease, and to solidify that she was not there in an instructor capacity. This was seen to help attenuate any perceived power imbalance. Indeed, it is noted that the friendly demeanour employed by the author as she escorted participants to the interview helped them to visibly relax. However, as noted earlier, the author strove to achieve "empathic neutrality" during the interviews themselves (Ormston et al., 2014, p.22), which meant remaining neutral in response to answers given during the interview (Bryman, 2016). As such, this addresses critiques relating to coercion (Peckover, 2002) and pleasing answers (Bryman, 2016).

Indeed, the lively and vibrant personalities of the participants shone throughout the interviews and is apparent in the excerpts utilised in Chapters Five, Six and Seven which present the research findings. The next section considers the process employed for analysing the data.

4.8 Data Analysis

To analyse qualitative data, a number of approaches are available, including analytic induction, grounded theory, narrative analysis and thematic analysis (Bryman, 2016). The author elected

to use thematic analysis for the following reasons. Thematic analysis involves searching the data set to find "repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). This form of analysis is said to allow a systematic, but flexible approach to qualitative data analysis (Saunders, et al., 2019). Qualitative methods (particularly interviewing) produce large amounts of textual data. Thematic analysis, and in particular the systematic process suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006), provides a framework with which to work through large amounts of data by identifying important themes therein. It provides a procedure for describing the data in rich detail, which allows the researcher to achieve a deep interpretation and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The framework involves generating codes within the data, and then recognising relationships and patterns by sorting codes into themes. The resulting themes then allow the researcher to theorise (or add to theory) (Saunders et al., 2019). When conducted through an interpretive lens, thematic analysis allows the researcher to explore multiple, and possibly conflicting, interpretations of a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, thematic analysis allows for an appreciation of the varying, multiple realities experienced by social actors, and is therefore aligned with the research paradigm of this doctoral study. For these reasons, thematic analysis was chosen as the method of analysis to be employed in the current research.

Ultimately, within this doctoral study, thematic analysis was conducted twice: (1) by manually coding the data and sorting the codes into themes, and (2) by using a software package (MaxQDA) to streamline the management of the data. The two-stage process employed for analysing the data was seen to add rigour to the research.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are six steps to be conducted in thematic analysis: (1) familiarising oneself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the report. Each of these

steps were implemented twice, once utilising a manual analysis, and a second time with the assistance of software (MaxQDA). Essentially, the first stage of analysis (manual analysis) focused on analysing the data using data-driven codes, while the second stage (software assisted) focused more so on theory-driven codes (Saunders et al., 2019). This will be explained in more detail throughout the discussion. Once the initial stage of analysis was complete (i.e., manual), the richness of the data was apparent. However, to more fully mine the data for its meaning and importance, the decision was made to analyse the data a second time, but this time with the support of qualitative data analysis software.

In other words, the author first analysed the data manually, employing all six steps advised by Braun & Clarke (2006). The decision was then taken to employ the six steps again to mine the data on a deeper level and to utilise more *a priori* or theory driven codes, but this time with the assistance of software to provide a more efficient way of managing the data. Once the decision to utilise software was made, the next step was to choose what programme to use. Multiple software programmes are available to choose from, the most established or well-known of which may be NVivo and MaxQDA. It has been argued in the literature that both packages have similar capabilities and benefits, so the choice of which programme to choose can rest upon the researcher's perception of which interface is more adaptable to them (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira & Santos, 2013). Indeed, it has been suggested that it is impossible to say which data analysis software is best, since the researcher is in control of the way in which the software is used and what tools are used within it (Saunders et al., 2019).

Having researched both programmes, and sought advice from colleagues, the author decided upon using MaxQDA. Overall, MaxQDA appears to have all the benefits associated with NVivo (such as ease of coding, the ability to edit and revise codes and to group codes together). However, the ease of use of MaxQDA was considered superior to that of NVivo. Therefore,

MaxQDA was utilised on this basis, since there appears to be no clear argument that one software package is superior to the other (Oliveira et al., 2013; Saunders et al., 2019).

It is widely acknowledged that the use of qualitative data analysis software does not replace the researcher within analysis – i.e., the software does not analyse the data for the researcher (Bryman, 2016; Oliveira, 2013; Saunders et al., 2019). Rather, the use of such software can act as an aid for the qualitative researcher in terms of *managing* the data. Indeed, this is where MaxQDA was beneficial to the research. The interface allowed the author to quickly toggle between transcripts, codes, and themes, as well as to easily read through all excerpts associated with a particular code or theme. Therefore, while analysis is still reliant on the researcher's interpretation, software benefits the process by allowing a more efficient way to deal with large amounts of data.

Furthermore, a critique of qualitative data analysis is that it can have an 'anything goes' quality (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whereby the process employed to arrive at findings is unclear. The use of software acts as a means of adding rigour to the research by providing transparency to the analysis process. In other words, it provides a database which makes the transcripts and codes visible, including how the codes have been grouped into themes (and indeed, how themes have been grouped into major themes). The grouping of major themes and sub-themes which emerged at the end of both stages of analysis is visible in Table 4.3. Therefore, anyone who is given access to the database can clearly follow the process of analysis and observe the composition of themes at both a coded and data level.

Table 4.3: *A Breakdown of Major Themes and Sub-Themes Which Emerged at the End of Data Analysis.*

Cognitive AL	Affective AL	Moral AL
Awareness and Recognition of SM Advertising • Awareness & Recognition of Overt SM Advertising • Awareness & Recognition of Native Advertising • Perception of IM as a Hybrid of Paid and Earned Media Rather Than as a Form of Covert Advertising • Overestimation of Ability to Recognise IM – Dispositional Expertise but Limited Situational Ability • Awareness of the Commercial Purpose of Owned Media **Understanding of the Advertiser's Objectives and Tactics with regard to SM Advertising** • Understanding of Selling Intent within SM Advertising • Understanding of Persuasive Intent & Persuasive Tactics within SM Advertising • Understanding of Segmentation & Targeting at Play within SM Advertising • Understanding of Bias within SM Advertising • SM Consumers as a Source of Brand Messaging - Some Understanding of the Power of Earned Media • Understanding of the Advertiser's Covert Tactics on SM: Compensation & Editorial Control within IM	**Unfavourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising** • Irritation Towards Disruptive Advertising • Dislike but Tolerance Towards Incessant Advertising • Frustration Towards Irrelevant Advertising • Resentment Towards Influencers for Acting as Disseminators of Advertising, but Tolerance Towards Specific Influencers **Favourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising: Perception of SM Advertising as Offering Relevance and Utility** • Targeted SM Advertising as a Helpful Resource • Enjoyment of Covert Advertising: Appreciation of Influencer Marketing • A Modern-Day Catalogue – the Opt-In Nature & perceived Utility of Owned Media as a Form of Advertising • Earned Media as a Reliable Testimonial from Peers: Consumer WOM in Praise of Brands	**The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Fair** • Tolerance of SM Advertising on the Basis of Relevance and Utility • Empathising with Commercial Perspectives **The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Immoral** • SM Advertising as Creating Pressure to Consume & Keep Up with Trends • The Invasion of Consumers' Privacy by the Marketer • Questioning the Subtle Nature of Covert Advertising: IM as Immoral on the Basis of its Embedded Nature • Scepticism Towards Covert Advertising: Questioning the Legitimacy of IM • Disapproval of Covert Advertising: IM as an Exploitative Practice

Source: developed by the author.

Both forms of analysis (i.e., manual and software assisted) will be discussed utilising the structure suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006), i.e., according to the six steps employed. The discussion is chronological, and therefore starts by giving an overview of the manual process, followed by software assisted.

4.8.1 Analysing the Data: Manual Analysis

Step One: Familiarising Oneself with the Data

Braun & Clarke (2006, p.87) advise that the researcher should start by immersing themselves in the data to achieve deep familiarity with the "depth and breadth of the content". They suggest this can be achieved by transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data and noting down initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcribing the data is not only a practical exercise so that the data can be coded, but it also acts as an important step in achieving closeness with the data. During the process of transcribing, aspects of note started to become apparent to the author. In line with recommendations, the author therefore recorded initial thoughts and ideas of note for each transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step Two: Generating Initial Codes

When coding the data manually, the author tagged (i.e., coded) each and every part of the data. This meant that there was no part of any transcript that did not have a code assigned to it. The reasoning behind this was to ensure that the process was systematic, and that extracts of data which were not initially identified as important by the author were not overlooked. When every piece of data is coded, the importance of extracts of data which initially appeared insignificant can sometimes become apparent. This is an inductive approach, as coding every part of the

data allows an exploration of all possible meanings and guides the direction of the research (Saunders et al., 2019).

A qualitative researcher can code in three ways. Codes can be guided by (1) the actual terms used by participants (i.e., '*in vivo'* codes); (2) developed according to labels derived from the data; or (3) derived from existing theory and literature ('*a priori codes'*) (Saunders et al., 2019). The first two may be considered as data-driven codes, while the latter can be labelled as theory-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2019). At this stage within data analysis, in so far as was possible, coding was carried out on a data-driven level (i.e., focusing on using terms and labels guided by the data). Since the research is guided by a pre-existing theory, *a-priori* codes were also used, but to a lesser extent. A greater emphasis was placed on *a-priori* codes in the second stage of analysis, which was software assisted.

Given the analysis was manual at this point, a master document was created to act as an index of codes, which assigned a number to each code. This is available in Appendix T, thus making the initial codes visible. The researcher then set up a dedicated document for each code which listed all excerpts recorded within that code. This meant that almost 300 documents were created (one for each code) to record the data relevant to each code.

Step Three: Searching for Themes

The next step in Braun & Clarke's (2006) process is to search for themes. According to Bryman (2016), a theme is a category identified by the analyst within the data which relates to the research focus, builds on codes and that gives the researcher an understanding of their data to make a theoretical contribution. Elsewhere, Saunders et al. (2019, p. 657) define a theme as "a broad category incorporating several codes that appear to be related to one another and which indicates an idea that is important to your research question". Thus, it can be inferred from both

definitions that the important element is that the theme should be grounded in and relevant to the research focus, and therefore the research question. As such, when deciding how to group codes into themes, the author was guided by the research question, aim and objectives throughout.

In terms of deciding what counts as a theme, the author was guided by interpretive discourse. Specifically, themes were not based on their prevalence across the entire data set, as this approach would be quantitative in nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This would lend itself to reasoning such as "if it was present in 50% of one's data items, it would be a theme, but if it was present only in 47%, then it would not be a theme", which is unaligned with interpretive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Rather, themes were assigned based on their 'keyness', specifically "whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Indeed, this means that even if "a single comment made by one participant is particularly helpful in elucidating their account" a theme may be devised to encapsulate it (University of Huddersfield, n.d.)

Within this step of the manual data analysis, the author grouped as many codes as possible into themes, at this stage still cautious not to overlook the importance of any particular code as it related to the research question. At the end of this step, 32 preliminary themes were identified (see Appendix U).

Step Four: Reviewing Themes

The next stage involves reviewing themes by returning to the coded extracts to ensure all codes relate to the theme and to each other, as well as to the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author refined the themes by deciding upon major themes and sub-themes. Additionally, some themes were cut at this stage. Themes were removed if the coded extracts did not relate

to one another; if there were not enough codes or extracts to constitute a theme; or if the theme appeared irrelevant to the overall research focus, or indeed to the other themes. This resulted in seven major themes, each with sub-themes. At this stage of analysis, the seven over-arching themes were: cognisance of the marketers' agenda; limited cognitive AL; marketer as foe – disapproval of SM advertising; tolerance of SM advertising; positivity – advertising as helpful; social media as a resource; and detachment (see Appendix V for the breakdown of these themes including sub-themes). Ultimately, these themes were revised again in the second stage of analysis which utilised MaxQDA.

Step Five: Defining & Naming Themes

Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87) describe the fifth step (defining and naming themes) as "ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme". At this stage, the author narrowed the focus of the themes once more, by deciding upon three over-arching themes as guided by the focus of the research. These constituted: Cognitive Advertising Literacy (which included the major themes "cognisance of the marketers' agenda" and "limited cognitive AL"); Affective Advertising Literacy which included "advertising as helpful", "social media as a resource" and "detachment"; and Moral Advertising Literacy (which included "marketer as foe – disapproval of SM advertising" and "tolerance of SM advertising").

Step Six: Producing the Report

The final step in Braun & Clarke's (2006) framework is producing the report. In this step, the researcher undergoes final analysis of selected extracts and relates the data back to the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was at this point (when referring to the literature and attempting to

weave a coherent narrative of the participants' experiences) that the author decided a second phase of analysis with the aid of software was justified.

It is acknowledged now on reflection, that when coding manually, the author placed most emphasis on data-driven codes with perhaps not enough focus on using *a-priori* codes (i.e., codes driven by theory). When writing an initial draft of the findings report, the author recognised that further use of *a-priori* codes would be beneficial to ensure that every instance where the data linked with the literature was signposted, while also acknowledging data-driven codes and themes which added to the literature. At this point, the author also recognised that using a qualitative data analysis software would allow greater efficiency and management of the data.

Therefore, the author was not content to simply return to an earlier step in the analysis process (reviewing themes). Instead, the author wished to return to the level of coding with a re-invigorated focus on the literature (and more recently published studies) so as to ensure that important elements of the data had not been overlooked. Thus, a second stage of data analysis began with the aid of MaxQDA. An overview of this stage is now provided, also using Braun & Clarkes' (2006) framework to structure the discussion.

4.8.2 Analysing the Data: Software Assisted Analysis

Step One: Familiarising Oneself with the Data

Less emphasis was placed on this step during the second stage of data analysis since deep familiarity with the data had already been achieved. The only requirement at this point was to import the transcripts onto the MaxQDA software.

Step Two: Generating Initial Codes

The most purely inductive approach to thematic analysis is to utilise data-driven codes, i.e., codes which are strongly driven by the data itself, rather than theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Emphasis was placed on this during the manual stage of analysis. However, as noted by Braun & Clarke (2006, p.84) "researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments", as well as their research question. This aligns with the earlier discussion regarding critiques of a *purely* inductive approach, since categories employed to analyse data will inevitably be influenced by work already published in the field (Ormston et al., 2014). It is still possible to utilise concepts and terms present in the literature to label data excerpts (i.e., *a priori* codes), while being inductively led by the data to add to theory.

As a result of initial, manual analysis, the author now had an idea of what aspects of the data were important or significant. Therefore, in the second stage of analysis (i.e., when utilising MaxQDA), less focus was placed on coding *every* aspect of the data set, and more emphasis was placed on focusing on areas which had been identified as interesting and meaningful during the first round of analysis. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this stage of coding was guided to a greater extent by the research question and pre-existing theory. This meant that there were more *a-priori* codes utilised within MaxQDA, while still also utilising data-driven codes. Therefore, the coding of the data was now more balanced and richer in terms of being more aligned with the research focus.

The author can now acknowledge that the use of *a-priori* codes does not mean that the researcher is straying from an inductive approach, especially since such codes were not pre-determined before analysing the data. Rather, the codes simply utilised terms present within the literature. This illustrates how the author evolved throughout the project as an interpretive researcher.

Step Three: Searching for Themes

During the software assisted stage of analysis, the author again searched for themes. At this point, a good deal of themes which were initially present during the first stages of data analysis re-emerged. The author was interested now in further exploring areas of note which were first recognised, but not fully teased out, during the manual process. For example, during manual analysis, the author began to notice that the participants sometimes displayed AL in contrasting ways depending on whether they were speaking about advertising in general versus when it emerged in specific instances. Thus, it was recognised that key differences were present in terms of the participants' dispositional AL (i.e., their general associative network about advertising), versus their situational AL (i.e., how they applied this knowledge set to specific examples).

Step Four: Reviewing Themes

It was at this point in the process that MaxQDA was seen to add most value. The ability to see all codes within a single column, as well as the coded extracts within them meant that it was easier to see where important patterns lay. Of course, in line with principles of qualitative research, themes are not created based on statistical prevalence, rather their significance in terms of the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the researcher's interpretation was significant. However, it became easier to collate the data with the help of MaxQDA, to swap and change groupings of codes to see where they best fit, and to review themes until they wove a coherent narrative both in terms of what the data had to say, but also how it related to extant literature and theory. A screenshot from MaxQDA is provided in appendix W which gives an example of an overarching theme (cognitive AL) while also portraying the themes and codes within it.

Step Five: Defining & Naming Themes

After reviewing themes using MaxQDA and thus now having a set of themes which were more aligned to address the literature, the themes were defined and named accordingly. This was an on-going and iterative process alongside the next step. The three overarching signposts of Cognitive AL, Affective AL and Moral AL were confirmed at this point, as well as their themes and sub-themes (see Table 4.3). The composition of these themes, including examples of data extracts therein, are presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Step Six: Producing the Report

A handful of reports were drafted at this stage before the final versions of the three findings chapters were produced. Thus, steps five and six were an iterative process since both were revisited numerous times. After this process, the final report (i.e., the three findings chapters) tells the story of the data set in a coherent way, as well as providing key links to existing literature and theory.

Now that the process employed for analysing the data has been described in detail, a subsequent consideration is to evaluate the quality of the research.

4.9 Evaluating the Quality of the Research

While quantitative research is generally evaluated on the basis of validity and reliability (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019), these concepts are problematic when applied to qualitative research. Specifically, validity and reliability presuppose that a single, objective reality exists (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Opposingly, the interpretive paradigm aligns with the worldview that multiple, subjective realities co-exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the

concepts of validity and reliability must be adapted for qualitative research to reflect (1) credibility; (2) transferability; and (3) dependability (Bryman, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders et al., 2019). To evaluate qualitative research according to these criteria is essentially to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research (Bryman, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

4.9.1 Credibility

When credibility is used to evaluate the quality of qualitative research, it acts as a parallel to internal validity which is used when evaluating quantitative research (Bryman, 2016). While validity is concerned with the accuracy of research findings, this thesis does not propose to report the single, objective truth of teenagers' AL in the context of SM, as this notion is unaligned with the research paradigm. Rather, it provides a deep insight into, and understanding of, the experiences of a particular group of Irish middle adolescents at a given point in time as they navigate advertising on SM.

Therefore, to establish the credibility of qualitative findings, it should be determined that the research has been carried out according to principles of good practice (Bryman, 2016). Throughout this chapter, the careful consideration within each decision (e.g., regarding data collection and analysis methods) has been illustrated. For example, the decision to utilise individual interviews rather than focus groups was taken so as to provide a more comfortable and open space for the participants to discuss personal topics (Mack et al., 2005) relating to advertising literacy on social media, including issues of conformity and peer influence, should they have arisen.

Furthermore, multiple, subjective social realities are acknowledged to exist in the interpretive paradigm. Credibility is then concerned with "the feasibility or credibility of the account that a researcher arrives at" in order to determine its acceptability (Bryman, 2016, p.384). The

accounts provided of the social realities of the participants (in Chapters Five, Six and Seven) closely reflect the experiences shared by them, while also interpreting these experiences for deeper meaning and importance. This is evident by the bountiful use of excerpts to highlight the themes as they arose in the participants' own words. As a result, the author presents an interpretation of their social world which she feels is an accurate portrayal of what the participants intended (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

4.9.2 Transferability

Transferability acts as a parallel criterion to external validity or generalisability (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Rather than attempting to generate findings which can be applied to a wide population, qualitative researchers aim to provide deep insights into a particular social milieu, and therefore strive for depth rather than breadth in research findings (Bryman, 2016). As such, findings reported within qualitative research studies are typically unique in terms of being oriented towards a particular social context, time, and place (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, rather than providing generalisability, qualitative researchers are encouraged to provide a "thick description" of the findings, research questions, design, context, and interpretations arrived at (Bryman, 2016, p.384; Saunders et al., 2019). In this way, it is up to the reader to judge whether the findings can be transferred to another context, thus addressing the criterion of transferability (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). The deep exploration of the research findings presented in the following three chapters, as well as the thorough descriptions of the research questions and design provided in this chapter, therefore help readers to judge transferability.

4.9.3 Dependability

Dependability is a parallel criterion to reliability (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Essentially, this construct refers to keeping records of all phases of the research process, as well as documenting all changes which happened to the research focus (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). A deep account of the research process has been provided in this chapter, including discussions on gaining access to participants; gaining ethical approval for the research project; and an overview of both stages of data analysis (manual and software assisted) which were employed.

By achieving dependability, it is possible to establish the rigour of the research design. In qualitative research, rigour is achieved through "systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p.110). Decisions made in formulating the research design and analysis have been carefully documented in this chapter. In terms of evaluating rigour within research findings, this is deemed to have been achieved where "another trained researcher could analyse the same data in the same way and come to essentially the same conclusions" (Mays & Pope. 1995, p.110). In ways, it could be argued that the criteria presented by Mays & Pope (1995) conflicts with the interpretive research paradigm which accepts that multiple, social realities (and therefore interpretations) can exist. Nonetheless, it is proposed that based on the evidence (e.g., excerpts) provided in the following three chapters, the interpretation by the author is well-substantiated and as such, may be shared by other qualitative researchers.

A conclusion now closes the chapter.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented and outlined the important decisions which were made relating to the research design. The interpretive paradigm is under-utilised in the AL literature, since most AL studies employ a deductive approach. But given that SM is a relatively new media environment (Keegan & Rowley, 2017) whereby AL is only being investigated in recent years, it can be considered a new research context. SM platforms employ a range of advertising tactics which are not present in other environments (e.g., a blend of paid, owned, and earned advertising, see Section 3.3). Therefore, the composition of AL in this context could be very different to that in traditional settings.

A constructivist ontological position underpinned by interpretive epistemology was employed in the current study. This allows for an appreciation of multiple, subjective realities, as well as the meanings which young consumers might place in advertising. More specifically, a social constructionist perspective is taken, thereby acknowledging the integral role interaction plays in creating meaning (Galbin, 2014; Hackley, 1998). This allows the perspective to be taken that advertising might not only be processed on a cognitive level for informative and utilitarian meanings (Hackley, 1998), but also as a form of social learning relating to identity and self-expression.

Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews which utilised elicitation were chosen with a view to encouraging the participants to present their knowledge about, feelings towards and evaluations of SM advertising in general during the interview (i.e., their dispositional AL), as well as how this is applied during exposure within elicitation (i.e., their situational AL). The methods were chosen not only for their ability to address the research aim, but also concerning what is most comfortable and fair for the young participant (Barton, 2015).

The chapter provided an overview of the processes followed for gaining access to participants, as well as the ethical principles guiding the research and an overview of the fieldwork. In particular, it gave a detailed breakdown of the procedure employed for data analysis. A critique of qualitative research is that it is not always clear how findings are arrived at (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mays & Pope, 1995). This chapter addressed this critique by providing detailed discussion on the framework followed for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as well as an overview of both stages of analysis (i.e., manual and software assisted). Furthermore, because the data was analysed twice, it can be said that the process employed was rigorous.

The chapter also addresses how the research may be evaluated for trustworthiness across three criteria: credibility, transferability, and dependability (Bryman, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders et al., 2019). Such criteria account for the subjectivity and multiple social realities aligned with the interpretive paradigm, in contrast to concepts such as reliability and validity more commonly associated with quantitative research (Bryman, 2016).

Having presented a detailed account of the research process undertaken in this study, Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the rich findings which emerged from the primary research.

Chapter Five: Teenagers' Recognition & Understanding of the Nature of Advertising on Social Media

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, the author examined the research methodology employed in this study. This chapter is the first of three chapters which present findings from the primary research. The aim of the research is *to investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational AL in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on SM platforms*. Three research objectives were developed, and this chapter addresses the first objective: *to investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on social media*. Cognitive AL relates to one's ability to *recognise* advertising, but also to *understand* it (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). Correspondingly, this chapter is divided into two halves, namely Section 5.2 which focuses on the first element of cognitive AL, i.e., recognition, and Section 5.3, which focuses on the second element of cognitive AL, namely understanding.

The chapter begins with an overview of the participants who participated in the study with a view to reflecting upon their overall interest and engagement with the interviews, as well as to establish their use of SM. The chapter proceeds to examine the major themes arising under objective one. Specifically, it begins by exploring the participants' awareness and recognition of SM advertising, followed by a consideration of the participants' understanding of the advertiser's objectives and tactics in this arena. Application of this knowledge during elicitation is also signposted throughout. The analysis is supported by excerpts from the interviews. Anonymity is afforded to all participants using pseudonyms. Table 5.1. provides a roadmap of the themes which will be addressed in this chapter.

Table 5.1: *Roadmap of Themes Arising Under Objective One.*

5.2 Awareness & Recognition of SM Advertising

    5.2.1 Awareness & Recognition of Overt SM Advertising

    5.2.2 Awareness & Recognition of Native Advertising

    5.2.3 Perception of IM as a Hybrid of Paid and Earned Media Rather Than as a Form of Covert Advertising

    5.2.4 Overestimation of Ability to Recognise IM – Dispositional Expertise but Limited Situational Ability

    5.2.5 Awareness of the Commercial Purpose of Owned Media

5.3 Understanding of the Advertiser's Objectives and Tactics with regard to SM Advertising

    5.3.1 Understanding of Selling Intent within SM Advertising

    5.3.2 Understanding of Persuasive Intent & Persuasive Tactics within SM Advertising

    5.3.3 Understanding of Segmentation & Targeting at Play within SM Advertising

    5.3.4 Understanding of Bias within SM Advertising

    5.3.5 SM Consumers as a Source of Brand Messaging - Some Understanding of the Power of Earned Media

    5.3.6 Understanding of the Advertiser's Covert Tactics on SM: Compensation & Editorial Control within IM

Source: developed by the author.

5.1.1 Overview of the Participants

The author developed a sense of how important SM was for the participants, and indeed it's key role in their day-to-day lives. Conducting the interviews was an enjoyable experience, whereby the author observed the vibrant personalities of the diverse and lively group, as they often animatedly illustrated their experiences of, and feelings towards, SM. Indeed, the participants often took care to guide the author through their experiences. For instance, when discussing the internet phenomenon of 'memes', Alice stopped in her tracks to make sure that the author understood the language she used and codes of practice at play on SM:

For Facebook and stuff, it's mainly to look up - do you know what memes are?

Author: Yes (laughter).

Yeah, Facebook is mainly for memes that's where I get like most of my memes from so like whenever I want memes I just go on Facebook.

Alice, aged 16

Furthermore, the participants often illustrated how connected they felt towards SM figures such as influencers, and indeed how they considered them as an aid within their own lives. Many placed a value on the content shared by influencers and viewed it as being inspirational.

Terrie McEvoy [lifestyle influencer] always puts up like "be true to yourself" and … "always be kind to yourself" I just think that, that relates to me cause everyone says … I'm real hard on myself, so I always read them, and it makes me happy.

Rachel, aged 16

As such, the author received an insight into the deeper meanings sometimes inherent within SM for young people. Through qualitative interviewing, it was observed that the participants'

personalities could come to light, as well as insights into their lived experiences which perhaps could not have been uncovered within quantitative research.

The interviews themselves were conducted in social spaces which varied between classrooms and meeting rooms (see Section 4.7). All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded via Dictaphone. Altogether, it seemed that the participants were livelier, more energetic, enthusiastic, and eager during the earlier hours of the school day, i.e., before their lunch breaks. Furthermore, it was observed that the chance to escape the usual school routine and take part in a novel experience (i.e., to be interviewed for a research project) seemed to be an appealing and exciting experience for this age group. The school environment appeared to make the students feel comfortable, since this was an environment familiar to them. This helped to address power imbalances between researcher and participant, as the researcher acted as the 'visitor' into the participants' space, not vice versa (Cody, 2015). Therefore, interviewing teenagers at school during a school day was found to be a successful setting to conduct research with minors.

5.1.2 The Participants' Use of SM

All participants described using SM daily, with an emphasis placed on the platforms Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Less commonly used SM sites were Facebook and Twitter. Most admitted that they dedicate a lot of time each day being immersed within the platforms. Indeed, they commonly noted that the internet (and SM specifically) were addictive:

> *[SM is] my lifeline. I cannot go five minutes ... when I have Wi-Fi without checking Facebook or ... Snapchat ... my friends are my lifeline to be honest. So, if I can't talk to them ... it would make me go a bit crazy ... I need it ... I know it's bad, it's a new addiction.*

Thus, while they admitted a heavy reliance on the internet and SM in particular, at the same time they could acknowledge that this relationship may be unhealthy ("*I know it's bad*"). Indeed, when asked if there was anything which they disliked about SM, some participants answered by describing their reliance on it. Between referring to the internet and SM as an addiction (and even "*lifeline*"), alongside admitting a preference to spend less time on it, the participants suggested an a less than healthy relationship with SM at times. For these participants, it could be interpreted that they are not actively moderating their SM usage.

Furthermore, it was established that SM plays a key role in maintaining relationships.

> ***Author: why do you use [SM]?***
>
> *To talk to my friends, 'cause not all them have credit so it's not like you can text them.*
>
> James, aged 17

> ***Author: what do you use the internet for?***
>
> *To keep in … contact with my friends, and just see what's going on, on a daily basis.*
>
> Rachel, aged 16

Overall, the primary use of SM for the participants was to manage relationships and keep in contact with others. SM was seen as an important and free way to nurture relationships, since it allows constant contact without the limitation of having to purchase phone credit.

Virtually every participant categorised different SM sites according to their different uses or activities.

Snapchat, it's text friends ... Instagram is ... looking up other people's pictures ... Facebook I look up to see the news and stuff like that... YouTube I just watch videos, vlogs.

Conor, aged 16

I use Snapchat to talk to my friends. I like Instagram because I see different things, like it's easy to see everything, it's easy to work ... I'd use Instagram a lot more than I'd use Facebook.

Natasha, aged 17

It was apparent that a particular 'code of practice' was at play, whereby specific norms and uses were associated with SM platforms. Overall, Snapchat was considered an especially important platform in the maintenance of peer friendships and as a functional app for messaging others. On the other hand, Instagram (as well as YouTube and Facebook to lesser extents) was seen as a space where consumption of content, including from commercial sources, was more acceptable. Therefore, most participants indicated that they followed commercial sources such as brand profiles and influencers on Instagram, but not on Snapchat which was reserved for friends.

I'd follow him [Ben Kealy, an influencer] on Instagram ... Snapchat is just ... to talk to my friends really, that's pretty much what Snapchat is ... used for, really.

Rob, aged 16

Snapchat is mainly just for messaging [friends] and ... I just wanna keep it at that. Instagram ... [has] always been for like a bit of ads as well.

Shane, aged 16

Furthermore, the discussion related to advertising centred prevailingly around Instagram.

I'm mostly talking about Instagram cause it's the one where I see the most ads.

Emily, aged 15

Overall, it was established that the participants were keen users of SM, who segregated different platforms according to different uses/activities. SM was seen to bring value to the participants' lives in varying ways.

The next step was then to investigate their cognitive AL (research objective one), also referred to as conceptual AL interchangeably throughout the literature (e.g., Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2017) (see Section 2.2.1). Cognitive AL is important because those "who possess the necessary knowledge of advertising (understanding of advertising's intent and tactics) will use this knowledge in order to critically process the ads they encounter, making them less susceptible to its effects, including advertised product preferences and requests" (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011, p. 334).

Objective one therefore sought to investigate the participants' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on SM. The author will now explore the first half of the objective, namely the participants' awareness and recognition of SM as an advertising platform and of the differing advertising formats therein.

5.2 Awareness & Recognition of SM Advertising

Given this study's interest in investigating cognitive AL within SM, a natural starting point in the interviews was the participants' recognition of how advertising manifests in this space. The participants demonstrated familiarity, to varying degrees, with pop-up and pre-roll advertising (overt advertising), as well as native advertising and IM (covert advertising). They also

displayed awareness of the use of owned media, specifically, the marketer's use of SM platforms in order to communicate and share content with the consumer. Recently, authors have argued that definitions of SM advertising must include not only paid media, but also owned and earned media (see Section 3.3). A definition which addresses this call is provided by Alhabash et al., (2017, p.5), who define SM advertising as: "any piece of online content designed with a persuasive intent and/or distributed via a social media platform that enables Internet users to access, share, engage with, add to, and co-create". Therefore, owned media is classified as part of the SM advertising ecosystem to be investigated in this research.

The author did not introduce or specifically refer to the particular types of advertising outlined above. Instead, she asked questions such as "Do brands use social media? In what ways do they use it?", "Have you ever come across advertising on social media?", and "How do you know that it's advertising?". It should be noted that across the board for each type of advertising, the participants often did not use specific terms, like 'native advertising'. Rather, they described the content they interacted with, and the author subsequently labelled it during analysis. The terms and descriptions which they used for each advertising format are demonstrated throughout the discussion.

Table 5.2 outlines the themes that emerged regarding the participants' recognition of SM advertising.

Table 5.2: *Awareness & Recognition of SM Advertising*

5.2.1 Awareness & Recognition of Overt SM Advertising

5.2.2 Awareness & Recognition of Native Advertising

5.2.3 Perception of IM as a Hybrid of Paid and Earned Media Rather Than as a

Form of Covert Advertising

5.2.4 Overestimation of Ability to Recognise IM – Dispositional Expertise but

Limited Situational Ability

5.2.5 Awareness of the Commercial Purpose of Owned Media

Source: developed by the author

5.2.1 Awareness & Recognition of Overt SM Advertising

Overt advertising refers to more apparent forms of advertising that disrupt the user and require action to exit, such as pop-up and pre-roll advertising (see Section 3.4.1). There was widespread awareness of overt advertising amongst the participants. The most common type referred to was pop-up advertising.

> *In the middle of a Facebook video, they might … interrupt … or just pop up … at the end of a Snapchat story.*

Michael, aged 16

> *Ads popping up on Snapchat … they're just in there without you even tapping into them.*

Owen, aged 16

The participants illustrated a familiarity with pop-up advertising by describing advertising which interrupts regular SM content such as 'stories' (an Instagram and Snapchat feature, referring to pictures and videos posted which disappear after 24 hours). The nature of pop-up

advertising is disruptive, as it generally requires the user to click through the content. This push nature was described through the participants' use of phrases like "*interrupt*" and "*without you even tapping into them*". As such, pop-ups were conceptualised as an intrusive and disruptive form of advertising.

This intrusive nature aided the participants in recognising them. Specifically, they described recognising pop-ups based on wording present, such as 'ad' and 'advertisement'.

> *On Snapchat ... when ... you're tapping through ... photos ... it'll say 'ad' in the bottom right corner ... that's just an ad and you just click past it.*

<div align="right">Shane, aged 16</div>

> *When I'm going through ... stories [an Instagram & Snapchat feature] something would ... stop and say ... advertisement.*

<div align="right">David, aged 16</div>

Therefore, the intrusive nature and word markers present within pop-up advertising were used as schemata with which to recognise them. Overall, most participants indicated an ease of recognition of this ad-type.

Similarly, the participants were also keenly aware of pre-roll advertising, namely advertising which plays for a designated amount of time before allowing the viewer to exit the ad. This type of advertising generally takes a video format, and usually occurs at the start of video content on sites like YouTube.

> *I'm trying to ... watch a video ... it comes up all the time and then you just click back out of it ... it says ad, and then it says you can skip this ad in how many seconds.*

<div align="right">Ciara, aged 17</div>

Ads ... sometimes there's ... a time-zone on them so you ... have to watch them ...but you don't really pay attention.

Aisling, aged 16

As the participants described advertising which has a "*time-zone*" and offers the facility to "*watch it for five seconds and skip it*", it was possible for the author to identify their awareness of pre-roll ads, as well as schemata which they use to identify it (i.e., wording present like "*skip this ad*"). Most bemoaned being forced to watch such advertising until the timer runs out and because of this disruptive nature, admitted a reluctance to pay attention to it. A dominant pattern across the interviews was therefore that overt advertising that was 'pushed' on the participants was not appreciated. The author will return to this theme in Chapter Six.

5.2.2 Awareness & Recognition of Native Advertising

A further type of advertising commonly described by most participants was native advertising, which can be considered a covert advertising format (see Section 3.4.2). Native advertising refers to advertising which is embedded within a SM newsfeed and is designed to take the form and function of regular SM postings (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). The participants did not use the term 'native advertising', but rather described it and the author identified it based on their descriptions (see examples below). Since such advertising is designed to look like an editorial/organic SM post, the participants' ease of referral to it pointed to a developed cognitive AL.

With Instagram it would look like a post, but it would say it's sponsored.

Michael, aged 16

The sponsored ones on Instagram ... I'm pretty sure ... every 6 to 8 ... posts there's an ad one ... it wouldn't be something that I would follow, and then it comes up in blue like under it ... 'sponsored' or something like that.

Ava, aged 16

Thus, the participants portrayed an awareness of native advertising by describing advertising which looks like organic SM content. By describing this ad-type based on its similarity to editorial content, they illustrated an awareness that marketers design it so as to be covert in nature ("*it would look like a post*") and that it appears as embedded within SM newsfeeds rather than being disruptive.

The participants also illustrated the schemata they use to recognise native advertising. Namely, they recognised native advertising through wording like 'sponsored' and 'recommended' (disclosures used to signpost it), as well as the occurrence of posts on their newsfeed from brands which they do not follow.

It'd say, "recommended for you", and then it'd be stuff that I don't follow.

Jack, aged 16

It's an ad 'cause it's from a page I haven't seen before.

James, aged 17

Although native advertising is designed to take the format of editorial content (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019), the participants appeared well informed about this covert advertising format and knew how to recognise it. This knowledge was present throughout the group, and overall, awareness of, and ability to recognise, native advertising was concluded to be widely in place. This is surprising given that adult samples have been found to have limited knowledge and difficulty recognising this ad type (e.g., Spiteri Cornish, 2014; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). On

other hand, teenagers tend to be very active users of social media platforms (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Okoh, 2022) and therefore, over time, can develop a familiarity with such forms of advertising.

The following two sections continue to consider another form of covert advertising, namely influencer marketing (IM). The participants were very vocal about this new and innovative advertising method, both within the interview and during elicitation. Therefore, the detailed discussion that follows, reflects this.

5.2.3 Perception of IM as a Hybrid of Paid and Earned Media Rather Than as a Form of Covert Advertising

IM has been identified in the literature as a form of covert advertising (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Hudders et al, 2021; Ye et al, 2021). Yet, the participants in this study were not as 'expert' in making this identification as they were about the advertising formats discussed thus far. IM refers to the practice where influencers are "approached by advertisers to endorse products, brands, organizations, or ideas on their SM profiles" (Hudders et al., 2021, p.2). Therefore, it refers to a strategy where advertising is transmitted by an intermediary on behalf of the advertiser (see Section 3.4.2). IM is prolific on SM, with the industry estimated to be worth $13.8 billion in 2021 according to Statista (2021).

Early in each interview, when asked variations of the question, "have you ever come across advertising on SM?", just two participants introduced this form of covert advertising in response.

> *Yeah ... a lot of them I've noticed now are ... hidden away within another photo.*

Emily, aged 15

Yeah definitely ... on Instagram ... there'd just be so many different ones from ... influencers where they're doing ... paid things with brands.

<div align="right">Naomi, aged 16</div>

Similarly, although not in answer to the question "have you come across ads online?", Grace and Fred also introduced the topic of IM as a form of advertising, in an unprompted manner.

I know that there's ... indirect [ads] where it's ... photos and they just tag ... where it's from ... whenever someone's trying to sell you something you can know that it's an ad.

<div align="right">Grace, aged 16</div>

When you see [Rob Lipsett, Irish influencer] wearing clothes ... I wanted to go buy them ... If he's just wearing it normally ... But ... if it's an ad I'm not really sure if it's nice.

<div align="right">Fred, aged 16</div>

As such, four participants clearly categorised IM as a form of advertising. In doing so, Emily and Grace in particular note the covert nature of this practice, using "*hidden away*" and "*indirect*" to describe it. This is broadly in line with the participants in van Dam & van Reijmersdal's (2019, para.39) study, who described IM using terms like "unnoticeable". But given that the participants spoke about spending a lot of time on SM and following many influencers, it is surprising that only four participants introduced IM as a form of advertising unprompted by the author.

However, in other interviews when the author posed the question, "have you ever noticed brands using SM?", there was a greater tendency to introduce IM at this point.

[Influencers] would ... get sponsored from ... brands ... they put up a picture of ... some of their products ... so people can go and buy them.

<div align="right">Rachel, aged 16</div>

[Brands] get ... influencers to take a picture ... and post it so that they can show all their followers.

<div align="right">Tracy, aged 16</div>

I'd see ... people who work with brands ... on Instagram posts it's like "partnership with them". And then the odd time you'd see an ad here or there.

<div align="right">Rob, aged 16</div>

It is interesting that although most participants were aware of IM, they overwhelmingly did not introduce it when asked about advertising. Rather, they referenced it when asked about the presence of *brands* on SM. This would suggest that they do not classify IM as a form of advertising *per se*, but rather see it as a separate way for a brand to communicate. This can be inferred from the distinction Rob makes *between* IM and advertising, as he says, "*and **then** you'd see an ad here or there*". In doing so, Rob paradoxically categorises IM and advertising as separate entities. This distinction formed a common pattern throughout the group, as others also viewed IM as a partnership between influencer and brand, and therefore 'not quite' advertising.

To elaborate, most participants did not introduce the concept of IM unprompted. Instead, the author had to probe to get access to this knowledge. Such probes included "do you think people get paid to talk about brands on SM?". It turned out that when the participants were probed using this question, most were aware of IM, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

Yeah ... YouTubers ... need to get money for their videos somehow ... they're always ... promoting things ... they're in partnership.

<div align="right">Hannah, aged 16</div>

Yes, definitely ... they usually give the YouTuber ... a discount code which their fans can use ... the YouTubers would get ... money out of that.

<div align="right">Alice, aged 16</div>

Yeah ... the most famous people like ... Kim Kardashian. She has over ... 100 million followers ... She could get ... so much money for ... one post. Cause millions would look at it.

<div align="right">Fred, aged 16</div>

Therefore, after the author employed the use of probes whereby the focus was on brands rather than the word 'advertising', most participants illustrated familiarity with IM and referenced a relationship between brand and influencer. However, it was curious that for this knowledge to be accessed, probes were necessary for most. As such, the participants do not classify IM as advertising in the same way as they do other formats (such as overt advertising).

This is further evidenced by Ava.

The vloggers and bloggers ... always get sponsored videos ... which is good ... 'cause they usually do ... honest opinions on them ... sometimes the ads themselves ... [are] biased ... when they come from the company itself ... some of the make-up [influencers]... you know that they're being honest and ... they're not doing it just for the money.

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

Ava illuminates the perception of this covert advertising format as a less biased, and therefore more honest, type of communication. As such, most of the participants classified IM as different to advertising which originates directly from brands. IM is acknowledged as a form of covert advertising in the literature, and as such could be considered difficult for young consumers to identify (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). Alongside this, influencers are often seen as trusted advisors, trend setters and as people to turn to for purchase advice (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). The ability to therefore understand that recommendations given within influencer content are sometimes a form of covert advertising may not be easy for young people. However, it is an important distinction to be able to make, since it lends itself to an understanding that claims are made with selling and persuasive intent, and therefore may be biased, changing the meaning of the message.

Given the pattern in the data whereby most participants only spoke about IM when probed or when asked about brand activity on SM (rather than advertising), as well as the tendency to distinguish *between* IM and advertising (e.g., see quotes from Rob and Ava), it appears that they classify IM as a hybrid of paid and earned advertising (Kim et al., 2021) (see Section 3.3.1). For instance, consider Ava's description of this kind of covert advertising as more "*honest*" than advertising disseminated by brands. Because influencers embed a sponsored message within their own organic style of SM content, IM blurs the boundaries between paid and earned media (Kim et al., 2021). Therefore, although the participants were aware of IM, the majority did not concretely classify it as covert advertising. Instead, they conceptualised it as a way for brands and influencers to work together, i.e., a hybrid of paid and earned media (Kim et al., 2021). Given that the classification of IM as a form of *advertising* was indefinite, a subsequent area of interest was how the participants sought to recognise it.

5.2.4 Overestimation of Ability to Recognise Influencer Marketing – Dispositional Expertise but Limited Situational Ability

Influencers are considered trusted advisors who have close bonds with their followers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2021; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Since a new format of covert advertising involves utilising influencers to disseminate advertising in a style which is congruent with the influencer's organic content (see Section 3.4.2), it is important to investigate whether and how young consumers can identify when influencers are disseminating paid-for content on behalf of brands (De Veirman et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2021) The covert and embedded nature of the ad (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019) could challenge recognition. If an advertisement is not recognised, then critical reflection will not take place, i.e., AL will not be invoked (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017).

Therefore, it was important to investigate not only awareness of covert advertising, but also how the participants sought to recognise it. This emerged when participants spoke about IM as having a commercial nature and the author followed up with questions relating to their recognition of this (e.g., "what makes you think that?", "how can you tell when that's happening?"). The author also investigated recognition of covert advertising through observing how it happened in practice when the participants were exposed to examples of IM (i.e., during elicitation). Therefore, the knowledge which emerged within the interviews could be seen to represent the participants' dispositional AL (i.e., their general knowledge about advertising), while elicitation allowed observation of how this knowledge was applied in practice when exposed to specific advertising episodes (i.e., situational AL).

A gap existed between the participants' dispositional and situational AL when it came to identifying this format of covert advertising. Overall, the participants viewed themselves as

experts at identifying IM as they spoke about it dispositionally, however when they were exposed to it situationally, they were not always able to successfully identify it.

To elaborate, as they spoke about IM generally during the interviews, it became clear that across the board, they had developed their own mechanisms (outside the parameters of advertising disclosures which are required by advertising regulatory bodies) to identify the practice. The author categorises these as self-developed schemata, the most common of which involved seeking out the presence of exaggerated language or 'brand scripts'. Alongside their self-developed schemata, about half of the participants also showed awareness of advertising disclosures (see Section 3.6.3). Therefore, the participants demonstrated their dispositional AL in terms of being able to identify defining features of this covert advertising format.

For example, the participants spoke during the interviews about examining influencer content for the presence of scripted or exaggerated language, i.e., 'brand scripts', to identify IM. Brand scripts therefore refer to the influencer's use of prepared language or copy supplied by the brand owner. Usage of this schema was particularly common across the cohort and formed a dominant theme.

> *You can ... notice [IM] by the way they're saying it. You can tell it was scripted ... They ... say one or two things like the ads on TV.*

> David, aged 16

Identifying the presence of covert advertising based on exaggerated language or brand scripts points to mature thinking since it represents an understanding that the influencer is using prepared content that is discernibly different in tone in order to sell the brand (see Section 5.3.6 for further discussion on understanding of compensation and editorial control within IM). This indicates an element of self-sufficiency amongst the participants, who had adapted their AL

(Malmelin, 2010) to identify new advertising practices by using their own experience of interacting with covert advertising as a learning tool.

However, there are cases where IM may appear spontaneous, colloquial in nature, and as unscripted. As a result, it may have the potential to 'go under the radar' of its viewers if they seek to identify it through brand scripts. Indeed, this became a pattern when participants were exposed to IM during elicitation. Natasha is an example of this.

> *I love her, I watch her all the time! [referring to Ellie Kelly]*
>
> **Author: … what do you think the message behind that [post] is?**
>
> *Just showing natural make-up, that you don't have to have loads on really.*
>
> **Author: … would you read her captions and stuff like that?**
>
> *Yeah, I always read the caption … she's talking about make-up … so when I look at that I'm like … "I'd love to know what that is" … she's telling you what she used … that's real helpful … if I wanted to go make that look I could do it.*

> Natasha, aged 17 (in response to appendix P)

Therefore, in cases where influencers avoid the use of scripted language, IM may evade identification. Natasha does not detect the disclosure present (#sp) because she is instead seeking out brand scripts, which are not present. During her interview, Natasha was confident about being able to identify IM using brand scripts, representing her dispositional AL. But when situationally exposed to covert advertising during elicitation, this method often did not aid her to successfully identify the practice. This was a theme across the interviews, where the participants believed they were expert at identifying IM as they spoke generally, but the mechanisms they used did not always aid them to correctly identify covert advertising situationally.

For instance, Grace provides further evidence of this theme.

I don't know, this one feels like she ... didn't get paid for it. Like she just likes the [cosmetics] ... 'cause it's a lot less flashy than the others ... it's different ... I wouldn't know ...

Author: … do you think has she been [sponsored]?

I feel like probably, but I'm not quite sure.

Grace, aged 16 (in response to appendix J)

In Appendix J, because brand scripts are avoided ("*it's a lot less flashy than the others*"), it does not align with the schema they utilise to attempt to identify IM, i.e., using scripted language. As such, many participants were either left confused, or misidentified this content as organic, because they were seeking out brand scripts to identify IM, rather than disclosures. Therefore, although they believed themselves to be well capable of identifying covert advertising, this did not always come to pass during elicitation.

Even though they displayed self-sufficiency in developing their own ways of identifying IM based on an understanding of the practice, their limited ability to identify IM in practice suggests that their AL requires bolstering in this regard. Although the participants were confident in their ability to identify IM dispositionally, during elicitation most misinterpreted at least one example shown to them. Therefore, a pattern throughout the interviews was that a gap existed between dispositional cognitive AL (where they saw themselves as experts at identifying IM) and situational cognitive AL (where they often struggled to identify IM in practice when confronted with it).

The gap between dispositional and situational AL could be explained by conceptualising AL as a continuum, whereby AL is considered a critical skill which can be developed in some

respects but less so in others. In this way, although the participants showed an ability to understand the hallmarks of IM (such as the use of brand scripts) representing a mature understanding, their AL was limited in other ways (e.g., an inability to identify it in practice when exposed to it). By conceptualising AL as a continuum, it would mean a move away from categories such as 'fully literate' or 'not literate', to instead consider AL as a spectrum whereby consumers may be highly mature in some respects, and less so in others. This conceptualisation is discussed in detail in Chapter Eight (see Section 8.6).

Having considered the participants' awareness and recognition of IM, the discussion now addresses their awareness of content disseminated by brand profiles, i.e., owned media.

5.2.5 Awareness of the Commercial Purpose of Owned Media

SM advertising includes paid, owned, and earned media (see Section 3.3). Owned media is the presence that brands can have on SM by virtue of their business or brand profile which essentially is a SM account used to generate awareness and interest in the organisation and its offerings. Content on these profiles can include informative posts about the use of a product; brand competitions; or a tutorial showcasing the use of a product. Owned media forms a key part of digital marketing strategy, reflecting marketing objectives such as building brand equity (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Overwhelmingly, AL studies do not take this form of commercial communication into account, even though an emerging school of thought views owned media as a form of SM advertising (see Section 3.3). For example, Alhabash et al, (2017, p.5), define SM advertising as: "any piece of online content designed with a persuasive intent and/or distributed via a social media platform that enables Internet users to access, share, engage with, add to, and co-create". This perspective would therefore capture owned media as part of the SM advertising ecosystem.

In this research, 22 out of the 29 participants were reflective of the purpose of owned media as being commercially centred, thus constituting the vast majority. They understood it as an important part of marketing strategy and as a means of engaging with target audiences. This arose in response to questions like "who do you follow on SM? What kind of content do they share?" and "do brands use SM? In what ways do they use it?".

> *[Brands post] ... people using the brands, people talking about the brands ... photos of them ... I think that's advertising ... if someone's showing ... "oh look how good it is or useful it is" ... it's to get you to buy it and then generally they'll have like a link to the website ... So, you'd know where to get it.*

> Hannah, aged 16

As such, the participants recognised the selling and persuasive intent of owned media, in that it often provides testimonial proof by showcasing results and providing inspiration for target audiences. In this way, they understood it as part of a brand's marketing strategy and that its intention is "*to get you to buy*".

Others also noted that owned media is a useful way for brands to interact with target markets.

> *[Brands use SM] to promote a product ... and get in contact with their customers ... you can contact certain companies about ... their products ... and you can ask them questions ... [brands] show off their products, best things you can do about it, and mainly ... the benefits it has to offer.*

> Shane, aged 16

Thus, it was recognised that owned media allows open communication between brand and SM user. As such, the two-way interactional nature of the relationship between marketer and consumer in the context of SM was recognised. The facility to converse with brands was

recognised as helpful to the consumer, but also acknowledged as a way for firms to engage with target markets and therefore as beneficial to the brand also.

Others considered owned media as a covert means of targeting consumers.

> *I buy most of my clothes at H&M ... so I'll follow them on Instagram to see what they have ... they are advertisements, yes. But they keep you up to date on what they have in stock ... It's like a catalogue ... it's disguising itself as a fashion blog but ... you're going to buy it and they're going to make money off it ... it is a form of advertising.*

<div align="right">Alice, aged 16</div>

The excerpt from Alice showcases that owned media was perceived as a form of marketing communication, but one which seeks to present itself covertly. Alice refers to owned media "*disguising itself as a fashion blog*", thereby recognising the brand's intention of creating content in a 'blog' format (i.e., entertaining and informative), but which ultimately contains selling and persuasive intent. Alice also suggests that it is useful to her, comparing it to a modern-day "*catalogue*". In essence, while she categorises owned media as a form of subtle "*advertising*", she perceives it as a resource which offers her utility. This is an interesting theme which was found to hold true for the sample as a whole and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

Cognitive AL has been explained in terms of a consumer's persuasion knowledge, namely consumers' "personal knowledge about persuasion agents' goals and tactics" (Friestad and Wright 1994, p.1). The participants' observations regarding owned media therefore largely related to the firms' marketing objectives, suggesting that they understood it's role within marketing strategy. This points to a developed cognitive AL, since this kind of interaction between marketer and consumer can be considered native to the context of SM.

Therefore, having explored the participants' *recognition* of SM advertising, the next section focuses on their *understanding* of the advertiser's objectives and tactics regarding the use of SM advertising, reflecting the second half of objective one.

5.3 Understanding of the Advertiser's Objectives and Tactics with regard to SM Advertising

Cognitive AL can be broadly considered as both the facility to *recognise* advertising, but also to *understand* it (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). Section 5.2 focused on the first major element of cognitive AL, i.e., recognition of the various ways in which advertising can manifest on SM. This section now addresses the second major element of cognitive AL, i.e., understanding of advertising. Six themes emerged in this regard, which are outlined in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: *Understanding of the Advertiser's Objectives and Tactics with Regard to SM Advertising*

5.3.1 Understanding of Selling Intent within SM Advertising
5.3.2 Understanding of Persuasive Intent & Persuasive Tactics within SM Advertising
5.3.3 Understanding of Segmentation & Targeting at Play within SM Advertising
5.3.4 Understanding of Bias within SM Advertising
5.3.5 SM Consumers as a Source of Brand Messaging - Some Understanding of the Power of Earned Media
5.3.6 Understanding of the Advertiser's Covert Tactics on SM: Compensation & Editorial Control within IM

Source: developed by the author.

The literature had previously identified components of cognitive AL relating to an understanding of the advertiser's objectives and tactics, with regard to selling and persuasive intent, and the use of persuasive tactics (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). The present author wished to remain open to what she might discover in this SM-centred research, as opposed to seeking out previously identified components that had emerged in a traditional advertising context. The author did not ask participants whether, for instance, they were aware of the persuasive intent within SM advertising. Rather, the participants drew on this knowledge as they conversed throughout the interviews. As such, it unfolded naturally.

The discussion will now begin by examining the first theme which arose: extensive understanding of selling intent within SM advertising.

5.3.1 Understanding of Selling Intent within SM Advertising

The ability to understand selling intent refers to an understanding that advertisements attempt to convince consumers to buy a product/service (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Such an understanding is integral to cognitive AL, as it relates to one of the most fundamental objectives of advertising. Throughout the interviews, there was an extensive understanding of the reasons that brands use SM, such as attracting consumer's attention with a view to achieving marketing goals such as sales. For instance, when asked about why brands use SM, responses included:

> *To catch your attention … they advertise sales and prices and … use colourful stuff.*

Sarah, aged 17

> *To … help people to see their new stock and increase sales.*

Naomi, aged 16

Thus, the participants saw the presence of brands on SM as a means of promoting and furthering sales. Some referenced the use of tactics such as bright colours to attract attention. Others illustrated an understanding of selling intent as they spoke about covert advertising.

I know that there's ... indirect [ads] ... whenever someone's trying to sell you something, you can know that it's an ad.

Grace, aged 16

Here, Grace notes that advertising can be used to encourage sales while also observing its subtle nature by labelling it "*indirect*".

Predominantly, however, the participants referenced selling intent as they spoke about owned media.

[Owned media is] advertising because they're ... basically saying "this is new, go out and buy it".

David, aged 16

Make-up brands ... love the stuff they put up ... that you can buy ... show you how to do make-up ... it's getting people to go in and buy it really isn't it?

Natasha, aged 17

Therefore, there was a full understanding in place that the brand's provision of information about their products within paid and owned media (such as pricing, stockists, and demonstrations) is made based on encouraging sales. This understanding represents a developed cognitive dispositional AL because the participants were able to consider not only the entertaining and informative qualities of such communications (both paid owned media), but also understood that it aims to sell to them.

5.3.2 Understanding of Persuasive Intent & Persuasive Tactics within SM Advertising

Alongside selling intent there was also widespread understanding amongst the participants of persuasive intent and the use of persuasive tactics within SM advertising. Understanding persuasive intent refers to the ability to understand that the marketer attempts to influence the mental state of the consumer such as behaviour, beliefs, decisions, and actions (Ali et al., 2009; Lawlor et al., 2016). This understanding is more complex than the understanding of selling intent and is only expected to be present in older children who have greater cognitive resources (see Sections 2.2.1 and 2.3.1). Understanding of persuasive tactics refers to the ability to recognise specific tactics or strategies in use by the marketer to idealise the product and influence the consumer (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) (see Section 2.2.1). This understanding may not be straightforward in new media contexts (e.g., SM) which utilise tactics native to that landscape.

Within the interviews, the participants showed widespread ability to understand persuasive intent and tactics, often portraying both simultaneously. This was observed as they spoke about marketers' intentions to change their beliefs and conceptions, with the goal of persuading them to buy from a particular brand.

> *[Marketers are] always trying to target me ... with new stuff like "If you wear this, you'll be deadly" ... But they'd make them real dear 'cause they know ... they'd be [pestering] their Ma's ... for money (laughter).*

> Natasha, aged 17

> *I'd follow ... Pretty Little Thing [online fashion retailer] ...[they share] pictures of other people trying out the product ... saying "this person loves our product, go on and buy it" ... they use other people ... like celebrities ... people from ... Geordie Shore [reality*

TV show] ... they always have pictures of them on their page ... 'cause ... young people

... like what they do so if they're using it, obviously people are going to use it as well.

<div align="right">Rachel, aged 16</div>

The participants commonly illustrated an in-depth understanding of persuasive intent as they recognised that marketers aim to make consumers feel as though they would be happier if they owned a particular product. In terms of tactics utilised, Natasha observes that marketers try to take advantage of young people's pester power, i.e. that young people will attempt to convince their parents to buy something after seeing it advertised. They also understood that marketers utilise reference groups and opinion leaders (such as reality TV stars) as a tactic to persuade consumers about the merits of their brand.

The use of attractive sources/opinion leaders was also a widely recognised persuasive tactic within IM. Since IM can be considered a covert advertising format (see Section 3.4.2), the participants' recognition of its persuasive intent and tactics represents a reflective understanding of SM advertising. They understood that influencers form part of young peoples' reference groups, and that consumers want to mimic their behaviour as a result.

If you have a lot of popularity on SM, then you can start letting brands sponsor ya ...

your fans ... like what you're liking. So, if they think that you like a ... clothing brand,

they'll probably try get that clothing brand.

<div align="right">Jack, aged 16</div>

Say like [a consumer's] favourite person is wearing that stuff; they might want to be

like that person so then they have to wear that kind of stuff.

<div align="right">Michael, aged 16</div>

Overall, the participants recognised that associating a brand with the attractive source characteristics of an influencer may help to alter the mental states of their target audience. They understood that by appointing these opinion leaders as disseminators of advertising, consumers may feel compelled to purchase from that brand on account of their desire to emulate the individual's behaviour. As such, recognition of persuasive intent and tactics within this format of covert advertising was widely observed and formed a common pattern.

The participants' ability to recognise a wide range of persuasive tactics native to SM signified their ability to reflect on the marketers' agenda in this new media environment. As evident from the discussion, the participants displayed this knowledge across varying formats, from covert advertising to owned media. Therefore, this illustrates their ability to adapt AL to various manifestations of advertising in a new media context (Malmelin, 2010), suggestive of a developed cognitive AL. A further cognitive understanding displayed by the participants related to the use of segmentation and targeting on SM.

5.3.3 Understanding of Segmentation & Targeting at Play within SM Advertising

Segmentation refers to dividing the market into smaller segments of buyers which likely require separate marketing strategies, while targeting refers to selecting a segment to enter (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). In the context of AL, it involves an understanding about why marketers speak to specific groups of consumers and can be related to target knowledge within the PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994). It can also be compared to a component of cognitive AL recognised in the literature which is a *perception of advertisings' intended audience* (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) (see Section 2.2.1). However, the knowledge which manifested in this research extends Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al.'s (2011) component to include understanding of how segmentation and targeting are *put to use* in the SM landscape. Specifically, it involves an

awareness of how segmentation and targeting are achieved using different media landscapes and profiling tools in the contemporary advertising climate. Throughout the interviews, this was demonstrated by many participants.

For example, a common pattern was an understanding that SM is used by young people in particular, and that ads therein subsequently target a youthful segment.

> *[SM is] where you get most of the younger generation … you'd mostly see the younger generation on their phones … more than reading a book or watching the telly. Because they have it right in their hands. So that's the way to grab out at them.*

> Jack, aged 16

The participants' common reference to SM as a tool to target young people showed an understanding that marketers try to address specific groups of people and use age to segment the market. They understood that SM is especially popular with young people, above other media outlets such as television. Based on this reasoning, they understood that it is more important for marketers to be active on SM rather than television when addressing this age group.

Similarly, some compared television and SM advertising against each other and recognised that television advertising predominantly addresses older segments, like "*parents*".

> *The ads on TV are more for … everyday needs, like there's a lot of … supermarkets and things that … target at … parents … while online it's make-up and clothes.*

> Hannah, aged 16

They therefore recognised the difference between targeting that takes place on television, versus that which occurs on SM, and could differentiate between different target audiences active on different platforms.

A further dominant pattern across the interviews was an understanding that SM advertising is personalised to the user who is exposed to it.

> *On Facebook, you'll like some pages and they're like "hmmm this person liked these pages, lets recommend this product" ... I hate to be the whole paranoid "everyone's watching you" but it is, it's data collection ... so if I like something ... they're like "hmm this thing's related, let's recommend this person to get this product which will make said company money".*

<div align="right">Alice, aged 16</div>

The participants clearly understood that the advertising they receive on SM relates to their SM activity. As such, they understood that marketers utilise users' data to target them. Alice compares this to "*data collection*", recognising the marketer's tracking of her activity. Similarly, many recognised that marketers target users based on their specific online behaviours, such as search history and items added to virtual shopping baskets. This has been referred to as retargeted advertising in the literature (Zarouali et al., 2017).

> *If I go on something and I click on it, specifically ... those items that I clicked on would be ... in the ad ... I don't know if this would ... be the right word but sometimes I feel like I'm ... followed.*

<div align="right">Grace, aged 16</div>

> *I think when you look something up on Google it ... comes up on your feed ... they know what I'm trying to look for, so they just put it on my feed.*

<div align="right">Sarah, aged 17</div>

Often, and as the example excerpts from Grace and Sarah illustrate, the participants understood that marketers access their online data to utilise it within subsequent advertising and therefore

recognised this as a level of personalised targeting. Although a widespread and sophisticated understanding of this practice was in place, there were mixed evaluations about it. Some conceptualised it as the marketer lending a helping hand (as Sarah suggests), while others were more uncomfortable and likened it to being "*followed*" (as Grace illustrates). This theme is returned to in Chapter Seven (see Sections 7.2.1 and 7.3.2) which the discussion focuses on participants' moral evaluations of such practices.

A subsequent theme which emerged relating to the participants' understanding of SM advertising was their cognisance of bias.

5.3.4 Understanding of Bias within SM Advertising

A prevalent theme across the interviews related to the participants' understanding that SM advertising is biased. This refers to the facility to discern that "advertising makes products seem better than they are in reality" (Hudders et al., 2017, p.337) and has been recognised as a component of cognitive AL (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Understanding of bias was evident as participants described SM advertisings' tendency to exaggerate or focus solely on favourable qualities of products.

> *[Marketers are] always trying to target me ... with new stuff like. "If you wear this, you'll be deadly" ... trying to make it good as they can.*

> Natasha, aged 17

Thus, understanding of bias was evident as they referred to exaggerated language and promises made by brands within SM advertising. They also commonly referred to a tendency to trust WOM more than owned media or advertising, as illustrated by Tracy:

I suppose Beauty Bay [online beauty retailer] ... would have to put up stuff about themselves because that is their page, whereas if it was a friend, I probably would trust that it ... is a good product or a good website.

<div align="right">Tracy, aged 16</div>

As such, they could understand that claims made by firms about themselves are likely to be biased due to the vested interest of the advertiser, whereas WOM is more trustworthy since peers are not assumed to have an ulterior motive.

Overall, understanding of advertising's bias was illustrated most often as the participants spoke about covert advertising, and IM in particular.

They're promoting ... and showing the perks to it and they're not ... showing you the bad ... stuff.

<div align="right">Aisling, aged 16</div>

Someone could be sponsored to Nike so they might just be wearing Nike ... because they're sponsored ... sometimes the marketing could be for ... just the money ... But if she wasn't getting paid then you'd know she actually likes that product.

<div align="right">Michael, aged 16</div>

For many, the fact that influencers are compensated in exchange for speaking about brands means that recommendations cannot be taken without consideration of bias. These participants understood that within this format of covert advertising, it is the influencer's job to sell the product to their audience, and to do so may involve the use of exaggerated brand claims (see Section 5.3.6 for discussion on understanding of compensation and editorial control within IM). This was a prevailing theme across many of the interviews and was seen to have

implications for whether they could trust influencer recommendations, as the quote from Michael has just illustrated. Another example is provided by Fred.

> *When you see [Rob Lipsett, Irish influencer] wearing clothes … I wanted to go buy them … If he's just wearing it normally … But … if it's an ad I'm not really sure if it's nice … you know he actually enjoys wearing it if he wears it. But if he's wearing it in an ad he may or may not like it, you don't really know.*

<div align="right">Fred, aged 16</div>

Therefore, recommendations given within IM were recognised as biased by most participants since they are made in exchange for compensation. Recommendations posed by influencers during IM, versus recommendations given within organic content, were considered as separate and taken very differently ("*if it's an ad I'm not really sure if it's nice*"). One reason why marketers utilise IM is because WOM is considered to be more important in influencing consumer decisions than marketing communications, and IM could be considered to bridge the gap between advertising and WOM (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Kim et al., 2021). The impact of WOM when it emerges from opinion leaders like influencers has been reported to potentially double that of average consumers (Keller & Fay, 2016). However, it was interesting to observe that the participants of this research seemed to have a clear understanding of the potential for bias within IM. Another example is given by David.

> *Businesses … go … to [influencers] … and … get them to … be an advertiser saying "awh this is brilliant" even if they think it's garbage … It'd probably be real biased, cause they could hate it, but 'cause they're getting paid enough money they'd literally say anything about it. "It's the best thing they've ever seen" or something like that … the way they say it they over-exaggerate.*

<div align="right">David, aged 16</div>

As such, it was clear that IM was considered to be contrived or biased for most participants. This speaks to the presence of scepticism which is further examined in the context of moral AL in Chapter Seven (see Section 7.3.4).

The excerpts discussed within this theme so far have reflected the participants' dispositional AL, i.e., their understanding of bias within SM advertising as they are speaking generally. However, understanding of bias was also observed when participants were invited to view examples of covert advertising during elicitation at the end of the interviews (i.e., situationally).

> *You don't know if he's [Rob Lipsett, influencer] being genuine or not … if he's paid, he's obviously going to give the best he can.*

> Conor, aged 16 (in response to appendix I)

> *If he [Rob Lipsett, influencer] didn't have that [paid partnership disclosure] … I'd probably be like "they're nice jeans", but then I realised he mightn't even like them.*

> Fred, aged 16 (in response to appendix Q)

Therefore, at many junctures, the participants' response to specific examples of IM (situational AL) reflected their general discussion about bias during the interview (dispositional AL), namely, that IM is biased on account of compensation. This was illustrated by Fred in particular, as he applied his dispositional cognitive knowledge (see earlier extract) in the same way situationally by confirming that the disclosure changed his evaluation of the product due to a perception of bias ("*he mightn't even like them*").

However, it was interesting that in other cases during elicitation, in situations whereby the influencer was familiar to the participants, they were reluctant to apply their dispositional understanding of bias when exposed to IM situationally.

Author: So, when you [recognise it as advertising], does that make you react differently?

Well with him, no … But with other people, you'd kinda think are they just in it for the money … you see a lot of videos talking about their involvement with certain brands and they're saying it doesn't change anything but then … it's very fake and they are just in it for the money. Like they don't care about anything else.

James, aged 17 (in response to appendix O)

Therefore, although James speaks about IM in general as being biased and based on compensation ("*it's very fake and they are just in it for the money*"), he does not apply this to the example shown to him which emanates from a familiar, admired influencer. As such, although his general cognitive knowledge (dispositional AL) about IM informs him that IM is biased on account of the use of financial compensation, he is reluctant to situationally apply this to a known influencer during exposure. Therefore, even if teenagers are able to dispositionally critique the practice of IM (e.g., on account of bias), this suggests it may not always be applied to known influencers whom they trust (situationally). This is an important pattern which is returned to in Chapters Six and Seven. As such, dispositional knowledge is not necessarily applied in the same way to situational events. This suggests that dispositional and situational AL were not always aligned.

Two themes remain within this chapter relating to the participant's understanding of SM advertising. The penultimate theme relates to the power of earned media.

5.3.5 SM Consumers as a Source of Brand Messaging - Some Understanding of the Power of Earned Media

A further component of the participants' cognitive AL relates to their views on earned media which refers to WOM/UGC generated by parties external to the brand, such as content posted by consumers (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016). Earned media is often encouraged, and sometimes harnessed, by the brand within marketing communications given the heavy influence WOM has on consumer purchase decisions (see Section 3.3). The ability to understand the benefits which earned media provides the marketer can thus be considered important to the exploration of cognitive AL in a SM context, since marketers may stimulate earned media to subsequently utilise it within their SM advertising mix. While the participants understood that earned media benefits the brand in terms of acting as a testimonial for others, they tended to refute the idea that it can form part of a brand's marketing strategy. In other words, the pattern was that the participants understood how eWOM benefits the brand but disagreed that their own brand-centred WOM acts as a form of endorsement, and therefore, adheres to the brand's agenda. As such, it can be conceptualised that while they did have some understanding of this practice, it could be more developed.

Overall, the participants understood the benefits which the brand might receive from earned media, as it acts as testimonial for others.

> *Every bit of extra ... publicity for a brand is ... them getting extra advertisement. But you wouldn't really consciously do it.*

<div align="right">Owen, aged 16</div>

> *If I got new runners ... I'd take a picture and put it on Snapchat to say "love these" ... That kind of is advertising as well isn't it though? ... I'm not getting paid or anything I'm just putting it up 'cause I really like what I got ... for Christmas ... I got a pair of*

grey Nike runners, and I just took a picture ... and everyone was like "awh where did you get your runners?" ... now that I'm thinking about it that is me advertising that like [laughter].

<div align="right">Natasha, aged 17</div>

Many could articulate the advantages that earned media conveys upon a brand whom it is centred on and acknowledged that this kind of content acts as a testimonial for others. During Natasha's interview, she came to this realisation about her own user-generated content. As such, she could acknowledge her role in adhering to the marketer's agenda in recommending Nike to her peers. However, most participants who spoke about earned media tempered it with a note about its unintentionality ("*you wouldn't really consciously do it*"). Therefore, while most could understand how the brand benefits from earned media, they refuted the concept that they are acting in accordance with the brand's wishes. In other words, they suggested that their creation of brand-centred WOM served their own purpose, while also *inadvertently* serving the brand.

This formed a pattern in the data, as excerpts from Jack and Rob also demonstrate.

> **Author: if a friend posts … about a brand … how do you react to that?**
>
> *I'd probably text them saying ...where did they get ... probably be interested ...*
>
> **Author: have you ever put up a post like that?**
>
> *... Yeah. Just in case other people would wanna see them so I'd probably pop up what they are ... what price they were ... where to get them ...*
>
> **Author: … do you think is that a form of [endorsement] …?**
>
> *No not really ... it's more ... me showing off my fashion, what I like.*

In another interview, Rob similarly highlighted the benefits to him, regarding the sharing of brand-related WOM, as opposed to the benefits for the brand.

> *Author: have you ever posted on SM about a brand or product?*
>
> *Yeah ... I got a new camera a few weeks ago, and it's a Canon camera ... I had used it for a week, and I put up a picture of it just saying ... it's a brilliant camera, and if anybody's into photography they should look into getting it ... a lot of my friends would be into that as well ... and I'd definitely recommend that ...*
>
> *Author: And do you think is that you … endorsing Canon?*
>
> *No, I think that's just me generally saying ... it's good, you should get it.*

Rob, aged 16

Although both Jack and Rob acknowledge how their WOM acts as a recommendation for others, they disagreed that this type of content can be viewed as a form of endorsement for the brand. It was surprising that the participants did not seem to acknowledge the brands' encouragement and use of this content to fulfil marketing objectives. Although it is likely that Jack and Rob did not set out to intentionally act as brand ambassadors, the posts they describe do suggest endorsement and would fall within the category of earned media. When asked by the author to consider whether their posts might benefit the brand, they may have sought to restore their autonomy by disagreeing with the proposal that they were working to the marketers' agenda.

In contrast to this, a minority of participants were outright in their acknowledgement that earned media acts as a form of interaction and co-creation between brand and consumer. Ava in particular demonstrated her inclination to communicate back to the brand through UGC.

When you go out and you've done your make-up ... you post pictures ... you would tag Inglot [cosmetics brand] on your picture ...

Author: So, would you see that as endorsing the brand ...?

Yeah, kind of ... I think it's better because we aren't paid to use it ... we got these good results from genuinely using it ... it's not like there was ... professionals using it in a professional way ...

Author: do you think does the company benefit from that?

I would say so ... because then ... your friends are like "oh I love that colour".

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

Ava refers to intentionally creating earned media to recommend favoured brands to her friends. Interestingly, she highlights that she communicates with the brand by tagging their SM profile. She openly informs Inglot about how she has utilised their products, whilst also recommending to peers. As such, Ava engages in interactive communication with the brand. Part of Ava's enjoyment of the product may be the opportunity to create content on SM to associate herself with Inglot, thus illustrating the self-expressive benefits associated with consumption for teenagers (see Section 2.5). She contends that her curation of earned media is beneficial not only to the brand, but also other consumers. Therefore, while she understands earned media, she also considers it as "*better*" than advertising because she is not "*paid to use*" the products. Therefore, she sees herself as providing a service to both the brand *and* other consumers, in supplying a genuine and realistic presentation of the product.

Altogether, while most of the participants understood the power of SM testimonials in their ability to influence peers, only some acknowledged how such content aligns with the brand's agenda. Therefore, while they had reflected on the value within earned media for brands, they

perhaps did not fully understand that marketers encourage UGC in a bid to blend paid, owned and earned media as part of their SM advertising strategy. This is similar to findings reported by Lawlor et al. (2016), who also found that despite engaging in earned media, adolescent participants refuted their role as brand ambassadors.

It is perhaps surprising that the participants could understand and acknowledge that they interact with advertising in many non-traditional ways on SM (like via owned media and influencers), yet many denied that their own UGC aligns with the brand's agenda. If adolescents do not fully understand how marketers encourage earned media and the persuasive nature of brand-related UGC, then it follows that they may not enact the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994) when exposed to it and as such, may not respond critically. The final theme to be presented in this chapter relates to the participants' understanding of the advertisers' covert tactics on SM, in particular relating to compensation and editorial control within IM.

5.3.6 Understanding of the Advertiser's Covert Tactics on SM: Compensation & Editorial Control within Influencer Marketing

The final theme relating to the participants' cognitive AL concerns their understanding of covert advertising, in particular compensation and editorial control within IM. This knowledge represents an understanding of how this covert advertising strategy works. Influencer content qualifies as IM when *both* compensation and control have been provided by a brand (ASAI, 2018; De Veirman et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2021) (see Section 3.4.2). Cognisance of compensation and control therefore lends itself to an understanding that this kind of covert advertising does not involve the influencer's impartial review/opinion, but rather it is the brand who has final approval and dictates the content.

Throughout the interviews, most participants portrayed an understanding of compensation and editorial control within IM. Although they often did not use these terms, nor were they always *explicit* in explaining these elements as part of the practice of IM, through analysis of how they described IM, the author could identify their understanding of these aspects. An excerpt from Michael may be used as an example:

> *With SM, if someone has a big following … they could pay someone with like a million followers to put up a photo of them with that shirt in it, but it'd be like subtle advertising …*
>
> ***Author: how would you know that that's happening?***
>
> *They might say it in their … description of the photo … "thank you … Nike for giving me this" and then people might be like "oh he's wearing Nike so I'm going to wear Nike as well".*
>
> Michael, aged 16

Michael displays a sophisticated understanding of compensation and control within this excerpt, while also expressing a plethora of other elements of cognitive AL. Specifically, Michael *understands the advertiser's persuasive tactics* as he can appreciate that the brand employs the influencer due to their access to (and influence over) a large following. He shows *recognition of advertising* and *understanding of advertising's bias* as he labels IM "*subtle advertising*". This phrase implies an understanding that IM is designed to be perceived as similar to organic content by the audience (i.e., covert in nature) but is in fact a form of advertising and is therefore biased. Furthermore, he *understands advertising's persuasive intent* as he suggests that influencers are seen as opinion leaders by their followers ("*he's wearing Nike so I'm going to wear Nike as well*"). He also *recognises advertising's source* as he references the brand's (i.e., Nike's) role within the content, as message creator and source.

Therefore, taken together he is portraying an *understanding of compensation and editorial control within IM*. He understands that the message has two parties – Nike as message source and influencer as message transmitter. He knows that the influencer is compensated, and also suggests cognisance of the brand's control over the content when he states, "*to put up a photo of them with that shirt in it*", thereby giving an example of direction given to influencers over their sponsored content. As such, he is cognisant of the advertiser's objectives and tactics within this covert advertising format.

While acknowledgement of the brand's editorial control over messaging within IM was not always referred to outrightly by the participants, a prevalent theme was an understanding of (and subsequent use of) brand scripts as a way of identifying IM (see Section 5.2.4). Since brand scripts refer to the influencer's use of scripted language or copy, it is comparable to an understanding of editorial control. Thus, the excerpts and discussion provided earlier (see Section 5.2.4) illustrate this understanding. Similarly, discussion in relation to understanding of bias often portrayed the participants' understanding of both compensation and control in IM (see Section 5.3.4).

However, some participants illustrated an understanding of editorial control outside instances of discussing bias and brand scripts. For instance, Hannah gives an example that emerged during elicitation.

> *She's [Suzanne Jackson, influencer] gonna make money if people buy it ... I doubt she even saw that bag to be completely honest (laughs) ... looks like someone sent it to her and said "oh just post this online" ... she says ... "I'm in love with my new studded handbag", everyone always says that ... it's also saying Mother's Day is coming up so ... you should get it for your mum ... if she wasn't getting paid, she wouldn't as specific as to when to go find it.*

Hannah demonstrates a clear understanding of the control the brand has over the content in providing specific direction and copy, as well as compensation present for the influencer. She assumes that the influencers' voice is replaced with brand copy ("*I doubt she even saw that bag to be completely honest*"). Therefore, as she responds situationally, Hannah understands that the content she is exposed to is not an impartial review of a product, rather that the influencer is advertising the brand's message in exchange for compensation. Therefore, she has a clear understanding of the marketers' objectives and tactics within this kind of covert advertising.

However, when it came to understanding compensation and editorial control in various kinds of influencer content (e.g., IM versus PR), some participants struggled.

> *I don't know how it works to be honest ... he gets sent stuff in the post, but I don't know ... does he get money for it or anything?*

Ava, aged 16

Although Ava displayed an understanding of IM throughout her interview, she admits within the excerpt above she is unsure about the relationship between influencer and brand in different situations. Specifically, she struggles to understand the difference between PR (where the influencer "*gets sent stuff in the post*") and IM. She is uncertain whether compensation and editorial control are present in both cases.

Therefore, in general the participants displayed an understanding of the marketer's covert tactics on SM, in particular the presence of compensation and editorial control within IM, but also acknowledged the difficulties they sometimes face navigating various kinds of influencer content (e.g., understanding the differences between organic sharing of favoured brands, PR, and IM). A conclusion of the chapter now follows.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter addresses the first objective of the research: *to investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on social media.* This relates to cognitive AL, namely the ability to *recognise* advertising and *understand* it's intent (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; Hudders et al., 2017). The findings were considered under two overarching themes – the first related to awareness and recognition of advertising, while the second referred to understanding of advertisers' objectives and tactics in the venue of SM.

In terms of the former, the participants were fully aware of, and able to recognise, overt advertising on SM, including pop-ups and pre-rolls. They identified defining features of overt advertising such as its disruptive format, it's timer (in the case of pre-roll advertising), and ways of identifying it using markers such as the presence of wording like 'advertisement' and the use of buttons to 'skip' the ad. This is in line with previous studies from the literature that studied AL in the context of overt advertising on SM (e.g., De Pauw et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2010; Spiteri Cornish. 2014). For example, younger children (aged 9-11) have been reported to have "little difficulty" recognising these formats (De Pauw et al., 2017, p.2613), while adolescents (aged 13-17) have also been reported to have keen awareness of overt advertising, including mechanisms to identify it such as it's pop-up nature (Kelly et al., 2010). However, Lawlor et al. (2016) found that adolescents (aged 12-14) overestimated their ability to identify overt advertising, since they failed to recognise it during exposure. Therefore, the older participants in the current study showed a more developed cognitive AL, given they were not only aware of overt ads, but knew how to recognise them also.

Furthermore, the participants were fully aware of the presence and nature of native advertising on SM, which constitutes a covert advertising format, and they also had schema or identifiers by which to recognise it. Specifically, they were aware that advertising can appear as embedded

within SM newsfeeds and can take the form and function of organic SM content (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). They were also well informed about how to identify it, e.g., through disclosures such as "*recommended for you*". This awareness and familiarity contrasts with concerns which have been expressed in the literature about adolescents' ability to recognise native advertising (e.g., Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020; Zarouali et al., 2017). Furthermore, they showed more sophisticated knowledge about native advertising than adult samples in previous studies who were often unable to make this identification (Spiteri Cornish, 2014; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016).

However, in terms of awareness and recognition of a second form of covert advertising, namely IM, the participants were inclined to consider this as a way for brands and influencers to work together and therefore seemed to classify it as a hybrid of paid and earned media. A small number of authors in the literature classify IM in this way (e.g., Kim et al., 2021), but the majority categorise it as a form of covert advertising (e.g., De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Hudders et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). It could be argued that the participant's classification of IM as a hybrid of paid and earned media downplays or overlooks the element of brand editorial control within IM and therefore does not reflect a nuanced understanding that IM is essentially a form of advertising. On the other hand, by highlighting the earned media aspect, the participants were recognising the WOM that can arise from the influencer and consumer interacting within this brand-sponsored content. In other words, they were recognising that brand-related content can emanate from sources other than the advertiser.

Nonetheless, the participants' failure to recognise this covert format when asked about SM advertising (with exception of 4 participants) highlights its subtle nature and therefore it's possibility to pass 'under the radar' of young consumers. This is given further credence when considering the juxtaposition some participants made *between* IM and advertising.

Additionally, a prevalent theme related to the participants use of self-developed knowledge to identify IM, which lay outside the boundaries of advertising disclosures which are required by advertising regulatory bodies. The most prevalent 'self-developed schema' was seeking out brand scripts, i.e., using the presence of exaggerated language or brand copy to delineate IM. On this basis, the participants believed themselves to be experts at identifying this form of covert advertising, representing their dispositional AL. However, when they were exposed to IM during elicitation, a common pattern was an inability to correctly identify it using these self-developed schemata, constituting their situational AL. Therefore, in line with Lawlor et al. (2016) and van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019), the participants overestimated their ability to identify covert advertising in practice. This suggests that a gap exists between dispositional and situational AL. On the other hand, about half of the participants had dispositional knowledge of disclosures, and they were more successful at identifying this kind of covert advertising during exposure as a result. This suggests that if stakeholders focus on increasing *dispositional* knowledge of disclosures, it may aid situational recognition of advertising when exposed. Indeed, past research also confirms that situationally, disclosures help young people to identify IM (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018).

Elsewhere, the participants recognised and understood the commercial nature of owned media. They were able to recognise and rationalise why brands use SM platforms, for example, to showcase their product and service offerings. This research therefore highlighted participants' awareness of the various ways in which brands engage with young people on SM, not only in terms of using paid advertising formats on SM, but also by harnessing the potential of the brands' own SM profile or account (owned media). The latter is outside the parameters of what is traditionally considered advertising. This finding therefore strengthens the critique made by Voorveld (2019) and Alhabash et al, (2017) that the literature defines SM advertising too narrowly by not also considering owned and earned media.

The discussion now turns to the second half of objective one, namely *understanding* of the objectives underpinning, and tactics used, in SM advertising. By examining the themes which arose in the research against how the literature defines cognitive AL, it can be concluded that the participants' cognitive AL was highly developed on SM. Specifically, the knowledge which arose was reflective of the seven markers of cognitive AL as identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011), namely recognition of advertising and advertising's source; perception of intended audience; understanding of selling intent, persuasive intent and persuasive tactics; as well as understanding of advertising's bias (see Section 2.2.1). The present research illustrates how this knowledge has been adapted and extended by young consumers in the context of SM. For example, their understanding of segmentation and targeting at play within SM advertising overlaps with 'perception of intended audience' as suggested by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011), since both relate to an understanding of target markets. However, in the current research, this was adapted by the participants to include an understanding of profiling tools on SM. Similarly, their understanding of covert tactics, regarding a brand's interaction with an influencer, the brand's payment of financial compensation and the brand's holding of editorial control within IM, is comparable to 'recognition of advertising's source' as suggested by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011). Both constitute an understanding of the entity who has funded the advertisement. In the current research, this was extended to understand that commercial sources can sponsor third parties (such as influencers) to disseminate advertising on SM. Furthermore, understanding of persuasive intent and tactics also reflects Rozendaal's et al.'s (2011) components, but in this context was applied to understanding SM tactics such as product demonstrations and the use of attractive sources within advertising. As evident from the discussion, the participants displayed highly developed knowledge in most of these areas. However, knowledge was not as widespread across the group when it came to understanding of earned media as a source of brand messaging, in line with Lawlor et al. (2016). Overall, it

is concluded that although the seven components of cognitive AL were identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) in the context of traditional advertising, the present findings suggest that their foundation holds true in the context of SM.

Therefore, the overall conclusion is that *in the main*, the participants had a highly developed understanding (or cognitive AL) regarding the nature and range of overt and covert advertising formats on SM platforms. However, uncertainty was seen to arise in the case of one specific covert format - IM. Whilst the participants professed that they were able to recognise and comprehend the nature of IM, and they were able to articulate how they make this identification, this understanding did not always manifest itself when they were exposed to specific IM examples. This reflects the findings of van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) whose sample of adolescents (aged 14-16) had difficulties in recognising IM.

Therefore, preliminary evidence emerged regarding a gulf between dispositional and situational AL. The application of AL during exposure was challenged by the nature and origin of covert advertising, where advertising was embedded in the content of familiar and admired influencers. Specifically, many participants spoke during the interview about the biased nature of IM, reflecting their dispositional AL about the practice. However, when exposed to examples in the context of known or favoured influencers, many were reluctant to apply this understanding of bias as part of their situational response. As such, although their dispositional knowledge contained this understanding, this was not always applied to specific influencers in situational examples. Thus, dispositional knowledge did not always account for situational application. This pattern is further evidenced in Chapters Six and Seven.

Now that the participants' recognition and understanding of the nature of SM advertising has been explored, a subsequent consideration is how they felt about such content, namely their affective AL.

Chapter Six: Teenagers' Attitudes Towards SM Advertising

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the second of three chapters which discuss the findings from the primary research. The previous chapter examined the findings relating to the first research objective, namely, *to investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on SM*. This chapter addresses the second research objective, specifically: *to examine teenagers' attitudes towards advertising on SM*. Throughout the literature, affective AL (referred to interchangeably as attitudinal AL) is predominantly conceptualised as holding negative attitudes towards advertising. Specifically, it has been described as disliking of, and scepticism towards, advertising (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Others propose it as a learned disliking or disbelief of advertising, which then acts as an automatic attitudinal response during exposure (Hudders et al., 2016). However, a recent school of thought within the literature has pointed out that positive attitudes towards advertising have been largely ignored within the literature (Hudders et al., 2017). Hudders et al. (2017) were the first to contribute a model which posited that the outcome of critical processing of advertising may be either negative *or* positive in nature. As such, this study is one of the first to empirically investigate attitudes toward SM advertising from an interpretivist perspective.

Whilst both negative and positive attitudes towards SM advertising were found to be present within this research, the dominant pattern was positivity towards, and therefore liking of, SM advertising. This marks a tension in the data, in that although both kinds of attitudes were present (liking and disliking), ultimately liking was far more prevalent across the interviews.

Table 6.1 outlines the themes which arose under objective two. Specifically, negative attitudes towards SM advertising were found to be present as the participants spoke about disruptive, incessant, and irrelevant ads, as well as annoyance directed towards influencers on account of

their role in IM. However, positive attitudes were found to be a richer theme, whereby participants predominantly conceptualised SM advertising as enjoyable and relevant, and suggested garnering utility from it. For these reasons, they mostly held favourable attitudes towards it.

Table 6.1: *Roadmap of Themes Arising Under Objective Two*

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<tr><td>

6.2 Unfavourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising

    6.2.1 Irritation Towards Disruptive Advertising

    6.2.2 Dislike but Tolerance Towards Incessant Advertising

    6.2.3 Frustration Towards Irrelevant Advertising

    6.2.4 Resentment Towards Influencers for Acting as Disseminators of Advertising, but Tolerance Towards Specific Influencers

6.3 Favourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising: Perception of SM Advertising as Offering Relevance and Utility

    6.3.1 Targeted SM Advertising as a Helpful Resource

    6.3.2 Enjoyment of Covert Advertising: Appreciation of Influencer Marketing

    6.3.3 A Modern-Day Catalogue – the Opt-In Nature & Perceived Utility of Owned Media as a Form of Advertising

    6.3.4 Earned Media as a Reliable Testimonial from Peers: Consumer WOM in Praise of Brands

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Source: developed by the author

The discussion will begin by considering unfavourable attitudes towards advertising, starting with a feeling of irritation towards disruptive advertising.

6.2 Unfavourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising

6.2.1 Irritation Towards Disruptive Advertising

Where the participants spoke about disliking advertising, a predominant cause of irritation was where advertising was seen to cause disruption to their use of SM. Some advertising formats were considered more disruptive than others, namely overt formats. Specifically, pop-up and pre-roll advertising were considered disruptive due to their obtrusive nature – i.e., whereby they envelop the users' screen and (in the case of pre-roll advertising) must be viewed for a designated amount of time before allowing exit. As such, the participants often described feeling irritated towards these ad formats, since they impeded their use of SM. Owen and Shane gave examples:

> *Ads popping up ... that is a bit annoying ... they're just in there without you even tapping into them ... you're ... in the middle of looking at stuff ... try and tap through them as quickly as I can.*

> Owen, aged 16

> *I didn't really ask for it it's just kind of there ... if you're trying to do something and it pops up ... it can get a bit annoying.*

> Shane, aged 16

As such, pop-up advertising was conceptualised as interruptive and "*annoying*". The participants therefore dislike when SM advertising reduces them to act as passive recipients of advertising, without the facility to opt in or out ("*I didn't really ask for it*"). Owen illustrates his overall feelings towards this advertising tactic, i.e., his dispositional AL, and illustrates a specific action he takes when situationally confronted with it, namely exiting as quickly as he can.

Such animosity was often mirrored when the participants spoke about pre-roll advertising, as illustrated by Conor.

> *You're trying to watch … YouTube … you just wanna watch it, and then an ad would pop up and you're like 'ugh', and sometimes you can't skip it and you've to wait.*

<div align="right">Conor, aged 16</div>

Therefore, the participants were irritated at being forced to watch both pre-roll and pop-up advertising since these are 'push' advertising tactics, which minimise their agency and interrupt their consumption of media. Therefore, overt advertising often attracted negative attitudes, in line with findings reported by Kelly et al. (2010) and De Pauw et al. (2017). The participants disliked being forced to passively consume advertising, without the ability to actively filter or seek out genres they would like to see, as is possible when choosing brand profiles and influencers to follow. As a result, they may seek to avoid or ignore this kind of advertising.

6.2.2 Dislike but Tolerance Towards Incessant Advertising

The participants also described feeling negatively towards SM advertising which occurs too frequently. Similar to their dislike of disruptive advertising, incessant advertising was considered a detraction of their SM experience. This prevailed across the interviews, and is illustrated by Shane, Rob, and Hannah.

> *I only ever find ads irritating if it's constant stuff popping up and … I'm trying to do something.*

<div align="right">Shane, aged 16</div>

The ones that are repetitive and are constantly in your face are really annoying …

you've seen that ad for months on end. And it's just so annoying.

Rob, aged 16

You're constantly watching ads and it just like takes up a lot of your time.

Hannah, aged 16

Thus, the participants felt exasperated where advertising was conceptualised as "*constant*" and "*repetitive*". In these cases, it was seen as a nuisance.

This theme, however, was marked by ambivalence. Although the participants described feeling annoyed at advertising *when* it occurs incessantly, they often qualified this with an admittance that they are generally tolerant of it outside of that. Tracy, Aisling, and Michael are used as examples to portray this pattern.

Sometimes it does get annoying … the same one always comes up but apart from that they're fine.

Tracy, aged 16

I think they're a good idea for the business 'cause like its showing people … who they are and what they do … But … sometimes when they come up all the time it's annoying, you're kind of like 'ok I'm just gonna go out of this'.

Aisling, aged 16

Some days you would find it annoying, like if you're just constantly getting bombarded. But some days like you think "awh right it's grand" 'cause you might actually have a look. So, it's kind of good sometimes to keep up to date.

Michael, aged 16

Therefore, the participants were frustrated when they are "*bombarded*" by advertising, but outside of those circumstances, they look at SM advertising as "*fine*", "*a good idea*" and "*grand*" (a colloquial term for 'fine' / 'ok'). Once advertising does not occur too frequently, they can appreciate it in other ways such as keeping "*up to date*" with brands (this also formed a common theme and is discussed later in Section 6.3.3). Therefore, the participants often pointed out that they disliked advertising under some circumstances but enjoyed or appreciated it in other ways. This highlights that positivity towards SM advertising formed a more prominent pattern across the data.

Dislike of incessant advertising also arose as the participants spoke about the covert advertising format of IM, as demonstrated by David and Naomi.

> *Famous people … show it off … sponsoring … one or two would kind of be annoying. But others it'd be like "oh that's cool". It depends on how they really use it … this Youtuber … was constantly supporting G Fuel [energy drink brand] … went on for a bit too long and too often so everyone kind of got annoyed at him.*

> David, aged 16

> *There's some that do … way too many sponsored things. But some of them do occasionally and I like the occasional part of it… it kinda depends on who posts on what brand … there's one Youtuber and she's always posting about Hollister … it gets really annoying at certain times, so I just leave … I wouldn't look at any of her pictures or anything for a while until it's …over …*

> **Author: Ok so does that put you off Hollister?**

> *It wouldn't put me off Hollister necessarily. I wouldn't usually shop on Hollister so it wouldn't bother me too much about just being Hollister.*

Therefore, while the participants disliked IM when it occurred too frequently, they admitted liking it when it occurs judiciously ("*I like the occasional part of it*"). These findings are similar in part to those reported by van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) whose participants were also annoyed when sponsorship was perceived as excessive in comparison to organic influencer content. However, the present findings extend this by highlighting that where IM is perceived to occur too frequently, negative attitudes are directed towards the influencer, rather than the associated brand. This is interesting, since it suggests that even when the participants felt irritated with IM, the brand was not subject to negative outcomes.

6.2.3 Frustration Towards Irrelevant Advertising

A further cause of unfavourable attitudes was where SM advertising was perceived as irrelevant. The participants felt frustrated when they were exposed to advertising which was not tailored to their interests. This was a prevailing theme as illustrated by Jack and Natasha.

> *Sometimes the advertisements are useful and sometimes they're useless ... like, the Inglot make-up brand, that would probably pop up on [my] feed and ... that'd be useless to me ... why would they recommend that to me? I don't like anything like that.*

Jack, aged 16

> *Sometimes [ads are] just pointless though ... like about wedding dresses ... why would you put that up on a 17-year old's Instagram like? Or like boy's stuff... why would I be looking at that ...?*

Natasha, aged 17

This suggested that the participants looked to SM advertising as a source of relevant information. Where it was not found to offer this, they felt irritated. It seems they were accustomed to advertising being tailored to them in this venue, for instance, retargeted advertising is a common strategy used on SM where ads relate back to users' online behaviours. Where this was not put in place, and where advertising was irrelevant and incongruent with the participants' interests, they felt frustrated towards it. Thus, unless advertising was seen to offer value to the participants, it was conceptualised as a form of clutter and therefore something to be ignored or avoided.

6.2.4 Resentment Towards Influencers for Acting as Disseminators of Advertising, but Tolerance Towards Specific Influencers

A further cause of negative attitudes related to the covert advertising context of IM, though not as prevalent as those themes which have just been discussed (i.e., dislike resulting from disruption, frequency, and irrelevance). Resentment came about for a number of reasons, but a common theme was that negative attitudes were directed toward influencers themselves for taking part in the practice, rather than the brands who employ them.

Firstly, IM stimulated negative attitudes when the advertised product was perceived as being incongruent with the influencer themselves. This was illustrated by Alice and Ellie, as follows.

> *Let's say you're a channel who's into ... comic books ... and then ... you give a promotion for protein ... you know that's not your demographic ... it's just making them money.*

> Alice, aged 16

If they're only saying it just for the money ... it's like false advertising. But if they actually like the product and that's why they're doing it then I don't mind.

Author: Ok and is there a way for you to tell …?

... You'd ... be able to tell cause ... you'd see it come back up again a few times cause it's actually something they use. But if they never use it again, then obviously they didn't actually like it.

Ellie, aged 16

Therefore, a cause of disdain for IM was where influencers were seen to advertise products unaligned with their 'personal brand' or usual style of content. Where this was seen to take place, this led the participants to perceive that influencers advertise without any real interest or belief in the brand, but rather do it "*just for the money*". This led them to compare it to "*false advertising*". Therefore, congruence between influencer and advertised product was seen as important by these participants. This is in line with empirical research which sampled adult participants (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2021), thus demonstrating mature thinking on behalf of the adolescent participants of this study. Interestingly, both Alice and Ellie focus on the influencer's role in agreeing to advertise for brands unaligned with their content ("*you know that's not your demographic*"), rather than the brand who employs them.

Others were also dismissive of IM.

I just think [IM is] stupid ... just get ... anyone to put on a pair of runners like they can do it anyone can do it ... they always put the prices up more I think

Natasha, aged 17

Natasha identifies the persuasive intent within IM, as she references the marketer's agenda of utilising opinion leaders to influence brand perceptions. She is dismissive of the practice and

speaks negatively about it on account of her belief that it results in unwarranted price increases for the product. As such, she has negative feelings towards the practice of IM (i.e., dispositional AL) but when exposed to a specific example during elicitation, she was positively disposed to it (i.e., situational AL).

> *Just showing natural make-up like, that you don't have to have loads on really … so when I look at that I'm like "awh yeah I'd love to know what that is" … then she's like telling you what she used and … I'm like … "that's real helpful" so if I wanted to go make that look I could do it.*

> Natasha, aged 17 (in response to appendix S)

Natasha responds positively to this situational example because the influencer provides utility to her in terms of identifying and demonstrating specific cosmetics products in which Natasha would be interested. She appreciates the opportunity to learn skills which she can utilise in her own environment and considers the content "*helpful*". This causes her to bypass her negative dispositional AL towards IM in general and respond positively situationally.

This was a consistent pattern in the data, whereby participants might be negatively pre-disposed towards the concept and practice of IM (dispositional AL), but their situational AL (their attitudes towards the specific influencer) did not always follow suit. For example, other participants disliked when macro-influencers (those who have large audiences) take part in advertising but in contrast, it appeared to be more acceptable when micro-influencers (those who have smaller numbers of followers) engaged in the practice.

> ***Author: So, if you recognise that a post has been [sponsored], what's your general reaction?***

> *You're … like "ugh ok" but as I said that depends on the person. Like if it's somebody working their way up in the media world, it's … like "yeah fair play" but when there's*

... big people ... promoting brands that you know they definitely wouldn't use ... in their day-to-day life, you're ... like "ugh yeah whatever".

Rob, aged 16

Rob's attitude towards IM "*depends on the person*". He prefers IM when it originates from micro-influencers, as he suggests that these individuals are more deserving of paid work from brands since they are "*working their way up*". Macro-influencers ("*big people*"), on the other hand, are less deserving of IM in Rob's opinion, and advertise for brands which are incongruent with their personal brand, further emphasising the pattern discussed earlier. This illustrates that Rob has varying attitudes towards IM dependent on from which influencer it emerges, specifically disliking when macro-influencers are involved. Therefore, it is again clear that dislike of IM relates to the influencer involved and has little to do with the brand itself, meaning responses can differ based on the situational influencer. In Rob's case, he dispositionally dislikes IM, but (situationally) micro-influencers receive positive responses from him.

Alice further displays this pattern. Firstly, she responds with negative attitudes to an example of IM taken from Snapchat. This displays her dispositional dislike of advertising in general on Snapchat.

I don't really like promotion on Snapchat. I hate going through someone's story and seeing promotion ... that's going to be him talking about ... the brand saying blah blah blah it's great ... you're on Snapchat ... you want to see what your friends are up to you don't want to see what some person's using ... if I seen "the next few snaps are in partnership" ... just go out of it ... wouldn't give it the time of day.

Alice, aged 16 (in response to Appendix M)

Because Snapchat was valued by Alice as a platform to stay in contact with friends (see Section 5.1.2), advertising on this platform (including IM) was considered a form of disruption or

clutter. However, in response to a specific example of IM on the Snapchat platform, Alice responded differently.

> *Now I might sound like a hypocrite, but if I seen these I probably would swipe up … cause I love shoes and if I seen that one that was really nice, I would swipe up to them like "where can I get these, where can I get these, where can I get these?!"*

> Alice, aged 16 (in response to Appendix K)

Although Alice earlier spoke about a general dislike of IM on Snapchat (dispositional AL), she does not apply this to the specific example shown in this instance (situational AL), even though it also depicts IM on Snapchat. Because this specific advertisement showcases a product which delights Alice, her situational response differs ("*I might sound like a hypocrite*") to be one of positivity and excitement. Therefore, even when negative attitudes were in place about IM dispositionally, these were not always applied in the same way situationally, constituting a key theme.

Further evidence of this pattern was provided by James during elicitation.

> *Maybe he's [Rob Lipsett, Irish influencer] trying to put out there … use that code … to get discounts off the clothes.*

> **Author: … would you ever look at this part … "paid partnership with MVMT"?**

> *Oh, I didn't even notice that!*

> **Author: … so when you do see that, does that make you react differently?**

> *Well with him, no … But with other people, you'd kinda think like are they just in it for the money … you see a lot of videos talking about their involvement with certain brands and they're saying like it doesn't change anything but then … it's very fake and they are just in it for the money. Like they don't … care about anything else.*

James, aged 17 (in response to appendix O)

Although James displays a negative dispositional AL about IM as he speaks about "*other people*" advertising for brands for compensation alone, he does not apply this as a situational response in this instance. James' response suggests that his admiration for a specific influencer (Rob Lipsett) causes him to evaluate this influencer differently (i.e., positively) than influencers in general (i.e., negatively). Therefore, his situational affective AL differs from his dispositional AL, as similar to many others.

This key finding relating to a dislike of IM demonstrates that negative attitudes were based on deeper reflections about advertising (in this case IM specifically) than are considered in the literature. For instance, where authors refer to advertising disliking, they often conceptualise it as a learned, automatic response (e.g., Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Elsewhere, authors predict that dislike of advertising will emerge based on negative WOM from others; where the message is irrelevant; or where scepticism is present about advertising claims and/or directed towards SM sites in general (Kelly et al., 2010). But the present research demonstrated that the adolescents were also reflecting on IM in a much deeper manner, by considering issues of congruency (the fit between influencer and product) and the professional status (micro- versus macro-influencer) of the individual from whom it emanates. This new insight concerning the participants' reflective and questioning attitudes towards IM, stands in contrast to the literature's traditional view of a dislike of advertising manifesting itself as an automatic heuristic or learned response (e.g., Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Overall, where dislike of the practice of IM emerged, negative attitudes tended to be directed towards the influencer rather than the brand involved. However, it also evinced the gap that exists between dispositional and situational affective AL. Specifically, this discussion demonstrated that even where participants held negative attitudes about IM generally (i.e.,

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within their dispositional AL), if specific examples of IM were seen to provide utility; feature interesting products; or emerge from a familiar or favoured influencer, the participants responded with positivity (i.e., their situational AL).

To summarise this section, and as highlighted at the start of the chapter, whilst there was evidence of negative attitudes towards SM advertising, the more prevailing pattern was a positive disposition towards SM advertising which will now be examined.

6.3. Favourable Attitudes Towards SM Advertising: Perception of SM Advertising as Offering Relevance and Utility

Although the participants disliked SM advertising in certain situations, more often they recognised the benefits they receive from being exposed to it. The participants had more to say about the ways in which they used SM advertising, and therefore felt positive about it. As such, it was acknowledged as a resource which equips the user with useful information, meaning that attitudes were more positive than negative throughout the interviews.

Table 6.2 identifies the themes aligned with positive attitudes towards SM advertising. Specifically, advertising was valued on the basis that it was seen as helpful in terms of its relevant nature. Furthermore, influencers themselves were often appreciated as a source of relevant and useful information, in terms of both organic and sponsored content (thus highlighting contradictory opinions than those expressed earlier in Section 6.2.4). Owned media was seen as a resource on the basis that it serves as a modern-day catalogue. In other words, participants utilised it as a resource to keep updated about brand information such as current stock. Finally, earned media was valued as a reliable testimonial.

Table 6.2: *Perception of SM Advertising as Offering Relevance and Utility.*

> **6.3.1** Targeted SM Advertising as a Helpful Resource
>
> **6.3.2** Enjoyment of Covert Advertising: Appreciation of Influencer Marketing
>
> **6.3.3** A Modern-Day Catalogue – the Opt-In Nature & Perceived Utility of Owned Media
>
> **6.3.4** Earned Media as a Reliable Testimonial from Peers: Consumer WOM in Praise of Brands

Source: developed by the author

6.3.1 Targeted SM Advertising as a Helpful Resource

The participants often noted the relevant nature of advertising which they are exposed to on SM, and as a result found it helpful in navigating their daily environments. This was noted in the context of targeted advertising, i.e., advertising tailored to personal characteristics and behaviour (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020). Extracts from Natasha and Ava are used as examples to portray this pattern.

> *Something comes up [on my newsfeed] and I'm like "oh my God I love that" … sometimes [I wonder] how do they know that I love that so much … it must be recording … everything you like … it's good.*

> Natasha, aged 17

> *[Marketers] can get sponsored ads on Facebook and … tailor it …to … people from a certain area or people's age … it's good in a way … you're not getting unnecessary*

ads, like ads that don't apply to you ... at the same time it's weird that they can use

your information to target you.

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

Many participants were grateful for relevant advertising on SM, as it meant less advertising clutter to sift through, and more useful information. They appreciated the individualised level of targeting within this venue, and Ava in particular displays an understanding of this at play. However, interestingly she also questions the appropriateness of such behaviour ("*it's weird that they can use your information to target you*") yet still admits that she finds it useful ("*you're not getting unnecessary ads").* Therefore, while acknowledging how the marketer benefits in such a scenario, and indeed questioning the marketers' ethics, she also recognises the benefits inherent within such advertising and ultimately feels positive about it. This 'weighing up' of benefits and sacrifices within SM advertising, and its relative ethicality, is an important theme which will be returned to in the following chapter (see Section 7.3.2) which explores the participants' moral AL.

Positive attitudes also emerged in the context of retargeted advertising, defined as "exposing an online user to an advertisement including a particular kind of content that (s)he searched for online or saw on a previously visited website" (Zarouali et al., 2017, p. 157).

I was talking about [a product] the day before, I really ... wanted the lower price, and

it came up in my recommendations for like half the price ... that was kind of weird

(laughing). I was ... kind of creeped out about it at the start to be honest, and then I

was kinda happy ... I'd say it was because I was putting it into my Google search ... it

was definitely useful ... I bought it.

<div align="right">Shauna, aged 16</div>

SM is tailored ... it's good ... I was looking for a microphone a few weeks ago and I was searching everywhere, and then all of a sudden, this ad pops up and I saw it and ... I looked into it, and I got it.

<div align="right">Rob, aged 16</div>

A prominent pattern in the data was that the participants conceptualised retargeted advertising as lending them a helping hand to make purchases. They understood how the strategy works, since Shauna refers to the marketers' use of her "*Google search*" history. While admitting that they find it "*weird*", many felt positive about it and used it a resource for making purchases. They identified the marketers' persuasive intent, but rather than feeling irritated, they felt positive about it as it helps them to achieve their own goals (such as making purchases at lower prices).

Therefore, even though the participants understood they were the target of a persuasive attempt, they were not necessarily put-off or deterred, rather they often found it useful. According to the change-of-meaning and detachment effect within the PKM (Friestad & Wright, 1994), individuals feel irritated and seek to detach themselves from communications when they realise that they are the target of a persuasive attempt. However, this did not appear to be the case for these participants in the context of SM advertising which they often found to be useful.

6.3.2 Enjoyment of Covert Advertising: Appreciation of Influencer Marketing

Although the practice of IM was sometimes criticised (see Section 6.2.4), it was more common for influencers to be appreciated as a source of useful information. In order to tease this out, it is first necessary to outline the important role which influencers played in the lives of the participants. Many participants enjoyed consuming influencer content as it offered them value in terms of navigating hobbies and providing escapism. For instance, many observed that

influencers provide useful content to do with hobbies. Kelly, Aisling, and James illustrate this key theme.

> *I like cooking so I follow a lot of cooking blogs ... look at recipes and watch videos and stuff like that ... just getting to know more stuff and like learn things.*

<div align="right">Kelly, aged 16</div>

> *Make-up artists ... I like ... watching them do make-up and you learn how to do it I suppose.*

<div align="right">Aisling, aged 16</div>

> **Author: Why do you like following [that influencer]?**
>
> *'Cause I play with [my local football team] and we do the gym work and sometimes it's quite helpful to ... look at what I should be aiming to do.*

<div align="right">James, aged 17</div>

By following influencers in specific fields of interest, the participants described gaining access to information that was helpful and useful to them within their personal environments. They suggested seeking out influencers relevant to their respective hobbies to learn from them and gain guidance on recreational activities.

Influencer content was also appreciated as a source of escapism. Naomi and Rachel provide examples of this at play.

> *I follow a lot of influencers; I just find them very interesting ... to see their lives ... mostly make-up ones ... Suzanne Jackson or Pippa O'Connor [Irish influencers], they're both good ... I feel like they're very genuine ... I also like interior design and Pippa O'Connor is doing up her house, so I find that interesting too.*

[I like] when So Sue Me [Irish influencer] puts up … a new product … I love reading her blog … I just like reading all her stuff … I just really like all them [influencers] … they're great … their lifestyle and what they write and their blogs and what they say about life … me and my sisters love them … So Sue Me [Irish influencer] like had … a post about her wedding and I just really enjoyed … reading that and her pictures … that she put up for her wedding.

Therefore, influencer content was seen to provide entertainment and allowed insight into life experiences like interior design and weddings. The ability to delve into the lives of favoured influencers and share in exciting events as they happen provided the participants with diversion and escapism. Both Naomi and Rachel suggest feeling parasocially connected to the influencers they follow, as they speak about a "*love*" for their content and a feeling of knowing them personally ("*they're very genuine*"). As such, the positive attitudes directed towards influencers and their content helped to establish the important role these figures had in the lives of the participants.

These positive attitudes were also often associated with the brand-related content or sponsored content that was disseminated by influencers. In particular, IM was appreciated for introducing the participants to new and relevant brands, as well as providing inspiration and demonstration on their use. Alongside this, some saw IM as being more sincere than other advertising formats and acknowledged it as an aid within consumer decision making. Therefore, in line with findings reported by van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019), positive attitudes were associated with this form of covert advertising. Notably, later in Chapter Seven, themes are discussed which relate to the participants' questioning of the *moral* appropriateness of IM. This means

that although there was appreciation of the value of IM (affective/attitudinal AL), the participants could still evaluate the ethics of this practice (moral AL). This marks a tension in the data, which will be further examined in Section 7.3.4. For now, this section will focus on positive attitudes which were directed towards IM, as is the emphasis of this chapter.

Firstly, some participants liked IM because it introduced them to new brands, as Naomi illustrates.

> *I'd find it interesting to … read into … smaller brands … [influencers] do advertising for brands that I've never heard of, so then I might grow to like that brand which has happened. Like I never heard of … this sunglasses brand that they were doing a collab with … but now I love their sunglasses.*

<div align="right">

Naomi, aged 16

</div>

Influencers were considered tastemakers, where advertising they disseminate about new brands was valued. The fact that such learning occurred from exposure to "*advertising*" did not seem to matter – the recommendation was seen to carry utility regardless. Indeed, earlier on (in Section 6.2.2), an extract from Naomi was utilised which illuminated her dislike of IM when it occurs too frequently and is centred on well-known brands. However, it is clear from the present discussion that she can appreciate IM at other times, in particular when it introduces her to new brands. This serves as an example of the ambivalence which often marked the participants' attitudes about advertising in this context.

Others saw IM as valuable because it allows them access to trends from opinion leaders. In the following example, Jack compares IM against UGC posted by friends.

> *It's not like my friend is famous. So not a lot of people … follow him and go with his tastes and his interests. But … if it's someone with popularity and fans … I'd react differently 'cause they can actually sell the brand, but my friends couldn't like really*

sell the brand ... if the person's famous then most people are just gonna go for their fashion because you like the person.

<div align="right">Jack, aged 16</div>

Therefore, IM was valued on the basis that it was seen to give access to recommendations from trendsetters. For this reason, IM was sometimes valued above UGC posted by peers because peers are not considered to have the same status and insight as opinion leaders like influencers. Therefore, the "*popularity and fans*" associated with influencers often led to positive attitudes towards IM. This highlights the high source credibility the participants associated with influencers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Hudders et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021). IM is noted in the literature as a means of mimicking WOM, since WOM is recognised as one of the most powerful influences on consumer purchase decisions (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2019; Kozinets et al., 2010) (see Section 3.4.2). The fact that IM was seen to carry more weight and importance than WOM for some participants therefore highlights the highly influential nature of this covert advertising strategy for young consumers.

Jack also spoke positively about a specific example of IM (situational) during elicitation, based on credible source characteristics associated with the influencer.

He's sponsoring the teeth whitening company ... HiSmile teeth, so he's letting people know that it's the best one to choose because he uses it ... it must be like pretty good.

<div align="right">Jack, aged 16 (in response to appendix R)</div>

Because the figure in question is seen as an opinion-leader by Jack, he responds positively to this situational example. He identifies the sponsored nature of the post, but nonetheless its persuasive appeal is not undermined. Rather, mirroring his dispositional AL, Jack is

appreciative of being informed about products used by trend-setters and assumes they are of high quality ("*it must be like pretty good*").

Many appreciated when IM provides them with a product or service demonstration. Grace, Emily, and James can be used as examples to demonstrate this.

> *I do like the ones ... where they actually use the product well ... they have the clothes, and they style it ... in the comments ... they list where they get everything ... they tell you it's sponsored ... that's ... the ones I'm interested in.*

<div align="right">Grace, aged 16</div>

> **Author: do you usually spend time reading [IM]?**
>
> *Yeah, I would ... cause ... it's not just 'oh look at this amazing thing, buy it', they're ... interacting just a little bit more ... they still have a personality in it.*

<div align="right">Emily, aged 15</div>

> *If I seen that one now, I'd probably look to see ... what his routine was in the gym for that day ... click on to it to see if they had any ... gym programmes that they put out there.*

<div align="right">James, aged 17 (in response to appendix N)</div>

Some participants saw IM as a testimonial of sorts, since rather than just describing the advertised brand, it often illustrates how the influencer uses the product. This was seen to allow the viewer to witness how products/services function, as well as providing inspiration on their use and proof of their quality. Indeed, Emily also suggests that other kinds of advertising are biased ("*look at this amazing thing, buy it*"), while IM is less so.

This perception of IM as a less biased form of advertising was a pattern reflected by others, as Ava further develops this point.

> *[Influencers] always get sponsored ... the make-up people that I would follow, they get sponsored videos by different make-up brands ... they usually do like honest opinions on them, which is really good because you know sometimes the ads themselves, like most of the time they're like biased enough ... when they come from the company itself, and I know like some of the make-up people are paid to say good things ... but then some of them are really genuine as well and they actually will say what they think ... you know that they're being honest and they're not ... doing it just for the money*

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

For several participants including Ava, IM was considered more trustworthy and realistic than other forms of advertising. Influencers were perceived as honest and authentic, and were trusted to provide genuine opinions, even within content that was sponsored by a brand. Often, this tended to be applied to certain influencers, rather than all. Ava distinguishes between influencers whom she follows ("*the make-up people that I would follow*") in comparison to influencers in general. She states that those whom she follows give honest opinions, but later qualifies that other influencers "*are paid to say good things*". Thus, while Ava's dispositional AL (towards the practice in general) informs her that IM is not trustworthy, certain influencers are given a special allowance (situational AL) since they are trusted to be authentic ("*you know that they're being honest*"). IM in these cases attracted positive attitudes in that it was seen as an authentic recommendation, in opposition to the "*biased*" nature of communications which emerge directly from the brand. This further suggests that when the participants felt parasocially connected with particular influencers, they were less likely to be critical towards advertising they disseminate. Therefore, attitude towards the influencer may mediate attitude

towards the practice of IM. This coincides with the pattern permeating through many of the interviews – that of a gap between dispositional and situational AL.

Positive attitudes were also applied to IM on the basis that it aided purchase decisions.

> *Terrie McEvoy [Irish influencer] ... put ... this outfit ... up [on SM] and I was like "ohhh that's really nice" so like I went on to the site and bought it ... She tagged ... Pretty Little Thing [online clothing retailer] in it ... the site it's from ... that's why the company pays [influencers] so people can go and buy them.*

> Rachel, aged 16

Here, Rachel describes IM as not only serving the advertised brand and the influencer, but also the viewer. She acknowledges the brand's intent (in utilising the influencer to access their target market), as well as the influencer's intent (in receiving compensation), but instead of applying the detachment effect and feeling irritated or off-put by this knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994), she instead feels appreciative for being introduced to relevant products. For Rachel, the brand, influencer, and consumer all benefit from this exchange. She feels positively disposed towards IM based on the utility it serves her, at least situationally as she recalls this specific event.

Interestingly also, is Rachel's qualification that she in fact prefers sponsored influencer content over organic.

> **Author: how would you know that the company pays [influencers]?**

> *'Cause they always put up ... #sp, that means sponsored.*

> **Author: … so if you saw a picture … that had the #sp … versus a picture … that didn't have #sp, do you think do you react differently between the two?**

Yeah ... I think ... I'd look at the #sp more. Because ... they're getting paid for something so it obviously must be good, what they're using, but then if they don't put that you're like "oh that's just something that they like", not other people like it.

Rachel, aged 16

For Rachel, the presence of an advertising disclosure acts as a signifier of importance. For her, when influencers partner with brands, it results in more interesting content. In Rachel's opinion, sponsored content is representative of the collective thinking of the reference group, and as a result receives more positive attitudes than organic content. Therefore, she feels positive towards it on the basis that it offers her a means to achieve conformity through access to this collective thinking. It is clear that the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994) are not implemented here. According to the PKM, the change-of-meaning refers to the realisation that a communication is in fact a persuasion attempt, which subsequently triggers critical reflection via detachment (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, in Rachel's case, the identification of IM through the presence of a signpost ("*#sp, that means sponsored*") does not trigger critical reflection. Rather, it appears to do the opposite – it calls her attention to the content and increases its persuasive appeal ("*it obviously must be good*"). Indeed, this does call into question whether Rachel fully understands IM as a form of advertising, or indeed whether the fact it is advertising simply does not matter to her. In the case of the latter, the significance of being exposed to new products by opinion leaders may be so valued by Rachel, that it is simply irrelevant that the content is advertising.

In summary, the participants were often positively disposed towards sponsored influencer content, a pattern which is illustrated throughout this section. This stemmed from the fact that IM helped them to become socialised to their environment (see Section 3.5.3). Influencers provide access to trends and norms at play within reference groups, both through organic

content as well as through partnerships with brands. IM was seen to introduce them to relevant brands; teach and inspire them about how to utilise goods; and emerged from trusted advisors and trend-setters who have high source credibility, rather than directly from the brand which is seen as more biased. Through demonstrations and tutorials, the teenagers gained access to invaluable lessons from role models, related to fields like fashion, cosmetics or sport and fitness. Opting-in to influencer content signified a way for the participants to learn how to gain group membership and acceptance from peers and reference groups, and to excel in fields of interest.

6.3.3 A Modern-Day Catalogue – the Opt-In Nature & Perceived Utility of Owned Media as a Form of Advertising

A widespread pattern throughout the data related to the participants seeking out their preferred brands on SM to opt-in to their brand profile. A brand's presence on SM has been referred to as owned media (Alhabash et al., 2017; Lawlor et al., 2016) and is also regarded as a form of SM advertising in recent literature (see Section 3.3). Within this research, owned media was widely considered to offer utility to the user. In fact, it was deemed to be a modern-day version of a "*catalogue*" in that it allowed the participants to keep informed about new product releases, peruse current offerings, as well as providing inspiration and entertainment. Exposure to such content is within the users' control – they can opt-in or out using their own discretion. Therefore, it has a 'pull' nature (see Section 3.6.1) which the participants enjoyed.

Firstly, a key theme that prevailed across the interviews was a positive attitude towards brands with a presence on SM via owned media on the basis that participants could keep "*up to date*" with their favourite brands. Shane and Jack illustrate this.

I follow a few [brand profiles]. I follow ... a game company ... so I can keep up to date ... on what they're gonna ... release ... I do enjoy them 'cause ... they keep me up to date on what's gonna happen with what I enjoy.

Shane, aged 16

It's mostly clothes [brand profiles] that I follow because ... I find everything out about the clothes ... I just enjoy looking at stuff like that because I would maybe want to buy that in the future. So, it would let me know how much it is and where to get it ... so, it's useful.

Jack, aged 16

Not only did the participants speak about enjoying owned media on the basis that it allows them to keep informed about news and updates relating to their favourite brands, but it also provides them with practical information to do with pricing and stockist locations ("*it would let me know how much it is and where to get it*"). Therefore, opting-in to brand profiles was often appreciated on a functional level.

Because of this value, the participants actively sought out and opted-in to owned media.

I buy most of my clothes at H&M [clothing retailer] 'cause ... I like the clothes from there, so I'll follow them on Instagram to see what they have ... Like they are advertisements, yes. But they keep you up to date on what they have in stock. So, if let's say you see something that's really nice you can just go in and buy it then instead of ... going in, you not knowing if it's there or not ... it can be a bad thing but it's also a good thing to see what they have. It's like a catalogue. It's like something we had back ... when catalogues were huge. Now it's just all online ... I'll see a really nice pair of shoes and I'm like "oh my God they're so nice" ... that makes me want to buy them and

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that's playing into what they want. But … I see a nice pair of shoes and that's after making me happier. I see a really nice outfit and … that's after making me happy.

<div align="right">Alice, aged 16</div>

Because Alice is a regular customer of H&M, she ensures to opt-in to their SM profile. She likens owned media to a modern-day catalogue, as it facilitates her store visits by enabling her to see present stock before making the decision to visit the retail outlet. Therefore, by interacting with the brand on SM, she can access relevant information to aid offline consumption. Furthermore, Alice acknowledges the joy which owned media and consuming her favourite brands brings her. Although she understands that buying a product after being exposed to it through owned media is acting in accordance with the marketers' agenda, she admits that the act of finding and consuming products she enjoys makes her happy. In so doing, she recognises advantages present for both consumer *and* brand. Rather than acting as a passive conduit which advertising acts upon, Alice describes using owned media as a way to achieve her own goals (i.e., by opting-in and using it to seek out products which bring her happiness). Many participants spoke similarly about owned media, thus highlighting that they enjoy engaging with the brand in this manner.

Another positive aspect of owned media which ran throughout the data was its 'pull' nature where participants articulated how they actively seek out brands on SM platforms. Ellie gives an example.

I follow … clothes brands on Instagram, like Boohoo or Pretty Little Thing [online clothing retailers] … just to see the clothes … their products on the models, just laid out and as like an outfit … you're … deciding to follow that page, you know you want to see that. Whereas other ads are … forcing themselves to be seen.

<div align="right">Ellie, aged 16</div>

Ellie distinguishes between the opt-in nature of owned media in comparison to the push nature of other advertising formats. In so doing, she recognises her role in choosing to be exposed to this kind of advertising and feels positively towards it, in contrast to other ads "*forcing themselves*" on the viewer. Owned media is also valuable to her as it provides inspiration regarding product use, for example, in showcasing clothes together as an "*outfit*". Therefore, she also learns new ideas from this content.

This pattern was reflected by many others, as Natasha demonstrates.

> *Anastacia Beverley Hills [cosmetics company] … [I] love the stuff they put up that you can buy … MAC and Inglot [cosmetics companies] and all them … The tutorials they do … show you how to do make-up and … they'll put their product lists so … they literally tell you everything that they did …it's getting people to go in and buy it really isn't it?*

<div align="right">Natasha, aged 17</div>

By opting-in to owned media, the participants enjoyed being able to observe how products are used. This meant they could witness their quality and functionality as well as learn how to use them. While Natasha understands the commercial intent within this content ("*it's getting people to go in and buy it*"), she nonetheless notes how it serves her as a consumer of cosmetics brands.

Finally, others valued owned media on the basis that it acts as a form of escapism.

> *Red Bull [energy drink] and Go Pro [technology company] … give you a bit of entertainment … they're constantly doing like bikes down a hill or snowboarding or things like that, that give you a bit of entertainment for two minutes. So that's why I'd follow them … it's not just the "red bull gives you wings" ad … it's more like adrenaline fuelled things that they're showing … you know they're advertising it but you're happy to watch it.*

Therefore, owned media was not only seen to serve the participants value in terms of information, but also served as entertainment as demonstrated by Rob. As similar to others, Rob also notes the pull nature of such content, as he notes he is "*happy to watch it*". The "*adrenaline fuelled*" nature of Red Bull's content brings the brand tagline to life and gives Rob a moment of adventure in his day, even though he also acknowledges it as a form of advertising.

6.3.4 Earned Media as a Reliable Testimonial from Peers: Consumer WOM in Praise of Brands

The final theme to be considered in terms of the positivity the participants felt towards SM advertising relates to value placed in earned media. While earned media (WOM) attracted positive attitudes, this was not exhibited as commonly as it was for owned media (the brand's profile page). Nonetheless, some participants placed value on earned media as it was seen to provide a more realistic portrayal of products than content emerging from brands or influencers. Natasha and Kelly illustrate this at play.

> *The t-shirt … if I seen it on a friend's [SM profile] … I kinda seen it like in real life. I feel like it's easier to judge it … So, I'd probably get it because of my friends.*

> *I'd be more inclined to like buy it if a friend put it up rather than Missguided [online fashion retailer] put it up because like their picture is obviously … a model and they've like taken a lot of time to do it, whereas … if my friend put it up they're … not a model … they'd see what it's like kind of in real life …if they said they liked it I'd probably be*

more inclined [to buy it] cause looking at the Missguided picture, I'd be like "is it really

that nice in real life?"

<div align="right">Kelly, aged 16</div>

The participants understood that content present on brand and influencer profiles, and in advertising more generally, represents an idealised depiction of the product which may have gone through heavy production and editing, thus understanding bias in advertising. Therefore, when peers share earned media, it is perceived to provide a more genuine, "*real life*" depiction of the product and was valued by some on this basis. Furthermore, and as Kelly suggests, when friends share content about particular brands or products, it was also seen to influence the participants' own behaviour in that it caused them to desire the same products. This displays desire for conformity, as Sarah and David also illustrate.

[If] it's someone that I know is posting it and wearing them ... I'll probably want

them.

<div align="right">Sarah, aged 17</div>

If my friend put it up, I would probably definitely check it out ... we're interested in

most of the same things, and when your friend posts it you're like… "awh, what are

they ... looking at now, or what are they interested in?"

<div align="right">David, aged 16</div>

This demonstrates peer influence at play, whereby the participants formed positive evaluations about a brand because their friends post about it on SM. This is in line with their stage of development (see Section 2.5). Based on a desire to conform with friends and to assimilate with a peer group, the participants valued earned media as a means of harnessing this. David in particular notes that he aims to keep up to date with what his friends are interested in, and demonstrates conformity at play as he says, "*we're interested in most of the same things*". As

such, the source of earned media plays an important role on the resulting level of influence. Where social ties are in place, the content was seen as highly influential for the participants.

A conclusion of the chapter now follows.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter addresses the second objective of the research: *to examine teenagers' attitudes towards advertising on SM.* Affective AL (referred to interchangeably as attitudinal AL) encapsulates one's attitudes towards advertising. Throughout the literature, affective AL is generally conceptualised as negative in nature, and is often referred to as a learned disliking and disbelief of advertising (Hudders et al., 2016). But this negative attitude appears to be based on more traditional models of advertising. Recently, a small number of studies have pointed out that attitudes can be positive in nature (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Hudders et al., 2017; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Indeed, within this research, attitudes towards SM advertising were more often positive than negative. While dislike of advertising was found to be present, positive attitudes formed the dominant narrative as the participants used SM advertising as a resource in terms of utility and information which aided their personal and social environments.

Specifically, negative attitudes emerged where advertising was seen to detract from the SM experience. In particular, overt advertising was a cause of frustration because it disrupts media consumption, in line with findings reported by Kelly et al. (2010) and De Pauw et al. (2017). These push advertising tactics exasperated the participants because they reduced their ability to filter brand messages and therefore impeded their agency within SM. Similarly, where advertising was perceived to occur too frequently, it was considered to diminish the participants' use of SM. Negative attitudes were applied to all kinds of SM advertising on this

basis, both overt and covert. SM advertising also generated irritation where it was irrelevant to the participants' interests or age-group, as similar to findings within Lawlor et al.'s (2016) study. In these cases, advertising was seen as a form of clutter to be avoided.

A less prevalent pattern was a dislike of the practice of IM in particular. A striking finding was that where participants spoke negatively about this practice, unfavourable attitudes were directed towards the influencer rather than the associated brand. These findings add a new layer of knowledge to the literature by highlighting a certain level of insulation for brands, whereby even when IM attracts negative attitudes, brands appear to escape negative outcomes. Other reasons IM attracted negative outcomes related to the platform it appeared on (Snapchat in particular); when incongruency between influencer and brand was detected; and where it emerged from macro-influencers for whom being paid to advertise was not seen as a necessity. Therefore, this demonstrates that negative attitudes often emerged based on deeper reflections about advertising than are represented in the literature, which predominantly conceptualises AL as a learned disliking (e.g., Hudders et al., 2016; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). These negative attitudes made up the dispositional affective AL of some of the participants (i.e., their general attitudes towards SM advertising).

However, when these participants were exposed to specific examples of IM during elicitation, their affective response in these cases (situational AL) often differed from their general affective AL about the practice of IM (dispositional AL). Where products featured within specific examples of IM were of keen interest or relevance to the participants, or where tutorials showcasing the use of a product were provided, the participants often forewent their negative dispositional AL about IM in general in favour of responding positively to specific incidents of IM.

Similarly, where IM emerged from influencers whom they felt parasocially connected to, the participants' situational response tended to be positive to these specific influencers, even when their dispositional affective AL was negative. Therefore, even if negative attitudes are in place about the practice of IM, it seems that these may be overcome situationally by specific influencers who help to socialise the participants to their surroundings as teenagers (e.g., teaching them how to apply cosmetics).

This gap between dispositional and situational AL was also evidenced in Chapter Five in relation to cognitive AL (objective one). Therefore, the emerging picture at this stage and one that will be fully explicated in Chapter Eight is that the participants' AL is nuanced in nature rather than being binary. In other words, rather than the notion of a consumer being either advertising-literate or not, as the literature frequently suggests (e.g., Balaban et al., 2022; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020), the present study is moving towards a conceptualisation of AL as a continuum whereby one may show critical knowledge and attitudes in some aspects/contexts, but less so in others. This conceptualisation of AL is explained in Chapter Eight (see Section 8.6).

Returning to the participants' affective AL, positive attitudes towards SM advertising were often a function of the targeted nature of SM advertising. This was appreciated by many participants, as it meant exposure to relevant commercial content and less advertising clutter, even though they understood the marketer utilises their data to achieve this. This diverges from findings reported by De Pauw et al. (2017), as when their participants understood how target advertising works, it increased their critical attitude. The participants of this study also liked that they could seek out favoured brands on SM to opt-in to their brand profiles and therefore enjoyed the pull nature of owned media (as opposed to the push nature of other advertising formats in this venue). Earned media was also subject to positive attitudes on account of its utility in achieving conformity, whereby it offered the participants a means of assimilating with

their peers through consumption (Cody, 2013; Wang et al., 2012). This is in line with their stage of development, since peer groups are particularly important for middle adolescents (see Section 2.5.1). So too was influencer content enjoyed for reasons associated with conformity, as positive attitudes towards both organic and sponsored influencer content often stemmed from the idea that these figures helped socialise the adolescents to their surroundings. These findings are new to the literature, given that owned and earned media are largely overlooked in the literature (Voorveld, 2019) and that affective AL is predominantly approached from a traditional, positivist stance (see Section 2.2.2) which does not leave room for insight into aspects like conformity.

Adolescence marks a period of transformation and unsettlement, whereby identity formation has been acknowledged as the key developmental task (Klimstra et al., 2010). Influencer content (both organic and sponsored) was seen to lessen the burden of navigating this period, by providing insights, recommendations and skills which can be readily used within personal environments. The value and indeed appreciation of such content was therefore present across the interviews. Asking adolescents to apply automatic negative responses of disliking (as traditional outlooks on affective AL describe, see Section 2.2.2) in this context is therefore likely to be a redundant approach, when the value of influencer content goes beyond consumption alone to relate to identity formation and group membership. Furthermore, where positive attitudes were directed towards IM, they were often spoken about in the context of specific influencers (see Section 6.3.2). The motivation to enact a learned disliking in the context of influencers who have been sought out and whom teenagers feel parasocially connected to, is therefore argued to be low.

These findings add new knowledge because the literature on affective AL rarely deals with positive attitudes towards advertising or considers how advertising can be helpful or useful to consumers, with the exception of some recent studies (e.g., De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe,

2018; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Rather, the predominant focus of the literature is on considering a passive consumer who needs protection from advertising (e.g., Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). However, older children and teenagers who are more cognitively developed are unlikely to require an automatic negative response to advertising, since they are capable of complex thought and can retrieve information without prompt or cue to do so (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Roedder, 1981). This research therefore steps away from the traditional conception as it instead investigates AL in a context where advertising can be opted-in to and sought out by consumers, namely by following influencers, peers, and brand profiles on SM. Therefore, the consumer is often not passively consuming advertising in this context, rather they are taking an active role in their exposure to, and consumption of, advertising. As a result, attitudes were frequently found to be positive in nature.

Even though it is perhaps concerning that negative attitudes about advertising (dispositional AL) were often bypassed when it came to situational exposure to covert advertising (IM), it is proposed that an automatic, 'learned' response of disliking is an unrealistic response to expect from adolescents on SM, particularly in the context of pull advertising such as IM and owned media. Since they have taken steps to seek out and opt-in to (peer, brand and influencer) profiles, the author would argue it is unlikely that they would be motivated to retrieve a 'learned' disliking in these contexts, especially in response to figures they feel parasocially connected to. Therefore, it is suggested that the literature should move away from a predominant focus on affective AL as a learned response for passive consumers, to also consider how those who actively seek out and enjoy advertising can be empowered to make critical responses. This line of thought will be explored later in Section 8.6.

Now that findings related to the attitudes participants had towards SM advertising have been explored, those related to teenagers' beliefs and judgements (moral AL) are presented within the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Teenagers' Moral Evaluations of SM Advertising

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final of three findings chapters and addresses the third research objective, specifically: *to examine teenagers' moral evaluations of advertising on SM.* Previous chapters provided an exploration of how the participants *recognised* and *understood* SM advertising (i.e., their cognitive AL), as well as their *attitudes* towards it (i.e., their affective AL). Presently, this chapter examines the participants' moral assessment of SM advertising in general (dispositional AL), as well as their responses to specific advertising exposures during the elicitation stage of the interviews (situational AL).

Moral AL refers to the ability to reflect on the moral appropriateness of advertising, including different kinds of advertising tactics (Hudders et al., 2017) (see Section 2.2.3). When analysing the primary data, moral AL was seen to manifest in two over-arching ways: one major theme which related to the participants' acceptance of SM advertising as fair, while the other related to an evaluation of tactics used in SM advertising as unfair and therefore immoral (see Table 7.1 for an overview). Those who considered SM advertising as fair were often tolerant based on their ability to draw on commercial perspectives, i.e., by considering the perspective of the firm, SM platform and influencer, and their subsequent need to engage in advertising. Furthermore, the relevance and utility they found within advertising also led them to be tolerant of it. On the other hand, they evaluated certain elements within SM advertising as being unfair. Specifically, SM advertising was criticised on the basis that it places pressure on young consumers to consume and follow trends; the invasion of privacy; the covert nature of IM; scepticism towards this form of covert advertising; and lastly, disapproval of IM on the basis that it is exploitative. Therefore, the overall picture when it came to the participants' moral AL was that while they were accepting of the *practice* of SM advertising and understood it's

necessity for many stakeholders, they found fault with, and questioned the ethics of, many of its elements.

Table 7.1: *Roadmap of Themes Arising Under Objective Three*

7.2 The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Fair
7.2.1 Tolerance of SM Advertising on the Basis of Relevance and Utility
7.2.2 Empathising with Commercial Perspectives
7.3 The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Immoral
7.3.1 SM Advertising as Creating Pressure to Consume & Keep Up with Trends
7.3.2 The Invasion of Consumers' Privacy by the Marketer
7.3.3 Questioning the Subtle Nature of Covert Advertising: IM as Immoral on the Basis of its Embedded Nature
7.3.4 Scepticism Towards Covert Advertising: Questioning the Legitimacy of IM
7.3.5 Disapproval of Covert Advertising: IM as an Exploitative Practice

Source: developed by the author

7.2. The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Fair

Most participants acknowledged the necessity of SM advertising and considered it fair. This must also be viewed in the context of the previous chapter where the 'opt-in' nature and utility that SM offers to consumers, was widely acknowledged. Acceptance of advertising in this space generally stemmed from two key reasons - on account of advertising being perceived to be relevant and useful, and also the ability to empathise with commercial perspectives. Specifically, many participants reflected on the rationale for engaging in advertising from the perspectives of the firm, influencer, and SM platform with regard to the appropriateness of

such advertising. In doing so, it often led them to empathise with such individuals' need to earn a living.

7.2.1 Tolerance of SM Advertising on the Basis of Relevance and Utility

As established within Chapter Six, the participants were positively disposed to the perceived relevance of SM advertising. SM advertising is often tailored to an individual level by utilising consumer data, known as the practice of retargeted advertising (Zarouali et al., 2017) (see Section 3.6.2). The convenience of this kind of advertising led some participants to be accepting of the marketer's use of their data because it delivers SM advertising which is extremely pertinent to their purchasing goals. Sarah and Shane gave examples:

> *I think when you look something up on Google, it … comes up on your feed … they know what I'm trying to look for, so they just put it on my feed … I don't mind it.*

> Sarah, aged 17

> *I like that idea [of retargeted advertising] … it helps, you're … seeing things that you like to see.*

> Shane, aged 16

Both Sarah and Shane illuminate the often indifferent and tolerant attitudes the participants held about SM advertising, as they spoke about retargeted advertising in particular. Sarah shows a clear understanding of how this kind of advertising functions (in that it draws on data relating to the user's online search history). She understands that marketers utilise user's personal data, but even so, is accepting of it. So much so, she considers the marketer as lending her a helping hand (*"they know what I'm trying to look for, so they just put it on my feed"*).

Interestingly, a pattern across the interviews was that even when some admitted that they viewed retargeted advertising as 'weird', they were still tolerant of it. This was illustrated by Shauna and Hannah as follows.

Author: have you ever … felt like an ad was tailored specifically to you?

Yes … it came up in my … recommendations … I was talking about it the day before, I really … wanted the lower price, and it came up in my recommendations for … half the price it was and … that was kind of weird (laughing).

Author: … how did you feel about that?

… Kind of creeped out about it at the start to be honest, and then I was kinda happy. But I'd say it was because putting it into my Google search trying to find things … it was definitely useful … I bought it.

<div align="right">Shauna, aged 16</div>

You know websites use cookies and stuff? … I was looking at a jacket on a website and then I kept seeing the same website on my Instagram and I honestly don't have a problem (laughs) … I was like … "oh I don't think I actually need the jacket" and … it just keeps coming up and I was like "oh maybe I do need it" (laughs) … It's kinda creepy (laughs) … they just know … It does kinda work 'cause then you're like "oh I was looking at that yesterday".

<div align="right">Hannah, aged 16</div>

Therefore, although these participants admitted feeling "*creeped out*" by retargeted advertising, they were nonetheless tolerant of it based on its convenience. By describing it as "*weird*", the participants suggest a feeling of discomfort caused by the marketers' use of their data. In this way, they appear to question its appropriateness. However, because of the utility they find

within it, their overall evaluation is one of acceptance. This comes even as Hannah refers to a time where retargeted advertising changed her behaviour, in that it made her feel as though she did in fact "*need*" to purchase a particular item even after deciding prior not to purchase it (further evidence of this theme whereby SM advertising created pressure to purchase is provided later on in Section 7.3.1). Therefore, it was common that positive affective reactions regarding the convenience of retargeted advertising led participants to evaluate it as fair.

In this way, the participants looked at their relationship with the marketer as a transactional one. They understood how the use of their data to tailor advertising could be considered as inappropriate and manipulative (highlighted later on within Section 7.3.2). However, notwithstanding this, the utility they received from SM advertising often led them to be tolerant of it. In this way, the relationship between consumer and marketer is reminiscent of a transactional one, whereby if the consumer perceives that there are benefits inherent within SM advertising for themselves, they are willing to forgo constructs such as online privacy. This is highlighted in the examples provided from Shauna and Hannah who, because they find utility within retargeted advertising, feel as though they benefit from it. This leads them to consider it as fair. Even so, they still acknowledge a sense of unease about this form of targeting as evidenced by the prevalence of terms such as '*weird*' and '*creepy*'.

Therefore, privacy was not of great concern for some participants in this research, which was also reported by Zarouali et al. (2017). Even when they understood how this tactic works, i.e., that the marketer utilises their data to target them more accurately, they were still sometimes accepting of it based on relevance. This diverges from findings reported by De Pauw et al. (2017), as when the participants of their study were aware of how retargeted advertising works, they then tended to judge it as inappropriate.

A further key theme across the interviews which led the participants to consider SM advertising as a fair practice was their ability to consider perspectives outside of their own, namely, why commercial interests gravitated towards SM as a communications platform.

7.2.2 Empathising with Commercial Perspectives

When evaluating SM advertising, most participants reflected not only their own perspective, but also drew on the perspectives of commercial stakeholders such as the firm, SM platform, or influencer. By doing so, they could acknowledge the necessity of advertising, and not just inconvenience for the consumer in being exposed to it. Each of these perspectives will be discussed in turn, starting with consideration of (and empathy towards) the firms' perspective.

Empathising with the Firms' Agenda: When evaluating the presence of advertising on SM, some participants did so by considering the brands' right to achieve revenue targets and recognised the role advertising plays in this. This was a pattern which was evidenced across many interviews. An example comes from Alice.

> ***Author: how do you react to ads that are on SM?***
>
> *... I don't think it's either a good thing or a bad thing ... it's always going to be an annoyance like the way ads are on telly ... the thing is I don't really mind it ... big corporations I know they can be evil ... but they do have to make money and this is a part of how they make money ... if they're making money off me, I know it's not great but maybe I'll buy something that I like.*
>
> Alice, aged 16

The participants understood that firms (including brands) have a right to earn profit, and that advertising plays a key role in facilitating this. Alice in particular admits that as a consumer,

she can feel inconvenienced by advertising at times, but nonetheless empathises with the brands' agenda of accessing revenue. Indeed, while acknowledging that her compliance with this goal may signal her own coercion in response to advertising, she reinstates her agency as she counters with "*but maybe I'll buy something that I like*". In so doing, she suggests that she inhibits an active role within her response to advertising, whereby she is not passively persuaded but rather admits her role in controlling the outcome. As such, she evaluates SM advertising as fair.

This pattern was prevalent across many interviews as participants empathised with the brand's agenda. In doing so, they reasoned that companies should have a fair and equal chance at making a profit. Some drew on the perspective of the marketer working for the brand in particular, as Ava and Fred demonstrate.

> *Because so many people use [SM] ... it's nearly better than TV ads now or radio because ... people are always ... on Spotify [music streaming platform] ... so they're not really listening to the radio ... and then ... with Netflix or being able to fast-forward ... ads are rarely viewed on TV ... the next big thing is SM and they're placed in a way that they can't really be avoided on SM ... it is ... the best way I think to advertise now ... they have to have some way of getting their brand or name or product out.*

> Ava, aged 16

> *I think [SM is] the best place to put ads, I don't really mind if ads pop up ... on my SM ... It's the best place to market so, let them be.*

> Fred, aged 16

As such, the participants could often understand the necessity of marketers' presence on SM. They saw it as an ideal platform on which to target young people in particular, and as providing innovative ways to converse with the consumer and evade advertising avoidance. They admired

the marketers' agenda in this way, as they recognised the requisite nature of SM advertising for marketers.

Even when ads were considered irritating, the pattern of empathy for the brand continued to emerge.

> *Sometimes it is annoying to see [ads] all the time, but I suppose it is a good way for brands to … advertise their product cause so many people are on the SM websites now … if that's their way of getting paid or way of advertising something, like it doesn't really matter to me.*

<div align="right">Tracy, aged 16</div>

As such, even when they acknowledged SM advertising as tiresome, the participants often still empathised with the brand. They understood that the marketer must advertise where their target market is present and as a result, accepted it in this space.

A further perspective which the participants drew from when considering the appropriateness of advertising was that of SM platforms.

Empathising with SM Platforms: Some participants recognised that advertising is an essential source of income for SM platforms and saw it as appropriate on this basis. This pattern was not as prevalent as those relating to the brand and influencers' perspectives, but nonetheless was evident amongst a small number of participants.

> *I'm generally pretty neutral on [advertising], because no one really likes getting random ads but like you have to know that … these websites need to make their money, they get money from ads, so they have to … It's just a part of the SM thing.*

<div align="right">Emily, aged 15</div>

[Ads are] alright I suppose, that's how ... Snapchat make their money, so maybe if they didn't have advertising you might have to pay to use it, so I suppose it's ok.

<div align="right">Ross, aged 16</div>

Those who considered the SM platforms' perspective recognised that without advertising, they might have to pay to use SM themselves. They therefore understand that SM platforms are corporations themselves and need to produce profit. On this basis, they looked at advertising as a fair trade-off for the free use of SM. Altogether, the participants considered the use of SM to generate income as ethical, and therefore considered the presence of SM advertising as fair. Another perspective which the participants empathised with was that of the influencer.

Empathising with the Influencers' Agenda: Given that most of the participants spoke about following and enjoying influencer content (as established in Chapter Six), they often empathised with the influencers' perspective when considering the appropriateness of IM. Even some who were sceptical towards the practice of IM (as discussed later within Section 7.3.4) could empathise with the influencer's perspective. A main driver of empathy was the understanding that disseminating advertising is an important source of revenue for influencers.

I think [IM is] grand ... It's their job, like they're getting money for it, so I don't mind ... looking at it. It's grand. It's their best way of making money.

<div align="right">Fred, aged 16</div>

I don't mind [IM] really, it's just their way of doing business ... their way of trying to earn a better living for themselves.

<div align="right">Shane, aged 16</div>

The participants agreed that the role of influencer is a profession in itself, and as such respected the influencers' right to access income. Others took the perspective of specific influencers when evaluating IM as fair.

> *It ... depends on the person, for the likes of Ben Kealy [micro influencer] who I mentioned earlier, like he's ... only working up the ranks. So when I see a paid promotion ... I think fair play cause you're actually getting up in the world a bit.*

<div align="right">Rob, aged 16</div>

Rob recognises the benefit which working with brands poses for micro-influencers. He feels glad that lesser-known influencers whom he follows are given the chance to earn income through their SM content and deems advertising as appropriate in these cases. It is interesting however, that Rob only concedes to IM in certain situations (i.e., in the context of specific micro influencers). He draws on his moral AL knowledge (dispositional), but also demonstrates how he applies this in practice (situational) when he refers to a specific influencer using the term "*fair play*".

Therefore, it was clear that rather than solely considering the effect which SM advertising has on them personally, the participants also considered what its presence signifies for others when evaluating its appropriateness. According to John (1999), those aged eleven and above are in the reflective stage of consumer socialisation whereby information processing and social skills lend themselves to an ability to consider perspectives outside their own. The participants' ability to therefore empathise with commercial stakeholders such as the firm, SM platform and influencer illustrates this stage of consumer socialisation at play. This is in line with other studies which found that young consumers were able to consider the necessity of advertising for many stakeholders (De Pauw et al., 2017; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Considering these perspectives, the participants of this study could see the rationale for using advertising to

generate income and profit. For this reason, they generally considered the practice of SM advertising to be appropriate.

A discussion now follows on the second overarching theme which related to the participants' moral evaluation of SM advertising, namely a perception of the particular tactics in use as being unfair. Whilst this may appear to be a somewhat contradictory theme, it is useful to reiterate that whilst the participants were mostly accepting of the *rationale for, and practice* of SM advertising and understood it's necessity for many stakeholders (as discussed in the chapter so far), they were critical of, and questioned the ethics of, many of its *elements*.

7.3 The Evaluation of SM Advertising as Immoral

Within the interviews, although the participants could understand the necessity of SM advertising and considered it fair, many of the same participants noted how it could be considered 'immoral' under particular conditions, thereby demonstrating fluidity within their moral AL. The word immoral is used to encapsulate the broad range of terms used by the participants to describe advertising as unfair, such as *"scary", "creepy", "weird", "hidden"* and *"wrong"*. Overall, five themes emerged in this area. The first theme relates to the pressure SM advertising was seen to place on young people to keep up with trends and fit in with peers. Others felt uncomfortable about marketers' use of consumers' data in order to tailor advertising and questioned its appropriateness. Furthermore, some participants looked at covert advertising, IM in particular, as a way for marketers to attempt to 'hide' advertising, and thereby evaluated it as unfair. Additionally, some participants were sceptical about IM as a covert advertising practice, in that they perceived it as steeped in bias and therefore, deceptive. Finally, some condemned IM as a practice which takes advantage of its audience. Each of these areas will now be examined.

7.3.1 SM Advertising as Creating Pressure to Consume & Keep Up with Trends

It has been suggested that SM offers an ideal space for self-representation, in that the online ecosystem provides a concentrated and malleable platform which allows complete control over constructing and presenting the self, thereby allowing the projection of a desired impression (Belk, 2013; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Alongside this, adolescence marks a period of transformation and unsettlement, whereby identity formation has been acknowledged as the key developmental task (see Section 2.5). Thus, and particularly at the age of the participants, one's possessions may be seen as an important part of one's personal and group identity. Indeed, within this research, some participants felt pressured to own particular brands/products in order to be held in esteem by their peers, or by others on SM more generally. To this end, they sometimes felt that SM advertising exacerbated the expectation to keep up with trends or own certain brands, and as such placed pressure on them to consume.

Firstly, some participants noted the pressure SM in general adds to young people's lives through its perpetuation of an idealised and romanticised version of reality.

> *Author: would there be anything about SM that you dislike?*
>
> *… The typical thing of only being able to see … the best part of someone's life and that can kind of affect people sometimes but … you figure that out 'cause everyone does it.*
>
> Emily, aged 15
>
> *Author: is there anything about SM that you dislike?*
>
> *… People are always posting … if they're away somewhere … and then you'd be saying to your parents "awh someone's away [on holidays] now" and … my mother does get angry at me whenever I … go on about that … we get jealous of other people, it's just people are showing off … boasting, bragging, putting up silly things.*

It was clear that SM acted as a point of comparison for the participants. While Emily understands that SM represents only the best parts of people's lives, she recognises that this makes young people feel inadequate at times. Una's comparison of her life against content posted on SM results in unrest at home and results in feelings of inferiority, as she talks about feeling jealous of others who are "*boasting*". As such, the participants disapproved of SM content which presents a falsely ideal depiction of life. It could be interpreted that this is damaging to their self-esteem. The inability to 'keep up' with others by posting similar content (for instance, of holidays) may prevent them from achieving congruency with a particular group identity (and also appears to result in arguments with parents).

Disapproval of SM *advertising* in particular was also illustrated by the participants, as ads were seen to create pressure to consume products in order to represent an idealised version of self. For example, Grace portrays how SM advertising fosters materialistic values.

> *I guess on ... SM ... you know it's an ad, then you get distracted 'cause you get ... caught up with the words and you're just like "oh maybe I do need this".*

Grace, aged 16

As such, through SM advertising's use of persuasive tactics, the participants admitted feeling as though some advertised products are essential to them. This led to a disapproval of these tactics at times, as further illustrated by Hannah and Alice.

> *It's smart of [marketers] to go on SM. Especially 'cause there's a lot of young people so people would keep seeing it and they'll ... go tell their parents that they need it ... it's nearly like peer pressure because a lot of people would take what people say online very like "oh if they're doing it I need to do it" so, I know that a lot of people would see someone using a product and then be like "oh I need it" ... it's ... not good ...*

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younger people ... probably feel very pressured to get things that their friends have that they saw online .... they probably have pressure in school to get things and then they go home, and they see it online and it's just ... everywhere ... whatever's in is constantly there ... it's probably particularly bad for them.

Hannah, aged 16

They [marketers/brands] act in a way like if you don't have this ... you're not going to be ... up there or whatever cause they use people's high profiles like Kim Kardashian or Kylie Jenner or Nicki Minaj ... they just want to make money off ya.

Alice, aged 16

Therefore, a pattern related to the participants feeling pressured by the demands of having to keep up with the range of new products advertised on SM, describing it as "*peer pressure*". Both Alice and Hannah recognise that brands/products can be used as a symbol of group membership. They acknowledge that consuming particular goods can help young people to feel as though they are fitting in, and that SM advertising tries to take advantage of this. As a result, this makes young people feel pressured to keep up with "*whatever's in*" (i.e., the latest trends), since they are exposed to these trends not only in person at school, but now also virtually on SM (and prevalently within advertising). Hannah observes that this is likely to be particularly magnified for younger people. In doing so, she shows an ability to reflect on the perspectives of others. Alice also notes the pressure which IM and celebrity endorsement in particular place on young people, since these advertising strategies utilise individuals who are seen as opinion leaders within reference groups. When these individuals advertise for brands, Alice observes that young people feel pressured to consume these particular brands in attempts to retain their group-membership.

It is therefore clear that the participants question the ethicality of some approaches in SM advertising on the basis that young people are likely to equate the ownership of particular products with a particular identity (or group identity). It is widely acknowledged that consumption acts as a method of identity presentation (Belk, 1988; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Sirgy et al., 2008). Based on this premise, the participants appeared to equate the consumption of goods and services as a form of social capital to be shared on SM. The inability to then keep up with trends featured within SM advertising was interpreted as damaging to their self-concepts. Thus far, the literature on AL has generally overlooked the importance of exploring young peoples' perceptions of the pressure placed on them by advertising. Although researchers are starting to investigate moral AL in the context of SM (De Pauw et al., 2017; De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019), such studies have focused on topics such as the visibility of SM advertising, it's use of personal data and whether it tells the truth. Therefore, research on the pressure which SM advertising (and in particular, it's creative messaging) places on young consumers is currently lacking within the AL literature. This study revealed that adolescents perceive SM advertising as having the potential to foster materialism in young people and to prey on their vulnerabilities.

Indeed, their concerns relate to the reflective stage of consumer socialisation (ages 11-16), whereby a heightened awareness of other people's perspectives exists as well as the desire to shape one's own identity (John, 1999). This results in more attention paid to the social aspects of consuming and conforming (John, 1999). Further defining features of adolescence are heightened self-consciousness and peer pressure (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Nairn & Fine, 2008). Therefore, it is indeed likely that advertising tactics which utilise opinion leaders and emphasise group conformity may be particularly effective at making young people feel pressured to own a particular product. Elsewhere, others questioned the morals behind using consumers' personal data to tailor advertising.

7.3.2 The Invasion of Consumers' Privacy by the Marketer

In Chapter Six, it was established that a rich theme which ran through the data was positivity towards SM advertising. Often, positive feelings were exhibited on the basis of the relevant nature of advertising, including retargeted advertising (see Section 6.3.1). Earlier in this chapter, it was also established that some participants judged SM advertising as fair based on its relevance (see Section 7.2.1). However, while many appreciated the premises of relevance and retargeting, at other times the participants questioned its appropriateness on the basis of the marketer's use of their personal data. Specifically, some participants of this study felt as though their online privacy was compromised by the marketer and therefore, disapproved of it, and indeed were often unnerved by it.

> *It's a bit scary that they know … like it mightn't have been on the same SM that you were looking at it on. It could have just been on the internet and then you click on Facebook and then it suddenly appears on there, which is a bit creepy that it knows what you're looking at.*

> Tracy, aged 16

> *On Facebook it's a little bit creepy at some point 'cause … when I literally even think of something, it's … there (laughs) and I'm like I don't want to see this, I think they're just … inside my mind … If I go on any … new websites … specifically … those items that I clicked on would be … in the ad.*

> ***Author: … so how do you feel about that?***

> *… I don't know if this would … be the right word but sometimes I feel like I'm … followed. Honestly because … they … won't … stop and it's … really weird. Sometimes I just … try to ignore it … it's too much nowadays … it's just way too … targeted to …*

the person ... how they ... follow you ... through your whole internet ... and what you click on.

<div align="right">Grace, aged 16</div>

It is interesting to observe the participants' use of strong adjectives such as "*scary*", "*weird*" and "*creepy*" as well as a feeling of being followed online by the marketer. Grace goes so far as to conceptualise retargeted advertising as the marketer having access to her thoughts. Although some participants appreciated retargeted advertising on the basis of its relevance (as already established, see Section 7.2.1), for others the loss of their privacy was too high a price to pay ("*it's too much*"). In describing this advertising strategy, the girls seem to vilify the marketer, conjuring up images of a villain who spies on online users and steals their data. As they do so, they suggest that they do not feel as if they have opted in or consented to this kind of advertising (as Tracy says, "*it suddenly appears on there*" and as Grace says, "*I don't want to see this*"). To this end, it would seem that Tracy and Grace do not understand the role they have as consumers in allowing marketers access to their data when they agree to cookies. They suggest feeling as though they are powerless in moderating the marketer's access to their data, and thereby the occurrence of this kind of advertising.

Indeed, others also displayed this pattern, as they struggled to understand their role in assenting to the marketer's access to their personal data.

> **Author: do you feel targeted then, by marketers?**
>
> *Yeah sometimes ... you can ... be like ... how did they know that? ... when you're setting up an account you've to be really careful about ... the settings ... how much access they do have. But ... they're obviously going to be able to get a certain amount of information anyway, and ... it can just be a bit ... weird ... it's weird that something that really applies to me would come up. It's weird that ... they can find that.*

Even though Ava mentions being careful about the settings she chooses when setting up a SM profile, her confusion at the marketer's possession of individualised data suggests that she does not understand how to monitor her settings (and therefore her privacy) on an ongoing basis, i.e., as she goes about using the internet and visiting other websites. Indeed, as she remarks *"they're obviously going to be able to get a certain amount of information anyway",* she suggests a feeling of helplessness, in that no matter what settings she chooses she is unable to fully protect her privacy from marketers. To this end, she questions the morality of this kind of advertising, and stresses the need for consumers to be *"really careful"* about protecting their privacy.

Thus, some participants had feelings of helplessness at protecting online privacy and as a result evaluated retargeted advertising as unfair. However, this was not the case for everyone, as established earlier in Section 7.2.1. The earlier discussion demonstrated that utility within retargeted advertising was considered by many to be a more important benefit than the detriment of having online privacy invaded.

This is similar to other studies which found that consumers weigh up perceived utility within advertising against inconvenience when responding to it (White et al., 2008). It is evident from this study that contemplation on whether advertising is advantageous, or detrimental on the other hand, is a subjective experience. For instance, some saw the marketer's invasion of their privacy as too high a price to pay for relevant advertising (as demonstrated in the current discussion), and therefore judged retargeted advertising as inappropriate (in line with De Pauw et al., 2017 and Zarouali et al., 2017). However, other participants found that the utility and relevance of retargeted advertising far outweighed the disadvantage of the marketer's invasion of their privacy and judged it appropriate on this basis (see Section 7.2.1).

As such, this suggested that the participants perceived SM advertising through a transactional lens, in that they weigh up the benefits they receive from advertising against the inconvenience of being exposed to it, and make an evaluation based on this. This may be explained by the privacy calculus model (Laufer & Woulfe, 1977; Zarouali et al., 2018b), a theoretical framework which explains how people evaluate situations where their privacy is at stake. Namely, when posed with a situation where a consumer's privacy is invaded (for instance, where personal information is used within advertising), they will do a cost-benefit analysis, assessing the cost of losing their privacy against the potential gain they may receive from it (Zarouali et al., 2018b). When losses are seen to exceed benefits, this results in reactance (Zarouali et al., 2018b). Reactance describes a loss of control and jeopardization of autonomy, and causes unfavourable evaluations (Zarouali et al., 2018a). On the other hand, when benefits are seen to outweigh losses, it results in acceptance of advertising. Past research has applied this model in the context of tailored SM advertising (Gironda & Korgaonkar, 2018; Youn & Shin, 2019; Zarouali et al., 2018b). However, each of these studies did so from a quantitative perspective. This study therefore adds to this body of literature by providing insight into young consumers' reasoning and rationale within their cost-benefit analysis, as well as illustrations of this analysis at play qualitatively.

A further advertising strategy which the participants evaluated as unfair at times was that of IM. One such reason for this was due to its covert nature.

7.3.3 Questioning the Subtle Nature of Covert Advertising: IM as Immoral on the Basis of its Embedded Nature

Some participants considered tactics used by marketers on SM as underhand and sneaky. In particular, they noted the covert nature of IM. This emerged as the participants voiced struggles

in being able to delineate between organic and sponsored content with some participants describing IM as "*hidden*". Because of the subtle nature with which they categorised IM, they questioned its appropriateness.

For instance, Michael notes the confusing nature of influencer content, in that he finds the line between organic and sponsored content difficult to decipher. In so doing, he labels IM as "*subtle advertising*".

> *A company ... could pay someone with like a million followers to put up a photo of them with [their product] in it, but it'd be like subtle advertising ... unless you really look out for it on each post ... someone could be sponsored to Nike so they might just be wearing Nike the whole time because they're sponsored but ... you wouldn't know if it's either advertising or just 'cause they like it.*

> Michael, aged 16

Michael highlights the confusion in discerning between organic recommendations ("*cause they like it*") and sponsored recommendations ("*advertising*") within influencer content, and highlights that this distinction is sometimes blurred. He suggests that unless users "*really look out for*" an indicator of advertising on content shared by influencers, they are likely to misinterpret its nature. He therefore considers IM as covert and deliberately designed so as to avoid detection from those exposed to it.

Emily further illustrates this, by describing IM as "*hidden*".

> *A lot of [advertisements] I've noticed now are mostly kind of hidden away within another photo ... it can get very irritating ... if they're almost trying to ... hide the fact that they're affiliated.*

> Emily, aged 15

Emily believes that marketers and influencers are attempting to avoid consumers' critical reflection by 'hiding' advertising within content that fits the form and function of organic content. She therefore characterises IM as a deceptive practice on the basis that it attempts to evade detection from its audience, and questions it's appropriateness.

Because some participants saw this covert advertising format as a sneaky or deceptive practice, a further pattern related to concern for younger children in their ability to identify this kind of advertising. Again, this reflects the participants' ability to reflect on perspectives other than their own (e.g., as per Section 7.2.2) This is illustrated by Owen and Grace.

> *People younger than me ... on SM ... probably won't realise it's an ad and they'll probably think these [products] are cool 'cause he's using it.*
>
> Owen, aged 16

> *Younger kids, some might not recognise [IM] ... I've a younger sister and I see [influencers], and they don't really talk about the ads they just ... put [a product] in there, like they like it but ... I know they don't ... I've seen a couple of videos 'cause I've seen [my sister] talk about it ... [the influencer] doesn't specify that it's ... sponsored ... then I'd hear my sister wanting something really random, and I'm just like where did you see or hear that from, and ... she says she seen it from a video ... I feel like it's really wrong ... I know ads ... on the TV do it but ... on ... the internet it's way more sneakier ... it's way easier to ... target youth and even my age group and below.*
>
> Grace, aged 16

Therefore, although these participants felt confident in recognising IM themselves, they worried for their younger counterparts. They considered that for younger children, seeing an admired influencer showcase a brand is likely to increase brand positivity and result in purchase

intention. Of major concern was the worry that younger children are not capable of recognising that they are being advertised to in this way and are therefore susceptible to it. As such, the participants recognised that younger children may not be able to protect themselves to the same extent that they themselves can. This suggests a reflective manner of thinking, in that they consider the effect which covert advertising may have on others, not only themselves. Indeed, underlying Grace's excerpt is the assumption that advertising claims made within IM are untrue. Thus, when the detection of advertising is evaded as Owen and Grace worry about, this would mean that young consumers are exposed to biased recommendations without their AL in place. As such, they evaluate this practice as "*wrong*" and as "*sneakier*" than more overt formats of advertising, like television advertising.

Interestingly also, is Grace's focus on the influencer's role in protecting the audience from underhand advertising tactics. She talks about a particular influencer whom her sister watches and claims that the influencer does not adequately disclose sponsored content, before going on to describe the practice as "*really wrong*". Therefore, she places the responsibility on the influencer to ensure that advertising is fairly disclosed. In this way, her negative moral evaluations are directed towards the influencer in particular, rather than the associated brand. This is similar to a pattern displayed in Chapter Six (see Section 6.2.4), whereby dislike of IM resulted in negative attitudes towards the influencer rather than the sponsoring brand.

Indeed, disapproval of IM on the basis of its covert nature was also observed to be present as the participants responded to examples of advertising shown to them within elicitation.

> *You can see that she's [Roz Purcell, Irish influencer] ... pushed it [#spon] down so when you see it on ... your phone ... the only thing that comes up is the "Christmas party make up" and then you have to ... click more to see the rest of it. So, I think that's*

... hiding the fact that it's sponsored ... I don't know if I like that when they hide it. But if they just put it at the top then it's fine.

Kelly, aged 16 (in response to appendix J)

It's a paid partnership ... that one's also more subtle though. Because it's up there rather than ... in your face.

Hannah, aged 16 (in response to appendix I)

Kelly disapproves of the example shown to her based on the positioning of the disclosure below the fold of the webpage. She points out that the location means consumers are likely to misinterpret the content as organic and sees this as an attempt to misguide the consumer. Similarly, when exposed to covert advertising, Hannah considers the disclosure 'paid partnership' as more subtle than other disclosures which appear within the caption of influencer content since it appears *above* visuals on Instagram (see appendix J). For her, disclosures that occur within the caption text are "*in your face*", but 'paid partnership' is more understated due to its placement. She suggests that unless one knows to seek out the presence of an advertising disclosure in this location, it may go undetected. In this way, it was possible to see how general disapproval of IM as a covert tactic (dispositional AL) was retrieved and applied as a response during exposure (situational AL).

The participants questioned the moral appropriateness of this advertising format not only because of its covert nature, but they also questioned the legitimacy of claims made within it.

7.3.4 Scepticism Towards Covert Advertising: Questioning the Legitimacy of IM

According to Hudders et al. (2017), moral AL is linked to scepticism towards advertising, in that the ability to notice when advertising is biased or does not tell the truth forms part of an

individual's ability to reflect on the moral appropriateness of advertising (see Section 2.2.3). Throughout the interviews, scepticism was apparent at times, most often in the context of IM. This resulted from the practice whereby many influencers are compensated to recommend/review products within their content. This led to an understanding that influencers utilise their profiles (and thus their audience) to earn income. Owing to the compensation present, many participants reasoned that IM could not be genuine and were therefore disbelieving towards it. As a result, they evaluated it as immoral.

This marks a tension in the data between the frequent positivity which was associated with IM (see Section 6.3.2) and scepticism displayed towards it, demonstrating that the participants were not single-minded in their evaluations of the practice. This displays a level of cognitive complexity, whereby rather than using concrete evaluations when perceiving a practice (i.e., perceiving IM as simply 'good' or 'bad'), they were capable of identifying ways in which it was beneficial to them (see Section 6.3.2), but could also question its ethics, as demonstrated in this discussion. An extract from Tracy can be used as an example to illustrate this.

> *Author: why do you follow [influencers] …?*
>
> *Just enjoy like seeing what make-up they use …*
>
> *Author: … do you trust their opinions on stuff?*
>
> *Ehhhm yeah, I suppose I would. But you'd kinda be weary if it was an ad or not 'cause then they'd be more likely to like the product. 'Cause you're never really sure if it's their real opinion if you get me.*
>
> *Author: … when they're talking about a product are you looking to see if it's an ad then?*
>
> *Ehhhm yeah probably would check to see if it was one, if they were saying it in a YouTube video or something.*

Author: And if it was an ad does that change … your opinion on what they're saying?

Ehhm probably a little bit, probably if I was looking to get a specific like item, I would probably go and watch someone else's to see what they thought of it.

<div align="right">Tracy, aged 16</div>

This extract from Tracy captures the essence of the key themes relating to this format of covert advertising. A dominant pattern across the interviews was a positive outlook on both organic and sponsored influencer content (see Section 6.3.2). However, there was also a sense of realism as the participants spoke about IM, as although they appreciated it as a source of utility, they understood the influencer is compensated and therefore, that IM may contain bias (see Section 5.3.4). However, even so, Tracy illustrates that this advertising format was still used as a resource to find out about relevant goods and learn skills pertinent to their environments, as she speaks about turning to multiple influencers (and thereby likely multiple instances of IM) to decipher whether to buy a "*specific*" item. Thus, while retaining a sceptical disposition, IM was still valued as a source of utility. This demonstrates the tensions present between these two themes within the data, but nonetheless, both were key themes across the interviews. The remainder of this section will now focus on the latter theme, scepticism towards this covert advertising practice.

Firstly, many participants were sceptical towards IM on the basis that it exchanges a positive review for compensation.

They're probably getting paid, so they probably don't even like it … [influencers] are gonna do anything for money (laughs) … they probably never seen the product before and then they're going online saying "oh I use this everyday".

<div align="right">Hannah, aged 16</div>

The [influencer] could hate [the advertised product] but 'cause they're getting paid enough money they'd literally say anything about it. "It's the best thing they've ever seen" or something like that.

<div align="right">David, aged 16</div>

Knowledge of the incentive present within sponsored content caused some participants to question the legitimacy of claims made within. For these participants, the understanding that influencers are in receipt of compensation to feature brands/products distorts the credibility of sponsored recommendations and caused them to evaluate it as a disingenuous form of advertising at times. Interestingly within the excerpts above, the participants place emphasis on evaluating the influencer. They each refer to the influencers' role in agreeing to recommend a brand which they do not trust, as a trade-off for money. In doing so, they detract moral responsibility away from the brand, and place it on the influencer instead.

Some participants thus equated this kind of covert advertising with disseminating false recommendations.

If you didn't see the paid promotion thing … you'd probably think "oh yeah they're actually genuinely promoting it" … if you see it … you … think … they probably don't want that, they don't actually use that. Whereas if you don't see it, the paid promotion, you're … like "ok, he's starting to use that, maybe we should be getting it".

<div align="right">Rob, aged 16</div>

Rob evaluates organic and sponsored content in very different ways. He considers recommendations provided within organic content as genuine, while those made within sponsored content as false. As such, the presence (and recognition) of disclosures within IM

(such as "*paid partnership*") represent a method of judging the trustworthiness of influencer claims.

This was also apparent during elicitation. For example, before Conor was probed by the author on the presence of a disclosure, he felt trusting of the kind of content shown to him. However, his evaluations change when the disclosure is pointed out to him.

> **Author: … would you take that recommendation?**
>
> *Well, if I know the person I probably would … someone that I watch … and they wore it I probably would yeah.*
>
> **Author: … did you notice this part here [paid partnership disclosure]?**
>
> *No (laughs) … I probably wouldn't have looked up there really. Just went straight to here [the caption underneath the picture].*
>
> **Author: Ok and does your reaction change then when you see that [disclosure]?**
>
> *Yeah … he's been paid to wear it. Obviously … you don't know if he's being genuine or not … if he's paid, he's obviously going to give the best [review] he can.*
>
> Conor, aged 16 (in response to appendix I)

As such, recognition of disclosures could be seen to activate moral AL for both Rob and Conor in the context of covert advertising. This illustrates the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994), whereby recognition of advertising detracts from the coherency of the message. In the case of both Rob and Conor, recognition of disclosures causes then to be disbelieving of influencer content based on assumptions of bias and falsehood. On the other hand, if disclosures are not recognised/not present, they do not respond in the same critical way ("*maybe we should be getting it*"). Therefore, the presence of a disclosure significantly changes the meaning of influencer content and causes the participants to apply

scepticism in some cases. This also serves to highlight the important role that an inherent recognition of advertising plays in activating moral AL situationally (i.e., when exposed to a given advertising episode).

Other participants also demonstrated scepticism towards IM, drawing on their understanding of advertising's bias.

> *Businesses ... go ... to [influencers] ... and see if they can get them to ... be an advertiser saying "awh this is brilliant" even if they think it's garbage ... some of the time they just do it for the money ... It'd probably be real biased, cause they could hate it, but cause they're getting paid enough money they'd literally say anything about it.*

> David, aged 16

David's understanding of bias within advertising leads him to disparage claims made within IM as "*garbage*". This was true for many participants, as an understanding of bias equates to an understanding that advertising does not tell the truth. Since influencers are offered compensation to advertise for a brand, this led many participants to assume that they are not telling the truth within advertising, and, therefore, to apply scepticism.

However, although participants were often sceptical of the practice of IM in general (dispositional AL), they were reluctant to apply this to known influencers (situational AL). For example, at one juncture in an interview with Ava, she illustrates scepticism towards IM on the basis that influencers are compensated.

> *[IM] does kind of persuade you a bit though because ... you ... look up to them in a way ... if they're speaking so highly of it ... they obviously really like it. But then at the same time you're kind of like 'ugh they're just advertising again; they're just getting paid to do this again'.*

However, at another point when the author probed her, she illustrates a gap between her dispositional and situational AL in terms of scepticism towards this form of covert advertising.

> **Author: … Do you think are they honest about it generally?**
>
> *It depends on the person really … it's hard to know … some people, if you follow them … and you watch their stories every day … you don't get to know them, but you get to know their … personality … so you can tell if they're being honest or not. But that only happens with some people.*

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

It appears Ava is sceptical towards IM in general which would reflect the presence of dispositional AL. However, she is more accepting of specific influencers whom she follows herself which would point towards her situational AL. The extract illustrates the internal struggle or dispute she goes through when evaluating the honesty of IM., and also demonstrates the tension in the data between positive attitudes towards this kind of advertising, while at the time being sceptical of it. According to Hudders et al. (2017), AL consists of three information nodes: cognitive, affective, and moral. All three of these are apparent as Ava wrestles with which node to draw on as she speaks to the author about the sincerity of IM. Her positive affective AL is clear as she speaks about feeling persuaded by influencers, on account of admiring them. Her affective AL leads her to believe that influencers "*obviously really like*" products they advertise and are giving a genuine recommendation. However, her cognitive AL reminds her that influencers act as conduits of advertising for third-party brands, as she says, "*they're just advertising*". This leads her to draw on her moral AL, as she notes that influencers may be biased since they are paid to advertise ("*they're just getting paid to do this*"). However, following a probe from the author, Ava's affective AL is most prominent. She draws on

feelings of being parasocially connected with influencers whom she follows ("*you get to know their ... personality*"), and based on this, feels capable of judging their honesty. Because of this, she suggests that she does not need to be sceptical towards influencers whom she follows herself. Overall, it seems as though her positive affective AL is the most predominant node guiding her assessment of this covert advertising format in the context of known influencers, over and above her moral and cognitive AL. Although she understands that IM is a form of advertising and that it may be biased, her positive affective AL leads her to trust specific influencers and to be less critical towards their sponsored content as a result. As such, she discerns between the practice of IM in general (which she suggests feeling sceptical towards), and specific influencers.

Indeed, this was also apparent elsewhere. For instance, during Natasha's interview (before elicitation) she appeared to be highly sceptical towards this covert advertising practice.

> *[If given the chance to create sponsored content for a brand] I wouldn't act different the way other people do. I'd give my honest opinion and ... an honest review about it. Not gonna lie to people just to waste money.*
>
> **Author: … do you feel like people do lie then like you said when they get paid?**
>
> *Yeah ... I wouldn't watch them again ... Get them away from me.*

<div align="right">Natasha, aged 17</div>

Therefore, it was clear that Natasha felt strongly about IM in that she compares it with lying and sees it as influencing consumers to "*waste money*". However, when shown an example from a familiar influencer during elicitation, she did not apply this dispositional evaluation situationally.

I've actually liked this video before (laughs) ... HiSmile [teeth whitening company] asked him to do it ... But he's using them months, so I think ... he liked it, he just kept using it.

Author: … what do you think this part means here, "paid partnership"? Would you notice that?

He got paid to do it ... I'm only after noticing that now.

Author: Ok and does that make you think about it differently?

No ... if he's getting paid to do it fair enough ... he was not acting one bit different there like he was just being his pure self ... I look at that and I think ... I'd probably go and try it out, be good for myself.

<div align="right">Natasha, aged 17 (in response to appendix R)</div>

Because Natasha is familiar with and enjoys following this influencer, she is reluctant to apply her dispositional moral AL (i.e., her understanding and attitudes towards influencers in general) to a specific influencer (situational AL). Even though her dispositional AL tells her that IM is immoral, she does not apply this in practice to admired influencers, a pattern which emerged at many junctures during her interview, as also portrayed below.

There's a make-up artist James Charles that I watch and he's so honest it's unreal. But that's good though so people aren't wasting money ... he was talking about the Morphe [cosmetics brand] brushes and the Kylie Jenner ones ... you'd think he'd be on Kylie Jenner's side saying "oh my God they're amazing" but he was like "no they're actually [terrible] brushes ... I wouldn't pay €375 for this" but he did just to show us ... you can just see the difference in someone like that.

<div align="right">Natasha, aged 17</div>

Although she was highly sceptical towards IM as she spoke dispositionally ("*lie to people just to waste money*"), where she speaks about admired influencers whom she feels connected to, she does not apply this sceptical response (situational AL). It seems that her affective reaction towards influencers whom she has sought out and therefore admires skews her moral judgements towards acceptance of advertising. As such, it seems that negative moral evaluations are not always applied situationally in the context of admired influencers. Positive affective evaluations appear to be inhibiting the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Similarly, although it was made clear earlier in this section that Hannah was sceptical towards IM as she spoke dispositionally, when shown an example featuring a step-by-step make-up tutorial during elicitation, she was reluctant to apply these negative moral evaluations.

> *I don't mind that. I think it's ... not too much in your face ... she did it step by step ... maybe ... if I bought it, it would turn out that way ...*
>
> **Author: … does it matter to you that she's been sponsored?**
>
> *I dunno. Cause I feel like when things are sponsored it's not their honest opinion ... but at the same time she did ... do the work herself so I dunno [don't know].*
>
> Hannah, aged 16 (in response to appendix J)

Even though Hannah notes concerns regarding the sincerity of advertising claims within IM ***in general** ("when things are sponsored it's not their honest opinion")*, she is reluctant to apply those judgements to this particular example because of its utility. Although she admits how this covert advertising strategy could be considered inappropriate (in that it may not be the influencers' honest opinion), the benefits present within this example stop her from applying negative moral AL as a response. As such, because she feels as though she has gained

something from the influencer in this instance, she is less willing to judge it as inappropriate and instead seems to be tolerant towards it. Therefore, negative *dispositional* moral AL does not guarantee the application of this *situationally*.

This provides further evidence of the transactional approach used by the participants within their moral AL on SM. Earlier, it was demonstrated that if the perceived benefits of targeted advertising were subjectively interpreted to outweigh the detriments of the marketers' invasion of their privacy, then the participants judged this strategy as fair (see Section 7.3.2). This constitutes a transaction of sorts between marketer and consumer and is reminiscent of the privacy calculus model (Laufer & Woulfe, 1977; Zarouali et al., 2018b). However, within this study, the participants were seen to conduct a cost-benefit analysis not only in the context of retargeted advertising as has been the focus within previous research (Zarouali et al., 2018b), but also in the context of covert advertising – IM specifically. This is demonstrated by the gap between negative moral judgements of the practice in general (i.e., *dispositionally*) and the application of moral AL to *situational* examples. As such, they were seen to weigh up the cost of being exposed to it (e.g., the possibility of being exploited by false or exaggerated recommendations) against its benefits (like learning a new skill). As a result, although the practice of IM was (dispositionally) considered unethical, (situational) instances which contained utility, or which emerged from favoured influencers were given leniency.

This offers a conclusion to the tension in the data whereby influencer content (including sponsored content) was often appreciated as a source of utility (as detailed within Section 6.3.2), yet the practice of IM itself was privy to negative moral evaluations. A gap exists between moral AL in the context of SM advertising in general, and willingness to apply this to known (situational) influencers, or (situational) instances where it offered utility. These findings diverge from other studies, namely De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018). They found within their research on adolescents' self-reported levels of AL that "more sceptical

attitudes toward advertising ensure more advertising avoidance, more contesting and more empowerment" (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018, p. 416). But in the present study, sceptical attitudes did not guarantee advertising contesting in the context of covert advertising which contained utility or emerged from admired influencers. Instead, it is proposed that positive affective evaluations led the participants to be less critical in situational instances, regardless of the moral AL they possess about the advertising format more generally. As such, it appears that moral AL in the context of IM can be moderated by affective AL.

Altogether, although scepticism about the practice of IM was in place, many participants struggled to apply this to influencers whom they feel parasocially connected to, or to situations where they felt as though they were in receipt of utility. As such, a gulf was present between the participants' dispositional and situational AL. This gap between dispositional and situational manifestations of AL ran across each of the three findings chapters (as evident in the current section, as well as Sections 5.2.4, 5.3.4 and 6.2.4) and therefore, across each dimension of the participants' AL – cognitive, affective, and moral. As such, the existence of this gap needs to be encompassed in the overall conceptualisation of AL. A continuum approach to conceptualising the nuanced nature of AL will therefore be proposed in Chapter Eight (see Section 8.6).

A final source of disapproval of covert advertising on SM was the perception that IM is an exploitative practice.

7.3.5 Disapproval of Covert Advertising: IM as an Exploitative Practice

Some participants perceived IM as an exploitative practice, due to the knowledge that influencers earn money from recommending products to their followers, and commission when their followers use affiliate links. Some considered this as a fair practice which allows

influencers to make content creation a full-time job (as discussed earlier in Section 7.2.2). However, for others, IM constituted a way for influencers to take advantage of their followers and exploit their position as opinion leaders in pursuit of earning income. These participants believed that the primary incentive behind IM was for influencers to earn money, and given this, that they would engage in advertising for products/brands which they do not use, do not believe in, and would not genuinely recommend. On this basis, they questioned its moral appropriateness.

For instance, Naomi feels uncomfortable that her purchasing behaviour is a source of income for influencers through affiliate links. For this reason, she strives to avoid using them.

> *I probably wouldn't buy it if it was a paid promotion. Because they can ... earn something from it ... they do [affiliated] links ... I wouldn't buy it from the link ... Say it was ... ASOS ... I'd go on to ASOS and not use their link because they can earn something from the link ... if they are getting paid ... it's kind of annoying.*

<div align="right">Naomi, aged 16</div>

Naomi suggests feeling used by influencers in their pursuit of earning income. Even where she goes on to make a purchase following the influencer's recommendation, she strives to avoid the influencer earning commission from her by evading the use of their affiliate link to instead visit the website herself. Indeed, she also applied this situationally when exposed to a specific example of IM (Appendix K).

> *She'll [Terrie McEvoy, influencer] earn something from people using the link. ... cause she's put up that it's affiliated, I'd probably pass it and just go onto ASOS [online retailer] myself that night ... I feel like they always use their SMs to advertise, and they always earn something out of it. Whereas ... if I just went onto the website myself, they*

wouldn't earn anything ... I wouldn't feel as guilty cause ... the influencer isn't getting anything.

Author: … does that make you think differently about the brand then?

Not so much the brand. It's probably the person that's promoting it. Like the brand is just ... trying to get out there. But if the influencer does too many ... sponsored things ... it's really overwhelming. And ... it just makes me want to spend more money (laughs), so it's probably not so good.

Naomi, aged 16 (in response to appendix K)

As such, within both her dispositional knowledge and situational application, Naomi disapproves of the use of IM (and affiliate marketing in particular) and seeks to avoid it. The use of such links makes her feel "*guilty*" since, to her, they symbolise exploitation in order to earn commission. In line with other participants, she applies her negative evaluation towards the influencer, rather than the associated brand with which the influencer is working. In fact, she sympathises with the brand's agenda in seeking out their target audience and their right to access revenue. Therefore, the onus is placed solely on the influencer for agreeing to take part in marketing (and the frequency in which they do so), rather than on the brand for seeking such partnerships. This is a recurring pattern, as it also emerged where participants were sceptical towards IM (see Section 7.3.4), as well as where they disliked IM (see Section 6.2.4). Therefore, it is up to the influencer to explain and disclose their sponsored content diligently to avoid negative outcomes. The participants appeared to have a more forgiving attitude towards the brand which is ultimately paying the influencer. Furthermore, Naomi also recognises the behaviour change which exposure to these tactics bring about in her ("*makes me want to spend more money*") and understands this is "*not so good*". This points to an active response to advertising, since she understands and recognises advertisings' negative effects on

her and takes steps to control it. As such, the application of the 'stop-and-think' response is apparent here, since Naomi stops to recognise the persuasive tactics at play and chooses a response of avoidance (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

Similarly, although Ava continually empathised with the influencer throughout her interview, she does admit feeling troubled by the idea that influencers earn money through sponsored recommendations and evaluates this as exploitative.

> *Sometimes you're ... like "awh he's gone so commercial" ... his vlogs they're just not him anymore ... he's taking advantage of the forum that he has ... his following ... and using it then to promote stuff ... you feel like you're being used ... and like he's not like that at all ... well I don't know him personally (laughter).*
>
> **Author: You feel like you do (laughter).**
>
> *Yeah (laughter) ... sometimes you can be like "am I being brainwashed here?" or ... "is what he's saying what he really thinks?"*

<div align="right">Ava, aged 16</div>

Ava is therefore troubled by the overall concept of IM, as she conceptualises it as a way for influencers to become "*commercial*" and betray their authenticity by taking advantage of their audience. Again, her deliberation between affective and moral AL is apparent, as she condemns the influencer's actions for taking part in sponsored content, while at the same time defends him ("*he's not like that at all*"). In so doing, she attempts to separate her disapproval of his behaviour, from her perception of his intentions. She seems to evaluate the practice of IM as inappropriate given that it may contain false recommendations ("*is what he's saying what he really thinks?*") which followers may perceive as sincere ("*am I being brainwashed here?*"). Overall, she admits that this could be conceptualised as a way for influencers to take advantage of their audience. However, she separates these judgements about the *act* of IM from her

perception of the *intentions* of a specific influencer whom she follows and feels connected to. As such, she is reluctant to apply her negative moral judgements to a specific influencer, again discerning between IM in general, and specific influencers (i.e., a gap between dispositional and situational AL).

Noteworthy here also is Ava's recognition of the one-sided nature of her parasocial relationship with influencers. Although she continually spoke about influencers during her interview as though they were akin to friends (i.e., demonstrating parasocial connection), a further pattern which emerged in her interviews was her recognition of the fragility of this relationship, for instance as she clarifies "*well I don't know him personally*". This demonstrates reflective thinking, as Ava reminds herself of the linear nature of the relationship whereby, she feels connected to the influencer, but the influencer does not feel connected to her.

A conclusion of this chapter now follows.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter is the final of the three findings chapters and addresses the third research objective, specifically: *to examine teenagers' moral evaluations of advertising on SM*. Moral AL refers to the ability to reflect on the moral appropriateness of advertising, including different kinds of advertising tactics (Hudders et al., 2017) (see Section 2.2.3). Throughout the interviews, the participants were rarely single-minded as they evaluated the appropriateness of SM advertising. Rather, most participants showed fluidity within their moral AL, in that they could acknowledge the necessity and therefore appropriateness of the practice of SM advertising, but yet questioned the ethics of some of its tactics. Similar findings have been reported elsewhere, with De Pauw et al. (2017, p.15) describing this fluidity as "based on reasoning that transcends individual consequences". However, contrasting findings have also been reported, whereby the

moral dispositional AL of adolescents (aged 12-18) was reported to consist predominantly of scepticism towards advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Therefore, there is a lack of consensus in the extant literature.

In the present research, rather than demonising advertising, the participants took a more pragmatic approach by differentiating between the fairness of different elements of SM advertising. They tended to accept that advertising is a necessary pre-requisite for the functioning of business (and indeed, for consumers' free use of SM), yet at the same time, found fault with particular elements of SM advertising, similarly to the young consumers in De Pauw et al.'s (2017) study. Therefore, it can be concluded that while they were generally accepting of the presence of advertising on SM, certain elements (e.g., use of consumer data to tailor advertising) were identified as morally questionable.

Tolerance of advertising predominantly stemmed from the ability to consider and empathise with commercial perspectives outside one's own. This illustrates their stage of consumer socialisation at play (John, 1999) and is in line with other studies which explored moral AL (De Pauw et al., 2017; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). A further source of tolerance came from the relevance and associated utility of advertising in this venue, which helped the participants learn about their environments. Some participants valued the convenient nature of SM advertising over any qualms which they had about its ethics, for instance, the use of their personal data. It was therefore interpreted that where the participants felt that they were in receipt of value from SM advertising (be that convenience, relevance, or utility), they sometimes then accepted it and considered it appropriate. This is similar to other studies which reported that consumers weigh-up utility against inconvenience when responding to advertising (De Pauw et al., 2017; White et al., 2008). This type of cost-benefit analysis was conducted in the context of retargeted advertising which has been found in other studies (Zarouali et al., 2018b). The present study contributes to the literature in the context of IM by illustrating how

the participants used a transactional lens to evaluate SM advertising, whereby they weighed up perceived benefits of SM advertising against detriments in order to make an evaluation regarding its appropriateness.

In terms of evaluations of SM advertising as unfair, some participants did so on the basis that it exacerbates the pressure felt by young people to own and consume particular items/brands. In this way, they perceived the consumption of goods and services as a form of social capital to be shared on SM, and therefore as related to their identity in line with extant research on adolescents (e.g., Cody, 2015). Others perceived the marketer to invade their privacy in the context of retargeted advertising and judged this as inappropriate, in line with De Pauw et al. (2017) and Zarouali et al. (2017). However, when it came to disapproval of SM advertising, three themes were pertinent to the context of covert advertising, and IM in particular. Namely, judgements regarding its subtle nature, the truthfulness of its claims and it's exploitation of the influencers' audience. Interestingly, as they evaluated IM as immoral, they tended to detract responsibility away from the brand involved and place it solely on the influencer for agreeing to partake in advertising. This is similar to a theme discussed in Chapter Six, where participants directed negative attitudes about the practice of IM towards the influencer rather than the associated brand (see Section 6.2.4). These findings add to the scant body of research on moral AL in the context of IM. There appears to be only one other study which investigates moral IM in the context of IM, and that study reported only positive moral evaluations towards IM (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Therefore, this warrants further exploration.

However, the present study found that participants were reluctant to apply their negative moral judgements of IM in cases where they felt positive about the influencer from which it emerged, or where it provided especial utility, even when they displayed scepticism at other times. This diverges from findings reported by De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018). In these cases, it appears that positive affective AL mediates the application of moral AL. Therefore, a gap was

present between dispositional moral AL about the practice of IM in general, and application of this situationally. This continues the pattern of a gulf between dispositional and situational AL, which has permeated through each of the three findings chapters, and therefore each dimension of the participants' AL (cognitive, affective and moral). A new way of conceptualising AL as a continuum is presented in the following chapter to acknowledge this pattern (see Section 8.6).

The following chapter, Chapter Eight, provides discussion, conclusions and recommendations for this thesis. In doing so, it revisits each of the research objectives to review the main contributions made to knowledge. Recommendations for further research will be made, as well as discussing implications for marketers, influencers, educators, and policymakers.

Chapter Eight: Discussion, Conclusions & Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

Teenagers are avid users of SM (Ofcom, 2020) and as a result, constitute attractive target audiences for advertisers on SM platforms. However, SM advertising has been referred to as 'risky' for teenagers (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020). In this environment, advertising can be integrated into content such as YouTube videos and Instagram posts which means the boundary between commercial content (the advertisement) and non-commercial content (e.g., the video in which the ad appears) becomes blurred. Marketers can profile young consumers to target them more accurately, using overt forms of advertising (Shin et al., 2012; Zarouali et al., 2017; Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al., 2020), as well as covertly embedding advertising within the content of online role models, i.e., influencers (Freberg et al., 2011). This blurring of the boundaries between 'content' and advertising has generated palpable concern in the literature (e.g., De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021; van Reijmersdal et al., 2016; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020). The manner in which brands can systematically target teenagers via a range of overt and covert SM advertising strategies has implications for the development of their advertising literacy (AL) which is defined as "an individual's knowledge, abilities, and skills to cope with advertising" (Hudders et al., 2017, p. 335). A concern is that young consumers (and teenagers in particular) might not be able to understand the tactics in use against them, which in turn may impact their ability to critically respond (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020). For these reasons, there have been calls for research which investigates young consumers' AL in the context of novel advertising formats (e.g., Daems et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2021).

In response, this doctoral research posed the question: *what is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*

The research sought to gain a deep insight and understanding into teenagers' (aged 15-17) associative network about overt and covert SM advertising. This meant exploring their understanding of (cognitive AL), attitudes towards (affective AL), and moral evaluations (moral AL) about SM advertising in general (dispositional AL), but also how this was applied in specific situations where they were exposed to SM advertising (situational AL). As such, the aim was *to investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on social media platforms*. This addresses gaps within the literature as explored in Section 4.2.2.

In-depth, individual interviews which utilised an elicitation technique were undertaken with 29 teenagers (aged 15-17) across four schools in Ireland. This chapter will examine each of the three research objectives, outlining the resulting conclusions that can be drawn. While doing so, attention is paid to highlighting how the research addresses gaps in the literature, and therefore, how it contributes to the body of knowledge. This will culminate in the generation of an overall answer to the research question. The conceptual framework of the research is also revisited, and a new conceptualisation of AL is presented. The chapter then offers recommendations for future research, marketers, and influencers, as well as policymakers and educators, and then proceeds to reflect on the limitations of the study. The author will then draw the thesis to a close by reiterating the key contributions of this research.

The chapter commences by addressing the conclusions that arose regarding the first research objective.

8.2 Research Objective One

The first objective of the research was:

> *To investigate teenagers' recognition and understanding of the nature of advertising on social media.*

Although cognitive AL is the dimension of AL which receives most attention in the literature, it is still a new area of research in the contemporary media environment of SM. There were two parts to objective one: (1) adolescents' *recognition* of SM advertising; but also (2) their *understanding* of SM advertising. A detailed discussion on the findings relating to this objective was presented in Chapter Five, therefore the current focus is on the key conclusions.

To consider the first half of objective one, namely the participants' recognition of advertising on SM, the participants were *au fait* with overt advertising on SM, namely pop-up and pre-roll advertising. They demonstrated how they recognise such advertising in practice, drawing upon cues such as its disruptive format, as well as the use of markers allowing them to 'skip' the ad. These findings align with studies in the AL literature whereby consumers' ability to recognise such advertising was also observed. For example, one study of younger children (aged 9-11) noted that the children had "little difficulty" in identifying pre-roll advertising (De Pauw et al, 2017, p.2613), and similarly, adult-based samples have demonstrated their awareness and recognition of such advertising (Spiteri Cornish, 2014).

In terms of their awareness and recognition of covert advertising, the participants showed fluency with the specific format of native advertising. Native advertising takes the form and function of non-advertising content (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016, p.1459) and has been described as "cohesive" and "integrated" (An et al, 2018, p.998). Since it mimics the style of editorial and organic SM content (Hwang & Jeong, 2020), authors have raised concerns regarding consumers' ability to recognise it as a form of advertising (e.g., De Pauw et al., 2017;

Kim & Kim, 2021). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that adult samples struggle to identify native advertising, given its embedded format (e.g., Boerman et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2020; Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). The teenage participants of this research therefore demonstrated a more developed associative network about this covert advertising format than adult samples have. This is given especial emphasis given the participants' developed knowledge regarding how to identify it in practice, such as seeking out disclosures (e.g., '*recommended for you*') or posts embedded on their newsfeeds which emerge from brands they had not opted-in to, thus signaling the presence of native advertising. These findings therefore diverge from the literature and suggest that adolescents could hold greater AL about native advertising than adults do. This could be explained by the teenagers' heavy usage of SM (see Section 5.1.2) which suggests they have more first-hand experience with this covert advertising practice (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018) than adults do.

On the other hand, their awareness and recognition of a second form of covert advertising discussed in the literature, namely IM (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019; Ye et al., 2021), was less developed. IM has been identified as a conduit for advertising messages where sponsored brand messages are embedded within influencer content in a style which mimics organic posts (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019). In the current research, most participants had to be probed to introduce IM, and even then, appeared to make a distinction *between* IM and advertising. Given that the participants spoke about IM as a form of "*partnership*" between brands which is more "*honest*" than advertising disseminated by brands directly, it was concluded that they classified it as a hybrid of paid and earned media (Kim et al., 2021) rather than viewing it as a pure form of advertising. Authors caution that this advertising format may go under the radar of consumers (Kim & Kim, 2021) due to its covert nature (Ye et al., 2021). The participants' classification of IM as different to other kinds of advertising substantiates this view.

Subsequently, when confronted with this covert advertising format during elicitation, a common theme was misidentification of this kind of advertising as organic influencer content. Although the participants *believed* they were expert at identifying IM as they spoke during the interview, it became clear during elicitation that the methods they use in an attempt to identify IM are often unsuccessful and lead them to overlook the presence of sponsored content. Based on experiences of interacting with (sponsored) influencer content, the participants had developed their own ways of identifying IM (dispositional AL) which lay outside the parameters of disclosures. The author has termed these 'self-developed schemata', the most common of which was brand scripts, i.e., delineating IM based on the use of exaggerated language or brand copy within influencer content. This suggests that rather than solely relying on advertising disclosures (e.g., #ad) as required by advertising regulatory authorities, they are also drawing upon their own self-sufficiency and experience within the SM environment to learn how to recognise and understand covert advertising. This suggests a level of independence within their development of AL, whereby they rely on their own experiences of trial and error. Other studies also support this conclusion. Namely, De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018) found a correlation between ownership of a greater variety of media devices with higher levels of dispositional cognitive AL, thus also recognising the role which experience plays in developing AL.

However, the methods of identifying IM which the participants had developed by themselves (dispositional AL) were not reliable means of identifying the practice during exposure (situational AL). On the contrary, a common theme was misidentification of IM as organic content when exposed to examples during elicitation (situational AL). These findings are similar to those reported by Lawlor et al. (2016) and van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019), where participants overestimated their ability to identify advertising in practice. This suggests that although the participants *believed* they were very capable of identifying IM on account of their

development and use of self-developed schemata, these schemata did not always help them to successfully identify advertising during exposure. Therefore, this points towards the existence of a gap between dispositional and situational cognitive AL since the participants had an extensive associative network about IM (or at least believed they did), yet this did not necessarily help them to recognise it in practice. The emergence of this gap was also observed under objectives two and three and will be further explicated there (see Sections 8.3 and 8.4).

Alongside paid media (as discussed thus far), marketers place substantial resources into owned and earned media and utilise these formats to achieve marketing objectives (Kozinets et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2020; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015; Voorveld, 2019). Recently, authors have argued that these formats are part of the SM advertising ecosystem and need to be included in definitions of SM advertising (Voorveld, 2019) (see Section 3.3). Owned media, within this context, relates to a brand's presence on SM platforms. The participants were well-versed with owned media and recognised it as having a commercial nature. They had full knowledge of this practice and considered it as a form of advertising which is "*disguising*" itself as editorial content. This therefore supports the emerging school of thought in the literature which calls for authors to include owned media in their conceptualisations of SM advertising (e.g., Voorveld, 2019). One of the only other studies to investigate AL in the context of paid, owned and earned media, namely Lawlor et al (2016), reported that adolescents had a low level of AL for both owned and earned media. In contrast, the participants of the current study had a full understanding of the nature of owned media (e.g., consisting of brand profile pages which utilise tactics like brand competitions and product demonstrations)**,** thus identifying the diverse means in which a brand can communicate in the SM environment. When it came to earned media, however, the present findings reflect Lawlor et al. (2016) since the participants refuted their role in endorsing brands when sharing brand centered WOM on SM.

The discussion now moves to the second half of objective one, namely the participants' ability to *understand* SM advertising. The participants displayed a highly developed understanding of the marketer's tactics and objectives in the context of SM. While more nuanced elements of cognitive knowledge emerged in the present research (e.g., an understanding of compensation and editorial control within covert advertising), their foundation remains relevant to the components of cognitive AL as identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011). Therefore, this research has illustrated that Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al.'s (2011) components of cognitive AL (see Section 2.2.1) hold true in the SM environment, as opposed to the traditional advertising environment for which they were developed.

Specifically, Table 8.1 showcases how the cognitive knowledge which emerged in the current social media-based research overlaps with the components of cognitive AL identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) in the context of traditional media. The participants of the present research showed advanced understanding of selling and persuasive intent, as well as persuasive tactics. They had extended this knowledge to apply it the SM environment, thereby applying it in the context of innovative advertising approaches such as native advertising and owned media. This means they had developed an understanding that marketers are attempting to influence their mental state (Moses & Baldwin, 2005) using specific tactics on SM, like targeted advertising and the use of attractive sources such as influencers. Understanding of persuasive intent is said to be more complex than understanding of selling intent (Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). Therefore, the participants' clear ability to understand this in the context of SM where advertising is presented in softer, more innovative ways than traditional contexts (Alhabash et al., 2017; Campbell & Farrell, 2020) points to a dynamic AL (Malmelin, 2010).

Table 8.1: *The Components of Cognitive AL in the Context of Overt and Covert SM Advertising which Manifested in the Primary Findings of this Research and How They Overlap with Components Suggested by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011).*

Cognitive Component of AL in the Current Research	Definition Within the Current Research	How Each Component Compares with Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al.'s (2011) Components of AL
1. Recognition of overt SM advertising.	The ability to distinguish overt advertising on SM, i.e., advertising which is disruptive.	Recognition of advertising
2. Recognition of covert SM advertising.	The ability to distinguish covert advertising on SM, i.e., integrated advertising approaches which take the form and function of organic SM content.	Recognition of advertising
3. Recognition of the commercial purpose of owned media.	The ability to recognise that owned media (e.g., content disseminated through owned SM brand profiles) has a commercial nature.	Recognition of advertising's source
4. Understanding of selling intent within SM advertising.	The ability to understand that SM advertising attempts to convince the consumer to buy a product/service.	Understanding advertising's selling intent
5. Understanding of persuasive intent & persuasive tactics within SM advertising.	The ability to understand that the marketer is attempting to influence the mental state of the consumer (behaviour, attitude, beliefs, decisions, and actions) through SM advertising, as well as the persuasive tactics in use to achieve this goal.	Understanding advertising's persuasive intent and understanding advertiser's persuasive tactics
6. Understanding of segmentation & targeting at play within SM advertising.	The ability to understand that marketers break down the market and target specific segments using profiling techniques on SM.	Perception of intended audience
7. Understanding of bias within SM advertising.	The ability to understand that claims may be exaggerated or false within SM advertising.	Understanding of advertising's bias
8. Understanding of earned media as a source of brand messaging.	The ability to understand that marketers can elicit and use brand-related eWOM or UGC (earned media) within marketing communications.	Recognition of advertising's source
9. Understanding of covert advertising tactics on SM: compensation & editorial control within influencer marketing.	The ability to understand that influencers are compensated to disseminate covert advertising on behalf of brands, and that the brand retains editorial control over the sponsored message.	Recognition of advertising's source

Source: developed by the author, column three adapted from the following:

Rozendaal, E, Lapierre, M A, van Reijmersdal, E A and Buijzen, M (2011) Reconsidering Advertising Literacy as a Defense against Advertising Effects. *Media Psychology,* 14(4), 333-54.

Furthermore, their understanding of segmentation and targeting at play within SM advertising can be compared to 'perception of intended audience' as identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011). However, the participants had extended this in the context of SM to acknowledge the sophisticated profiling tools available to marketers, as well as the use of various media platforms to target different market segments. As such, they demonstrated impressive agent knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) in the context of SM, given they understood that they are an attractive target audience for marketers, as well as cognisance of the tools that are at play to target them. Studies have queried adolescents' AL in the context of targeted advertising, in terms of teenagers' ability to understand these commercial practices (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al, 2020). This research shows that adolescents aged 15-17 had a developed understanding of this practice, in contrast to studies in the literature which found that this knowledge did not mature until the age of 20 (Zarouali, Verdoodt, et al, 2020).

A further component of cognitive AL as identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011), namely 'recognition of advertising's source', was extended by the participants in the context of SM to apply to owned media, earned media, as well as IM. In this context, it constituted an understanding of the multitude of sources which ultimately disseminate the brand's commercial message. This was least developed in the context of earned media, which is in line with the literature (Lawlor et al., 2016), but highly developed in the context of both owned media and IM. Recognition of the source of the message within IM is in keeping with the literature, as other studies also reported that adolescents understood the revenue model within IM and therefore that the brand sponsors the message (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). However, the present research extended this component to take into account both compensation *and* editorial control within IM (De Veirman, Hudders, & Nelson, 2018).

The final knowledge structure identified by Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al. (2011) as a component of cognitive AL is 'understanding of advertising's bias'. The participants displayed a

sophisticated dispositional understanding of bias across multiple SM advertising formats, and particularly in the context of IM, e.g., that influencer recommendations are likely to be biased when sponsorship is present. However, the pattern evidenced earlier regarding a gap between dispositional and situational AL was also demonstrated regarding the participants' understanding of bias. Namely, when exposed to examples of IM during elicitation, it emerged that the participants were sometimes reluctant to apply their understanding of bias to known influencers. Although their dispositional AL was developed in this regard, their willingness to apply it as a critical response during situational exposure was sometimes limited by the origin of the advertisement, namely by its attractive source characteristics. Therefore, even though dispositional AL has been described as a pre-requisite to situational AL in the literature (De Pauw et al., 2019), these findings point to the possibility that the composition of these manifestations may be different, depending on whether they are referred to dispositionally or situationally.

Taken together, it can be concluded that the participants were cognisant of not just overt advertising on SM (like pop-ups and pre-rolls), but also covert advertising which emerges from sources like owned brand profiles, influencers, and even fellow consumers through earned media. This means that although the advertising ecosystem has expanded and is more complex than traditional advertising, the adolescents nonetheless had a highly developed awareness and understanding of this (dispositional AL). However, and as signposted in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, this knowledge was more developed when it was referred to dispositionally, than when it was applied situationally.

Finally, the AL literature places strong emphasis on 'coping' with advertising, evident through the prevalent use of this term in definitions of AL (see Section 2.1.1). The term 'coping' carries connotations of 'dealing with' or 'struggling' with a challenge which must be overcome. Given the literature's emphasis on AL as a coping strategy, it is suggested that the resulting

conceptualisation of young consumers is of a passive audience who needs to be protected from deceptive persuasion (e.g., Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). On the other hand, the present findings demonstrate that adolescents had a highly developed understanding of SM advertising in many ways and used their own experience of interacting with advertising as a learning tool in attempts to develop their AL. Rather than being passive recipients, the participants of this research emphasised their role as active, goal-directed audiences who use advertising as a resource. This is especially apparent when considering the findings relating to the second objective, as next presented.

8.3 Research Objective Two

The second objective of the research was:

To examine teenagers' attitudes towards advertising on social media.

Authors overwhelmingly define affective AL as relating solely to negative dispositions towards advertising (e.g., De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018; De Pauw et al., 2019; Hoek et al., 2020; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). The reasoning behind this is that possessing a learned disliking towards advertising is said to make critical response a less cognitively taxing task (De Pauw et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). But given the novel and often 'pull' nature of SM advertising, the question arises as to whether consumers will feel negatively towards it. If young consumers seek out and agree to be exposed to advertising which emanates from brand and influencer profiles, they may be positively predisposed to such content. This could have implications for the development and deployment of AL, in particular the affective dimension. A recent school of thought has acknowledged that affective AL could include positive attitudes towards advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017) but few empirical studies have explored this (with exception of van Dam & van

Reijmersdal, 2019). Furthermore, if positive attitudes are indeed present towards SM advertising, how does this affect one's critical response towards such advertising?

In the present research, while the participants displayed both negative and positive attitudes towards SM advertising, positive attitudes were far more prevalent across the interviews. Both types of attitudes will be considered in terms of their key conclusions, as contributions can be drawn from both. Overall, it is concluded that the participants did not rely on a learned disliking towards advertising (Hudders et al., 2016), but rather their affective AL demonstrated fluidity and was based on more complex reasoning. Specifically, rather than utilising the blanket approach of being pre-disposed to disliking advertising in all cases, the participants formed attitudes towards advertising based on an ability to reflect on the usefulness of what it offered them, as well as the perceived motives and intent of the advertiser/influencer/brand.

Overall, the participants disliked SM advertising where it disrupted them; appeared too frequently; and where it showcased products/brands perceived as irrelevant. This is broadly in line with extant research studies, which allow participants to qualitatively demonstrate how they feel about advertising (e.g., Kelly et al, 2010; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). In the present study, IM also attracted negative attitudes from some participants, where the advertised product was perceived as incongruent with the influencer themselves and where it emerged from macro-influencers. This demonstrates more complex reasoning at play within affective AL than has been reported elsewhere, since it demonstrates reflection on perspectives such as brand owner and influencer.

However, a more prevalent theme was positivity towards advertising. This reflects an emerging school of thought in the literature that in the new advertising climate, attitudes towards advertising may be positive in nature (De Pauw et al., 2017; Hudders et al., 2017). Specifically, favourable attitudes were directed towards SM advertising, chiefly, owing to the utility it

offered the participants. In particular, SM advertising was considered highly relevant, and therefore, very pertinent to achieving consumption goals. This supports suggestions in the literature that personalised advertising increases consumers' motivation to attend to it (Alhabash et al., 2017) since many participants indicated positive feelings and intention to engage with relevant SM advertising. Additionally, owned media was enjoyed as a source of utility given it acted as a 'catalogue', whereby the teenagers could peruse information about their favourite brands. Earned media was also valued as a means of accessing reliable testimonials from peers, and as such, as useful in achieving group membership. These findings demonstrate affective AL at play in a broader advertising ecosystem than is generally considered by authors, since it takes owned and earned media into account (Voorveld, 2019). Finally, IM attracted positive attitudes, in line with findings from van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019), particularly for its utility in introducing relevant brands and product demonstrations to the participants, while parasocial connection with influencers was also seen as a driver of positive attitudes.

There are few studies available with which to compare these findings regarding positive affective AL, given that extant AL research tends to quantitatively investigate this dimension using narrow negative measures about advertising, such as "annoying" and "boring" (e.g., Hoek et al., 2020, p.821), and does not take positive attitudes into account. However, the present findings can be considered in the context of literature regarding consumer culture more broadly. For example, consumption is widely linked to identity (e.g., Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Swaminathan et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2017), and thereby, has been empirically reported to carry utility for young consumers in navigating group membership (Cody, 2013; Daniels & Leaper, 2006). The present research extends this in the context of AL literature by demonstrating how *advertising* practices on SM can help adolescents to maintain (group) identity, namely by turning to paid, owned, and earned media disseminated by brand

profiles, influencers and peers. Given the value and utility it offered them in achieving conformity and group membership, they were positively pre-disposed to it.

These findings regarding the participants' attitudes towards SM advertising will now be examined in terms of the intersection between attitudes (positive or negative) and responses to advertising. The dominant narrative in the literature is that contemporary advertising tactics persuade on an implicit level (Nairn & Fine, 2008; van Reijmersdal et al., 2012), meaning young consumers are *unable* to demonstrate a stop-and-think response in these contexts, and instead will be seduced by the affect-based qualities of these approaches. The stop-and-think response refers to the ability to "stop and recognize the persuasive nature of the message … to think about the persuasive message in some considerable depth" (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011, p.340) (see Section 2.2.1).

In this regard, authors posit that adolescents are unlikely to be able to demonstrate the stop-and-think response in the context of new, covert advertising formats (Nairn & Fine, 2008; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). The resulting concern is that where the stop-and-think response is evaded, positive feelings will form which could lead to outcomes such as "deceptive persuasion" (De Veirman & Hudders, 2019, p.95).

However, the present findings suggest that the participants *were* able to use the stop-and-think response in the context of SM advertising, namely, with regard to the overt formats of pop-up and pre-roll ads, and the covert form of native advertising, without the need for a 'learned disliking' of advertising to guard against implicit persuasion. Rather, they showed an ability to engage in "controlled, reflective, deliberative" thought, i.e., explicit elaboration (Nairn & Fine, 2008, p.454) to formulate an attitude towards SM advertising. This demonstrates the central route of persuasion, whereby they pay attention to the message and elaborate on the arguments being made (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). As such, for this age group at least, a perceived

requirement to promote affective AL as a learned disliking of advertising (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) may be of no addition or benefit to critical reflection, since adolescents are able to engage in effortful thought.

For instance, the negative attitudes held by the participants towards SM advertising (as discussed earlier) were seen to arise as a result of applying the stop-and-think response. The participants were able to *stop* to evaluate the perspectives of involved parties (like brand owners and target audiences) to *think* about advertising at quite an abstract level, e.g., to consider marketers' objectives. Based on this stop-and-think response, some participants felt negatively towards SM advertising, e.g., based on a perception that certain types of ads can interrupt their online browsing behaviours.

However, using the stop-and-think response, the participants formulated not only negative attitudes towards SM advertising, but more often, positive attitudes. They engaged in controlled and effortful thought (Nairn & Fine, 2008) as they *stopped* to acknowledge the commercial nature of SM advertising, to subsequently reflect (*think*) on it, e.g., acknowledging benefits such as useful product demonstrations which provided social learning. Even where they weighed up the costs of being exposed to such ads (e.g., marketers' use of personalised targeting) they were using effortful, explicit thought regarding the overall utility of the advertising message (e.g. learning about new products; peer conformity regarding favoured brands) and as a result, were positively disposed towards it. This is in stark contrast to the literature's concern that positive attitudes are evoked as a result of a *failure* to enact cognitive control, i.e., the stop-and-think response, which will lead to negative advertising outcomes such as advertising susceptibility (Nairn & Fine, 2008; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).

The concern in the literature is that positive attitudes about advertising will lead to persuasion taking place at an implicit level, which is considered unethical (Kunkel et al., 2004). The present findings challenge this assumption in the context of overt and native advertising on SM, since the stop-and-think response was used to arrive at positive attitudes in these contexts, which meant persuasion occurred on an explicit level. However, a context which did lead to the stop-and-think response being undermined is the covert advertising format of IM.

Specifically, parasocial connections with influencers were seen as a driver of positive attitudes, and in these situations, the coherency of the stop-and-think response that was evident with regard to other forms of advertising (e.g., overt, and the covert format of native advertising) was undermined whereby the participants did not appear to pause to reflect (*stop*) or engage in effortful thought (*think*). Specifically, even when participants held negative attitudes about IM dispositionally (i.e., in general), if they felt connected to a specific influencer whom the content emerged from, they contrastingly responded with positive attitudes situationally (i.e., towards that specific influencer episode).

Therefore, this had important implications for the dispositional and situational manifestations of affective AL, as the origin and nature of IM impacted motivation to apply and retrieve dispositional AL, reflecting the pattern noted earlier in the context of cognitive AL (see Section 8.2). Namely, although they disliked aspects of SM advertising, and some disliked particular formats (e.g., IM), as they spoke about it generally (i.e., dispositional AL), conditions within specific examples led them to forego these negative attitudes. For instance, when confronted with examples which emanated from an admired influencer, their response during exposure often contained positive attitudes (situational AL) even where they felt negative towards the practice (dispositional AL). This meant that where parasocial connection with an influencer was present, it drove positive attitudes towards advertising disseminated by this influencer, as

a more automatic and impulsive response (i.e., implicit persuasion) during exposure (situational AL).

Therefore, when they are speaking dispositionally, they are engaging in effortful thought and demonstrating the stop-and-think response (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011), which led some to dislike advertising at times. But situationally, the nature and origin of advertising could undermine the stop-and-think response on account of emotionally pleasing aspects of the message (e.g., attractive source/parasocial connection) (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006), which detracted from the stop-and-think response and led to positive attitudes in the moment (situational AL). Therefore, **the first contribution of the current research is that a demonstrable gulf exists between dispositional and situational AL**. This was suggested in the context of the first objective of the research, relating to cognitive AL (see Section 8.2), but is now clearly in evidence when considered under the second objective of the research, relating to affective AL.

In the context of affective AL, the gulf which prevailed between dispositional and situational AL largely arose due to parasocial connections with influencers. In the literature, it is recognised that consumers may form parasocial relationships with influencers (e.g., Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Shan et al., 2019) and that this may contribute to making them a particularly important source of information (De Veirman, et al., 2019). However, this research extends the literature's understanding of parasocial connection between young consumers and influencers as it is one of the first in the AL literature to demonstrate the impact which parasocial relationships can have on application of AL. Specifically, parasocial connection impacts the retrieval of AL, because parasocial connection with influencers lowers adolescents' motivation to retrieve and apply their dispositional AL as a critical response during exposure to advertising (situational AL). Only one other study comments on the impact of parasocial connection on AL, and that study reports similar findings. Specifically, Boerman & van Reijmersdal (2020)

studied the impact of parasocial relationships in the context of IM disclosures. They reported that IM disclosures did not lead to negative brand attitudes for children (aged 8-12) who had a parasocial connection with the influencer. This research extends these findings by demonstrating how parasocial connection can lead to a gulf between dispositional and situational AL.

A further conclusion which becomes **the second contribution of the research, is that positive affective AL impacts the application of the detachment effect**. SM advertising provided social learning for the participants, since it was sought out by these goal-directed consumers and subsequently utilised as a resource from which they learned about relevant products, as well as receiving tips and tricks relating to areas of interest like cosmetics, fashion, and fitness. In particular, they turned to owned media and influencers for information, utility and escapism. They therefore enjoyed SM advertising in these instances.

In the current research, when participants were positively predisposed to SM advertising, they did not seek to detach themselves (Friestad & Wright, 1994), but rather responded with interest, and sometimes, purchase intent (and follow through purchases). These findings challenge assumptions which have been present in the literature for almost three decades – the principle that identification of advertising leads to critical responses via the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (An et al., 2014; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011). They also challenge recent empirical findings, which reported that the change-of-meaning did take place for adolescents in the context of IM, as a result of identifying a disclosure present (De Jans, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2018). Hudders et al. (2017, p.339) compare the detachment effect to reactance, which they describe as "when individuals realise that they are subject to a persuasion attempt, they will perceive it as a threat to their autonomy and freedom of choice".

In the context of SM, the present participants did not perceive advertising as a threat to their freedom of choice, but rather readily embraced it as a resource and mode of social learning to inform consumption behaviour. Therefore, in the SM context, young consumers may not necessarily want to be free to make their own decisions, but rather *seek* guidance and input from brand profiles and influencers. This is in line with their stage of development, whereby middle adolescents seek to conform, assimilate, and gain advice from particular groups and cliques (Cody, 2013; Daniels & Leaper, 2006; John, 1999; Lachance et al., 2003; SAHRC, 2013). SM advertising was perceived as a resource which helped them to achieve this, and therefore to navigate their personal environments.

This adds to our understanding of consumer socialisation in the modern advertising climate. Specifically, the social learning model (SLM) emphasises sources of influence, i.e., socialisation agents, who are responsible for outlining and influencing norms which in turn affect behaviours, attitudes, and motivations of the young consumer (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). The present findings indicate that influencers, and, to a lesser extent, brand profiles, filled the role of socialisation agent for the participants since they turned to these sources to learn skills and to inform their behaviour. Therefore, if adolescents use these figures/profiles as socialisation agents, what does this mean for their ability to respond critically to advertising they disseminate? The present findings indicate that it might mean less counterargument and more implicit persuasion, drawing from the participants' situational responses to influencers whom they felt parasocially connected to. These findings add to the literature on modern consumer socialisation frameworks. For example, Wang et al. (2012) found that SM peer communication acted as a means of learning about products/services (informational route) for adults, which in turn influenced their product attitudes and purchase intentions through desire to conform with peers and social groups (conformity route). The present research builds on these findings to indicate that influencers and brand profiles filled these roles for the

participants, not just peer communication. The value of learning from brands and influencers on SM impacted not only affective AL, but also how moral AL was applied.

8.4 Research Objective Three

The third objective of the research was:

To examine teenagers' moral evaluations of advertising on social media.

Moral AL refers to the ability to evaluate the fairness and appropriateness of advertising (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe 2018; Hudders et al., 2017). Relatively little is known in the literature about young people's moral AL (Zarouali et al., 2019), with Hudders et al. (2017, p.344) describing empirical research on this dimension as "nonexistent". This dimension has only been acknowledged recently (Hudders et al. 2017), despite the fact that moral evaluations have been recognised as an important element of persuasion knowledge for more than two decades (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Zarouali et al., 2019). The exploration of young people's ability to question the fairness and appropriateness of advertising is a pertinent research gap given the predominance of covert persuasive tactics in use by marketers (Zarouali et al., 2019). It is surprising that little research has emerged in this area, since the appropriateness of many child-targeted marketing approaches have been questioned within the literature for years (e.g., Kunkel et al. 2004; Owen et al. 2013; Spiteri Cornish 2014; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020). Given that academics, regulators, and policy makers have long questioned the fairness of such marketing approaches, it follows that the views of young consumers themselves on the morality of such tactics are equally deserving of examination. This could have an impact on their willingness to critically respond to advertising (Hudders et al., 2017). Therefore, this research addresses a major gap in extant literature and extends scholarly understanding by providing insight into adolescents' moral judgements of SM advertising.

According to John (1999), young consumers aged eleven years and above are in the reflective stage of consumer socialisation whereby their information processing and social skills lend themselves to an ability to consider perspectives outside their own. In this study, the participants' (aged 15-17) ability to reflect on the perspectives of other stakeholders such as the firm, influencer, and to a lesser extent, the SM platform, illustrates this stage of consumer socialisation at play.

It can be concluded that the participants demonstrated fluidity within their moral AL, as while they could acknowledge the necessity and therefore appropriateness of SM advertising in some ways, they also questioned the ethics of some of its tactics. It was found that to formulate moral judgements, they conducted a cost-benefit analysis by assessing the *costs* of being exposed to SM advertising (e.g., the marketers' access and subsequent use of their personal data within targeted advertising) versus the *benefits* (e.g., receiving relevant and personalised advertising). This process is comparable to the privacy calculus model, which posits that when privacy is at stake, individuals will conduct a cost-benefit analysis, assessing the cost of losing their privacy against the potential gain they may receive from it (Laufer & Woulfe, 1977; Zarouali et al., 2018b). It is also comparable to the 'trade-off' approach used by the participants of De Pauw et al.'s (2017) study. However, where the present findings add to the literature is that the participants used a cost-benefit analysis to evaluate not only targeted advertising, but also covert advertising – IM in particular.

For instance, although some participants were sceptical about IM as a genre (i.e., their dispositional AL), they were more accepting of it in the case of specific influencer content to which they were exposed (situational AL). As such, they were seen to weigh up the cost of being exposed to it (e.g., the possibility of being exploited by exaggerated recommendations) against the benefits of the particular example (e.g., learning about new products). As a result, although the practice of IM was largely open to question, the participants were lenient where

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they felt that an influencer met certain standards e.g., introducing an interesting brand; providing a tutorial; being a young 'up and coming' influencer starting out on their career; or clearly signaling the presence of commercial content regarding brands they are known to usually recommend.

This means that where advertising was seen as useful or where participants felt connected with its source (e.g., a particular influencer), it led them to forgo negative dispositional moral AL in favour of applying positive situational moral AL (i.e., judging the ad as fair). As such, and similarly to findings reported in the context of cognitive and affective AL, the application of moral AL was impacted by the nature and origin of advertising. This means that a gap often existed between dispositional moral AL, and how this was applied situationally, again reflecting the first contribution of the research (see Section 8.3).

Arguably, when consumers allow the convenience of advertising (or the source from whom it emerges) to cloud their judgements of its appropriateness, they are responding in an uncritical manner (i.e., they are acting in accordance with advertising's goals rather than stopping to consider their own). In this way, they are focused on the enjoyable, relevant, or helpful elements of advertising and/or it's source and fail to consider how it's tactics may be manipulative. While this is similar in some ways to extant research (De Pauw et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008) which reported that children positively evaluate new advertising formats on the basis of being overwhelmed by it's fun or immersive nature, it diverges in others. Specifically, the teenagers of this study appeared capable of understanding the tactics which were used against them; thus, they were not necessarily overwhelmed. Rather, they made a conscious decision to accept such advertising where it offered them information, entertainment, and social capital (e.g., learning about new products that might win peer approval). As such, these participants were seen to make a conscious trade-off, perceiving SM advertising through a transactional lens, whereby the benefits of being exposed to such content, outweighed the

costs. Therefore, **the third contribution of the research is that within their moral AL, the participants had a transactional approach to SM advertising in terms of weighing up the costs and benefits**.

This finding is important in that it extends the findings of van Reijmersdal et al.'s (2012) study with 7–12-year-old children. They concluded that whilst the children in their study were in possession of persuasion knowledge in the context of advergames, i.e., an understanding of the persuasive and commercial nature of advergames, they were *unable* to recover and apply this knowledge when exposed to specific advertising attempts. In the present study, the older sample of 15–17 years possess such persuasion knowledge in the context of SM advertising, but they are *choosing* not to retrieve and apply the knowledge, and instead are positively disposed to advertising content that is perceived to benefit them, for example, the attainment of social capital that may accrue from learning about influencer-endorsed products that might win peer approval.

Therefore, a key conclusion is that whilst SM advertising was widely accepted where it followed certain parameters, such as providing relevance and utility, or where an influencer was starting out in their profession, having a smaller number of followers, and judiciously using sponsored posts that were consistent in terms of the products that they would normally consume, SM advertising also attracted moral opprobrium in five ways. These related to where advertising was seen to create pressure to keep up with trends, where the marketer was seen to invade their privacy, where advertising was presented covertly, leading to scepticism towards IM in particular, and finally, a perception that the financial motive for influencers engaging in brand collaborations was exploitative to the follower base.

These findings add to the scant body of research on moral AL in the context of IM in particular. There appears to be only one other study which investigates moral AL in the context of this

covert advertising format and that study reported only positive moral evaluations towards IM (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019). Furthermore, within the present research, it was found that attitudes towards a specific influencer can mediate the application of negative moral evaluations of IM in general. This diverges from other studies, namely De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe (2018) who found that adolescents' (12-18 years) dispositional scepticism towards advertising ensures more avoidance and contesting. However, the present study found that participants were reluctant to apply their negative moral judgements of IM in cases where they felt positive about the specific influencer from which it emerged, even when they displayed scepticism at other times regarding the practice of IM.

This finding must also be viewed through the lens of cognitive control, which in this context, relates to not only the possession of AL, but more importantly, the ability to retrieve and use this knowledge (Büttner et al., 2014; Moses & Baldwin, 2005). Specifically, it is important to consider whether a consumer *has* the cognitive ability to exercise such control, or whether they *choose* to exercise such control. It is accepted that cognitive control is an ongoing developmental process during childhood and adolescence (Büttner et al., 2014). Regarding the 15–17-year-olds in this study, their scepticism towards some influencers is suggestive of the stop-and-think manifestation of cognitive control. On the other hand, their enthusiastic acceptance of certain sponsored content emanating from influencers they feel positive towards or parasocially connected to, suggests a lack of critical reflection or the afore-mentioned stop-and-think response.

It is proposed that their positive affective evaluations of influencers whom they enjoy following, leads them to be less critical, regardless of the moral AL they possess about the advertising format itself. In this way, they tended to accept this kind of covert advertising when it emerged from familiar influencers yet condemn the practice in general. Therefore, it appears as though a gap exists between moral AL in the context of advertising in general (dispositional

AL), and a corresponding willingness to apply this to known influencers (situational AL), again re-enforcing the first contribution of this study (see Section 8.3), namely that a gap prevails between the participants' dispositional and situational AL.

Overall, because of the satisfaction evoked by the utility within SM advertising (central route of persuasion) or their affection for a given influencer (peripheral route of persuasion), the participants of this study were unwilling to apply dispositional moral evaluations of advertising to situational examples where they enjoyed them. This means that (positive) affective AL moderated the application of moral AL, and ultimately also cognitive AL since it hindered retrieval and application of knowledge such as understanding of advertising's bias. This is discussed further in the following section which seeks to formally answer the research question that informed and guided this study.

8.5 Answering the Research Question

This research posed the question:

> *What is the nature of teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail in the brand-rich environment of social media?*

To answer this research question, an aim was drawn up:

> *To investigate teenagers' dispositional and situational advertising literacy in the context of the overt and covert advertising formats which prevail on social media platforms.*

In answer to both the research question and aim, the present research concludes that the participants had a developed dispositional AL which consisted of sophisticated knowledge and

evaluations, *in the main*, about both overt and covert advertising in the SM environment. The italicised use of the phrase '*in the main*' is designed to reflect their deep understanding of overt forms of SM advertising and the covert form of native advertising whilst recognising their less developed understanding of the covert advertising format that is IM.

It is useful at this stage to reiterate the gaps in the literature that this study has sought to address, in order to explain the overall contribution of the present study. In the literature, little is known about adolescents' associative network regarding advertising, i.e., their dispositional AL (Zarouali et al., 2019). This is an important gap which requires addressing because ultimately, how one responds to a specific advertising episode might be dependent on one's dispositional AL (i.e., understanding, attitudes and evaluations about advertising in general), since this associative network is drawn upon during exposure (De Pauw et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2017). Furthermore, given the innovative nature of SM advertising which manifests in both overt and covert formats and blends a range of voices using paid, owned, and earned media, the development of an appropriate associative network about advertising may be a more challenging task in this context.

Furthermore, very little empirical research has been conducted which takes into account both manifestations of AL, i.e., dispositional *and* situational. It is important to investigate this, as it may be the case that young people *plan* to respond to SM advertising in a particular way (i.e., dispositionally) but this may not occur in practice (i.e., situationally). Alongside this, a call was made by Hudders et al. (2017) for an exploration of the three dimensions of AL - cognitive, affective, and moral - to understand their role and influence during advertising response.

In their seminal paper, Hudders et al. (2017, p.343) put forth that moral AL may be the determinant of whether "cognitive and affective advertising literacy positively or negatively affects the advertising effects". To explain, they contend that if a tactic is judged as unfair

(moral AL), advertising effects should be diminished since this should prompt consumers to enact negative affective AL (disliking of the advertisement) and critical cognitive AL (retrieval of cognitive knowledge) (Hudders et al., 2017). Given this reasoning, it could be interpreted that moral AL is proposed as a skill which may attenuate the effects which positive affective AL has on critical reflection (i.e., that positive emotions may result in less critical reflection, and thereby increase advertising effects). However, within the current research, regardless of whether participants considered a particular advertising strategy to be inappropriate, if it was found to be useful or convenient to them or if it emerged from an attractive source, they were frequently accepting of it and judged it as fair. In these cases, even when negative moral AL about a tactic was in place, it did not necessarily increase critical reflection if the benefits were seen to outweigh disadvantages.
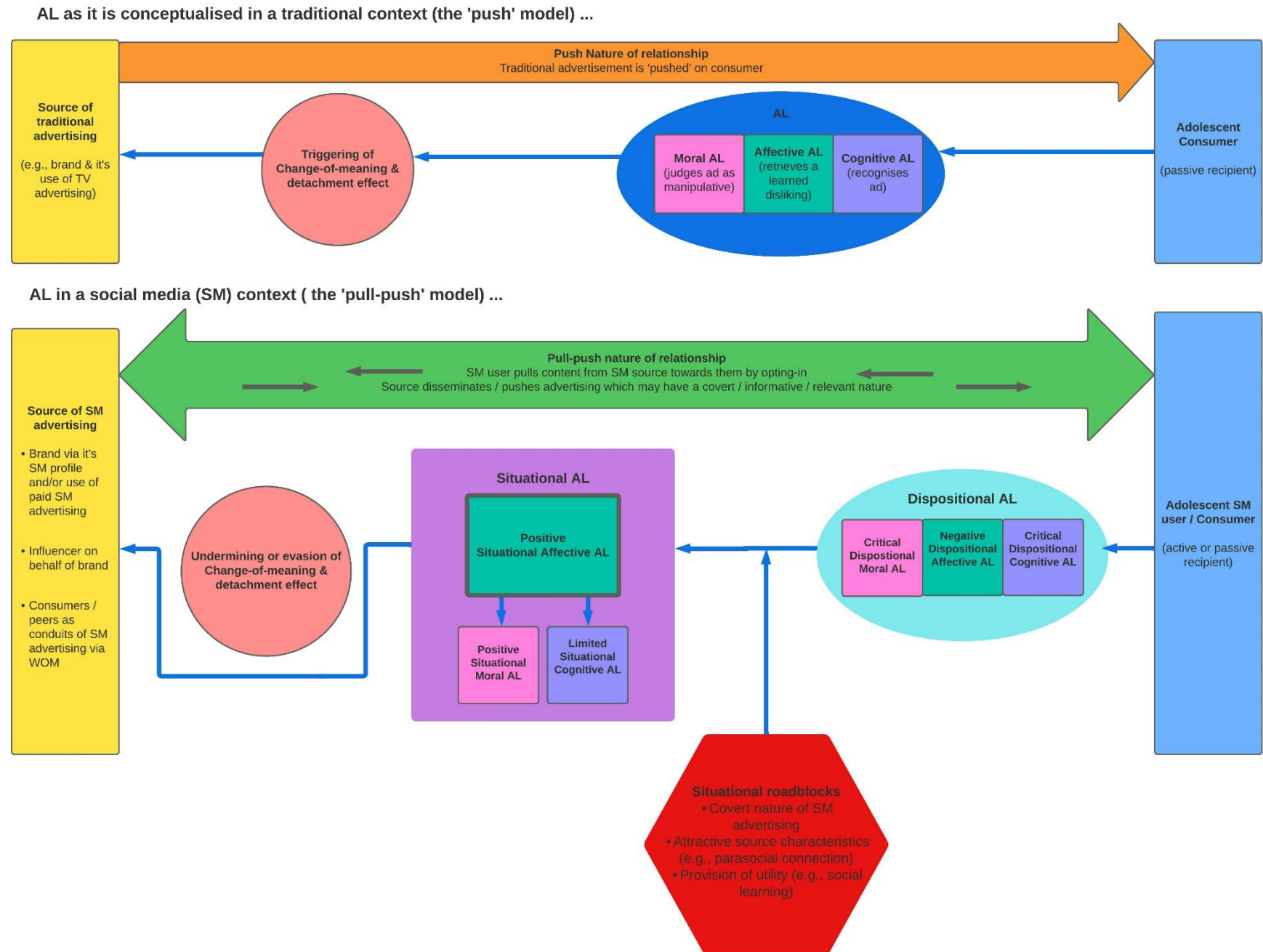
Furthermore, even when participants judged IM as inappropriate, they were often reluctant to apply this to known and admired influencers. As such, in these instances, affective AL appears to play a bigger role in advertising response than moral AL, even if negative moral evaluations are in place. Where positive attitudes were present, both moral and cognitive AL were not applied critically. For instance, moral judgements of IM as exploitative, and cognitive understanding of bias within IM, were overlooked in favour of responding with positive attitudes. This diverges from Hudders et al.'s (2017) predictions on how the dimensions of AL interplay, and suggests that it is affective AL, rather than moral AL, which determines how the other two dimensions are applied. This therefore represents **the fourth contribution of the research, namely that affective AL mediates the application of the cognitive and moral dimensions of AL**

Specifically, this means that if marketers are able to craft messaging which provides enjoyment, entertainment or social learning to adolescents, it is capable of overcoming negative dispositional moral AL and critical cognitive AL and can lead to tolerance, less critical

reflection and more implicit persuasion. For example, when advertising emerged from an influencer a participant felt parasocially connected to, the stop-and-think response was impaired in that participants were not motivated to apply negative moral dispositions they had about IM to that particular influencer. Therefore, persuasion was more implicit in that favourable evaluations of the source led to more impulsive responses based on positive feelings, and less critical responses which used explicit, reflective, and controlled (cognitive and moral dispositional) thought (Nairn & Fine, 2008). A revised conceptual framework is presented in Figure 8.1 which takes this into account and importantly which also highlights the first contribution of the research, which is that a gulf existed between the participants' dispositional and situational AL (see Section 8.3), which permeated across each dimension of their AL. Therefore, the source of advertising was seen to be of critical importance for application of AL situationally.

A conceptual framework was presented in Chapter Three (see Figure 3.1) proposing that because advertising can emerge from not only brands on SM (via brand-driven advertising) but also from sources the user has opted-in to, such as owned brand profiles (owned media), peers (earned media) and influencers (IM), the dispositional AL of teenagers may be relatively uncritical in this context. This is given especial weight considering characteristics of SM advertising, specifically it's often covert nature (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2020), as well as having informative, relevant, entertaining, and novel qualities (Alhabash et al., 2017; Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Taken together, it was posited that teenagers' dispositional AL may consist of positive affective AL, positive moral AL, and low cognitive AL (see Section 3.7). Because dispositional AL is said to act as a prerequisite for situational AL (De Pauw et al., 2019; Hudders et al., 2017), it was proposed that this could leave teenagers unmotivated to activate AL as a critical filter during exposure (situational AL). This would leave them unmotivated to

Figure 8.1: *The Revised Conceptual Framework Which Illustrates the Gap Which Prevailed Between Dispositional and Situational AL in the Primary Findings of this Research. Source: developed by the author.*

AL as it is conceptualised in a traditional context (the 'push' model) ...

Push Nature of relationship
Traditional advertisement is 'pushed' on consumer

Source of traditional advertising
(e.g., brand & it's use of TV advertising)

Triggering of Change-of-meaning & detachment effect

AL

Moral AL (judges ad as manipulative)

Affective AL (retrieves a learned disliking)

Cognitive AL (recognises ad)

Adolescent Consumer
(passive recipient)

AL in a social media (SM) context (the 'pull-push' model) ...

Pull-push nature of relationship
SM user pulls content from SM source towards them by opting-in
Source disseminates / pushes advertising which may have a covert / informative / relevant nature

Source of SM advertising
• Brand via it's SM profile and/or use of paid SM advertising

• Influencer on behalf of brand

• Consumers / peers as conduits of SM advertising via WOM

Undermining or evasion of Change-of-meaning & detachment effect

Situational AL

Positive Situational Affective AL

Positive Situational Moral AL

Limited Situational Cognitive AL

Dispositional AL

Critical Dispositional Moral AL

Negative Dispositional Affective AL

Critical Dispositional Cognitive AL

Adolescent SM user / Consumer
(active or passive recipient)

Situational roadblocks
• Covert nature of SM advertising
• Attractive source characteristics (e.g., parasocial connection)
• Provision of utility (e.g., social learning)

detach themselves from SM advertising, meaning the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (Friestad & Wright, 1994) could be undermined or evaded (see Figure 3.1).

Whilst this framework is accepted in part, an updated model is presented in Figure 8.1 to reflect the primary research findings. No change has been made to the upper part of the framework which reflects the 'push' nature of traditional advertising formats (see Section 3.7). In particular, the updated framework illustrates the gap between dispositional and situational AL which prevailed across the three dimensions in the context of SM (see Sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4).

In contrast to what was proposed in the original conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1), the purpose of this framework (Figure 8.1) is to illustrate that the participants actually possessed a highly developed dispositional AL about SM advertising. In particular, they had a ***critical dispositional cognitive AL***, since they possessed sophisticated knowledge about SM advertising. They had a ***critical dispositional moral AL***, in that they critiqued tactics within SM advertising based on invasion of privacy, having a covert nature, scepticism towards IM and judgement of IM as an exploitative practice. In terms of dispositional affective AL, disliking was present, although positivity towards SM advertising was more prevalent, in line with the original framework (Figure 3.1). However, because the revised framework aims to depict the gulf between dispositional and situational AL across the three dimensions, the disliking element of the participants' dispositional affective AL ***(negative dispositional affective AL***) is highlighted so as to portray the gap that occurred within this dimension. Positive affective AL is therefore still captured as a situational response, as it often manifested this way throughout the data.

The updated framework therefore highlights that even where participants held a sophisticated and critical dispositional AL, 'roadblocks' emerged which inhibited the application of this

dispositional network situationally. These roadblocks include the covert nature of SM advertising, attractive source characteristics present (such as the likeability and credibility of influencers), as well as its provision of utility, and therefore, social learning. The dispositional manifestation could therefore be seen to represent how participants *plan* to respond (or how they believe they act) in the context of SM advertising, whereas the situational manifestation reflects how they actually responded when exposed to examples of covert advertising (IM in particular).

Therefore, as represented in the revised framework (Figure 8.1), gaps between dispositional and situational AL permeated throughout the three findings chapters, and consequently, the three dimensions of AL. In terms of affective AL, although when speaking dispositionally some participants disliked advertising (and IM specifically), it emerged that this was not always applied situationally. Instead, positive attitudes were often evoked situationally (e.g., based on feeling parasocially connected to an influencer) and these were capable of overcoming negative dispositional attitudes about the practice in general. Thus, they displayed *positive situational affective AL*. This positive affective AL was seen to impact how the other two dimensions, cognitive and moral, were retrieved and applied situationally. Specifically, when it came to cognitive AL, they were often reluctant to apply cognitive knowledge (like understanding of bias) to situational instances of SM advertising which they felt positive about (e.g., towards favourite influencers). Furthermore, although the participants dispositionally viewed themselves as experts at identifying embedded advertising, when this was investigated in practice throughout elicitation, it emerged that this was not the case for covert advertising situationally. They often misidentified IM as organic influencer content. Therefore, they demonstrated *limited situational cognitive AL*. Finally, in terms of moral AL, even where participants considered advertising to be inappropriate as they spoke generally (i.e., dispositionally), if positive emotions were evoked during exposure it led to situational

evaluations of advertising as fair (i.e., ***positive situational moral AL***). Specifically, this emerged if advertising was situationally seen to offer utility and/or opportunities for social learning. It also took place where a parasocial connection was felt with the source of the content.

As such, because these situational conditions (or roadblocks) evoked positive attitudes from the participants (or caused them to misidentify IM at times), it led to an ***evasion of the change-of-meaning and detachment effect***, and therefore changed how AL was applied situationally.

Authors have proposed that dispositional AL is a prerequisite for situational AL (De Pauw et al., 2019). More specifically, Hudders et al. (2017, p.338) describe the interplay between manifestations as follows: "children will rely on their dispositional advertising literacy [during exposure to advertising] by retrieving and activating the relevant (cognitive, affective, and moral) information nodes within the associative network". But the present research highlights that the composition of the information nodes may be different depending on whether they are referred to dispositionally or activated situationally. In other words, dispositional AL was more expert in that it showcased greater reflective thought and critical thinking. When it came to situational AL, motivation to apply this was often limited.

Hudders et al. (2017) also highlight the possibility that the retrieval of knowledge during exposure could be impacted by an inability to stop-and-think, or by the fun nature of the content. The present research found that adolescents *were* able to stop-and-think, but that positive emotions impacted this process whereby they *chose* not to apply certain dispositional knowledge in particular situations. This reluctance was seen to emerge on the basis of deeper reasoning (rather than fun alone), but often as related to parasocial connections and social learning.

Based on the key conclusions and contributions discussed thus far, the next section offers a new conceptualisation of AL.

8.6 Conceptualising Advertising Literacy in the Context of Overt & Covert Social Media Advertising: The Advertising Literacy Continuum

As has been noted, the AL literature predominantly conceptualises the young consumer as a passive conduit through which advertising acts upon. Correspondingly, to protect this passive consumer, authors have proposed specific categories and components within AL to shield the consumer, e.g., the dominant description of affective AL as a learned disliking (Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011; Hudders et al., 2016). There is also a focus in empirical research on positivist approaches (see Section 4.3.1), which involve authors setting out specific components before beginning data collection, which they then seek to test the presence of in young people (e.g., testing for recognition of a particular disclosure format, rather than allowing research participants to demonstrate/explain how they go about identifying advertising). Children and adolescents are then deemed to either possess or not possess particular components of AL, implicitly suggesting to the reader that they either are, or are not, 'advertising literate'. Based on the findings of the present research, the author contends that conceptualisations of AL need to move away from the dominant narrative of considering passive consumers only, and away from considering AL as something that is dependent on particular components manifesting in a particular way (e.g., holding only negative attitudes towards advertising).

To do so, the author suggests borrowing from the roots of AL, to consider media literacy. A central goal of media literacy is to encourage critical thinking (Potter, 2019). The author would

encourage AL researchers (and ultimately, AL educational programmes) to consider AL as having the same goal. Rather than instilling advertising disliking or avoidance, researchers and other stakeholders should seek to empower young consumers to *critically respond* to advertising using their AL. As De Pauw et al. (2017) points out, the extant literature predominantly equates the broad concept of critical thinking to negative attitudes alone. In reality, critical thinking can also lead to a positive evaluation of advertising, if nuanced thinking is used to arrive at this outcome (De Pauw et al., 2017).

In this regard, **the fifth contribution of the research is to conceptualise AL as a continuum** (see Figure 8.2) rather than a binary condition as is widely presented in the extant literature. The continuum draws on theory from media literacy literature, which suggests that media literacy should be conceptualised as a continuum rather than a category (Potter, 2019). As such, it is not possible to be 'fully literate' or 'not literate', there is always room for improvement (Potter, 2019). This means that one's literacy is measured based on the strength and quality of perspectives and knowledge structures, and the quality of these structures may be based on skills and experiences (Potter, 2019).

People may operate at "lower levels of media literacy", meaning they have "fewer perspectives on the media, and those perspectives are supported by knowledge structures that contain little information and are less organized" (Potter, 2019, p. 25). Therefore, such individuals have less ability to understand media and to protect themselves from risks associated with it (Potter, 2019). As a result, they may be reluctant or unwilling to use their skills (Potter, 2019).The present author proposes that Potter's (2019) approach to conceptualising media literacy should influence how AL researchers conceptualise AL. Rather than seeking to instil specific attitudes in young consumers (such as a learned disliking towards advertising), an alternative is to use a continuum approach that lends itself to conceptualising knowledge about (dispositional AL) and responses to (situational AL) SM advertising, based on a passive/active scale.

Figure 8.2: *A Continuum for Identifying and Encouraging Advertising Literacy in the Context of SM Advertising.*
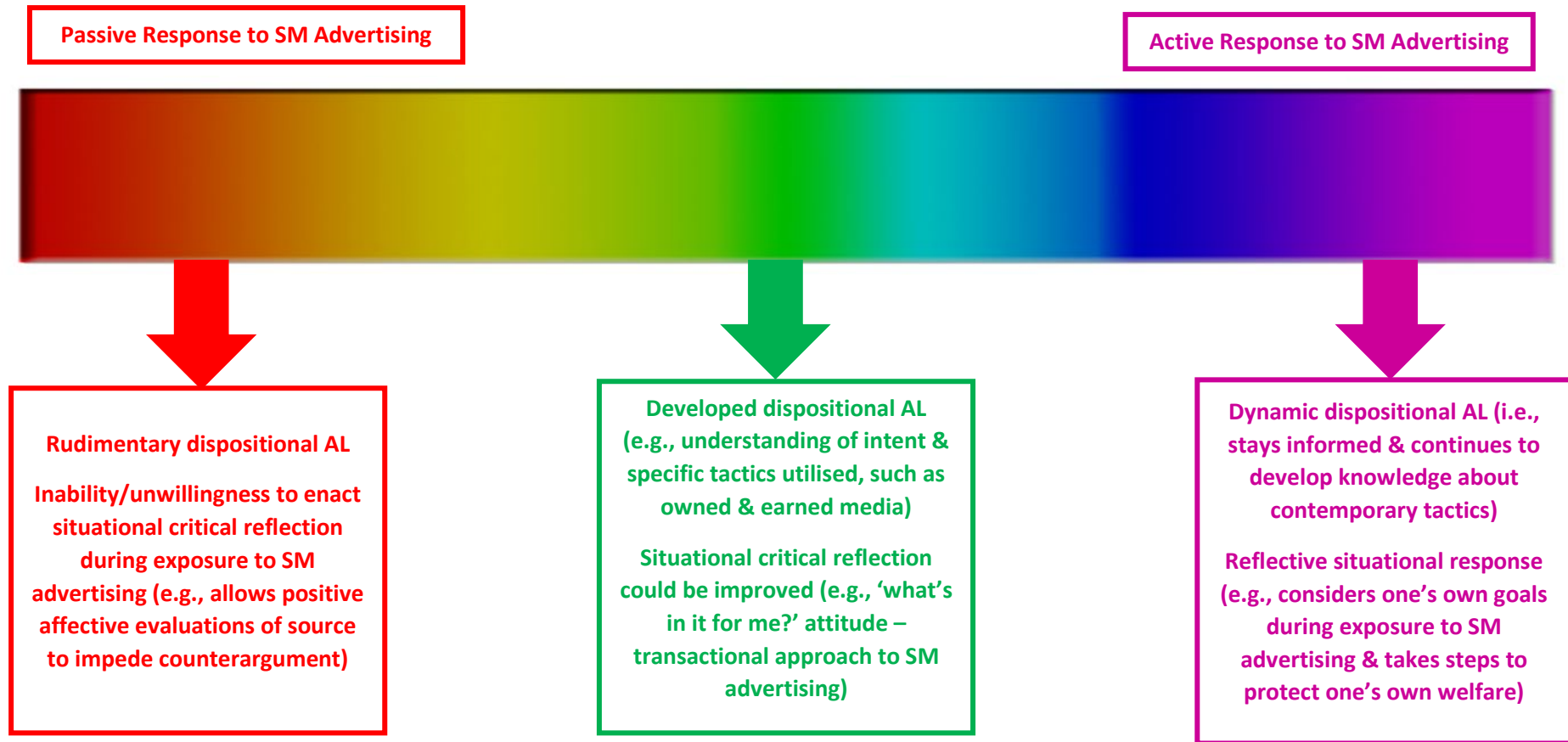
Source: developed by the author.

For instance, using the continuum in Figure 8.2, researchers may identify that participants respond to advertising in a passive manner, meaning they have only a rudimentary knowledge of tactics in use to target them (dispositional AL), or that they fail to engage in counterargument when presented with a specific ad which captivates their attention and emotions (situational AL). Where the participants of this study allowed positive emotions at the time of exposure to overcome their dispositional thoughts, feelings, and evaluations about SM advertising, it could be conceptualised that they are responding in a passive manner closer to the lower end of the continuum. This is because they are forgoing planned counterargument in favour of passively acting in line with the marketer's goals. In this case, they are allowing positive feelings to impede their ability to objectively reflect.

In other cases, it could be that young consumers are somewhat midway on the continuum, meaning they have a developed associative network about advertising (dispositional AL), but their critical reflection when exposed to such content (situational AL) could be improved. This might involve a transactional approach, or a 'what's in it for me?' attitude, whereby if advertising is situationally seen to provide value (e.g., by providing relevant information or utility through a product tutorial) then critical reflection may be evaded in favour of responding passively (i.e., in accordance with the goals of advertising, such as purchase intention, rather than one's own personal goals, such as saving money). As such, many of the participants of the present study displayed AL as mid-way on the continuum, given they had a developed dispositional AL but where advertising was seen to offer them benefits (e.g., relevance), they were less critical situationally.

AL at the higher end of the continuum refers to a dynamic associative network about SM advertising (dispositional AL), meaning it develops and changes over time alongside developments in marketing communications. The key difference, however, between AL at higher and lower levels on the continuum, is that at the upper points of the spectrum consumers

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are *reflective* about their experiences with advertising and actively consider their own goals *during exposure* to such content (situational AL). The strength of their dispositional knowledge (e.g., consisting of awareness about the motivations and intentions of advertising) aids them to make *active* and informed responses during situational exposure. Such a consumer does not allow positive affective qualities of the advertisement to impede their critical reflection, but rather takes time to consider their own goals during exposure and takes steps to achieve such goals. This might involve considering one's finances and budget (for a teenager, this could be considering one's allowance from caregivers or income from a part-time job) and the goals one has set (e.g., to save money, or to avoid placing economic burden on caregivers) to respond in a manner which aligns with both.

For example, a teenager may have a personal goal of buying new trainers for football practice at a price they can afford using wages from their part-time job. When exposed to an advertisement about trainers, they may weigh up the arguments being made (cognitive AL), consider the appropriateness of the tactics being used (moral AL), and ultimately form a positive evaluation of the ad (affective AL). The ad may allow them to achieve their consumption goal by purchasing the product which they have judged to meet their criteria (active response). This demonstrates the point from De Pauw et al. (2017), that the outcomes of critical thinking can be positive evaluations of advertising, not only negative.

The value of conceptualising AL as a continuum is to develop a framework which acknowledges not only passive consumers (e.g., young children), but also active, goal-directed consumers (e.g., adolescents). It was proposed in the theoretical framework of this research (see Section 3.7) that consumers actively seek out SM advertising, given the opt-in, pull nature of advertising in this context. The primary findings have confirmed this to be the case, whereby advertising is sought out and used to achieve deep goals (e.g., as a source of social learning to aid navigating personal environments). Therefore, the literature needs to acknowledge that

young audiences are seeking out and enjoying SM advertising for these reasons and to conceptualise AL as a way to empower consumers to *respond actively (*i.e., using critical thinking to achieve one's own best interests), not only as a way of protecting passive consumers.

Additionally, conceptualising AL as a continuum takes into account that gaps can occur between dispositional and situational AL (see Sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4), as the findings of this research have demonstrated. This is because the continuum recognises that AL operates on a spectrum. For example, just because one is sceptical about the use of IM (dispositional AL), does not mean one will *always* apply this as a response when situationally exposed to IM. Rather, there are instances where one may be seduced by situational conditions (e.g., a parasocial relationship with the source of advertising) and forego planned responses (dispositional AL) to respond in a different manner situationally. This situational response does not mean one has a lack of ability to critique the practice of IM, but rather that they were either not able or not motivated to apply it in this situational instance. Therefore, AL operates as a spectrum, whereby situational application can differ from dispositional AL.

Utilising the continuum within educational programmes may help young consumers to become *aware* that situational response does not always match perceived or planned action (dispositional AL) through a process of reflection. Specifically, they could be asked to reflect on their general perspectives about SM advertising (dispositional AL), as well as specific responses they have made to SM advertising (situational AL). Through this process, they may use the continuum to identify where their AL lies, and subsequently become aware of gaps between planned counterargument (dispositional AL) and actual responses when exposed to advertising (situational AL). When awareness is achieved, further critical thinking can be encouraged to identify 'roadblocks' which distort the application of dispositional AL as a situational response to diminish this in future.

Therefore, by recognising that AL operates on a spectrum, it encourages researchers to investigate both the dispositional *and* situational facets of young consumers' AL. Where only one of these manifestations is taken into account in a research study, researchers cannot make accurate conclusions regarding their participant's' AL. To consider the example just mentioned of a consumer who foregoes scepticism towards the practice of IM (dispositional AL) when responding to a particular example (situational AL), if a researcher had only investigated one manifestation (i.e., situational *or* dispositional) they would not have a full understanding of their participants' AL. Only by taking both manifestations into account is it possible to understand the full spectrum of their participants' AL, which for example may consist of a developed dispositional AL, but limited motivation to apply this during exposure (situational AL), as the current research has found. The continuum approach acknowledges that such gulfs can occur.

It is acknowledged that younger children who have limited cognitive ability may indeed interact with advertising in a passive manner, and therefore existing conceptualisations of AL in the literature may be appropriate for this age group, i.e., conceptualising AL as a way to help consumers 'cope' with advertising (see Section 2.1.1). However, the continuum approach may be more suitable for adolescents (and adults) who are more cognitively advanced and who may seek out advertising in a more active, goal-directed manner. Definitions of AL as a means of 'coping' with advertising (see Section 2.1.1) are therefore unaligned with the continuum approach which seeks to *empower* consumers to critically respond to advertising in a way which is aligned with their goals. This therefore raises the question as to whether the existing definitions of AL fully capture the concept of an active and goal-directed consumer who may seek out (the 'pull' approach outlined in Figure 8.1) SM advertising for reasons such as utility, information and entertainment. Therefore, **the sixth contribution of the research is to propose a new definition of AL, as follows:**

Advertising literacy is the dynamic, critical skill of understanding and evaluating advertising practices (dispositional literacy), as well as the use of this skill to achieve agency during exposure to specific advertising episodes (situational literacy).

This definition takes into account the ongoing nature of developing one's associative network about advertising over time as developments are made in marketing communications (i.e., AL as a dynamic, critical skill). Additionally, the definition emphasises the *use* of this skill during exposure to advertising practices (situational AL) as a means of achieving agency, i.e., to respond in line with one's own personal goals, rather than the agenda of the marketer. Importantly, it does not specify particular outcomes (e.g., advertising avoidance or disliking) as it is acknowledged that one can respond with positive attitudes to advertising while still achieving agency, i.e., that outcomes of critical thinking can be both positive and negative (De Pauw et al., 2017). This contrasts with the dominant narrative in AL definitions on 'coping' with advertising. For example, Hudders et al. (2017, p. 335) use the following definition: "an individual's knowledge, abilities, and skills to ***cope*** with advertising", suggesting that advertising is a challenge which must be overcome, or a threat which individuals should be shielded from. In contrast, the new definition proposed by the present author seeks to encourage *empowerment* in the context of advertising practices, by emphasising the use of this skill to achieve agency.

The new definition also underlines the necessity of considering AL from both a dispositional and situational perspective, since the continuum highlights that AL operates as a spectrum, meaning gaps can occur between these manifestations. Therefore, to have a full understanding of this skill, it is necessary to acknowledge it as both an associative network, namely dispositional AL, but also as a behavioural skill which is referred to during exposure, i.e., situational AL. Finally, the proposed definition specifies 'advertising practices', thereby calling to attention the blurred and oblique nature of new advertising contexts, such as SM

where advertising emerges in paid, owned and earned media (see Section 3.3). This means that advertising can have new and different meanings in modern contexts, whereby it can emanate from brand profiles, consumer related WOM, and SM influencers. This addresses calls in the literature for authors to take a broader approach in how they define SM advertising to include owned and earned media (Voorveld, 2019).

Now that the contributions of the present research have been outlined, the remaining sections of the chapter look to the future. Specially, recommendations for further research are presented, followed by recommendations for marketers and influencers, as well as educators and policymakers based on the findings and contributions of this thesis.

8.7 Recommendations for Further Research

There is a dearth of research regarding affective AL, especially that which is open to exploring *positive* and negative attitudes towards advertising, which should continue to be addressed by future research. Because the new advertising climate is moving towards pull communications which the consumer chooses to opt-in to, it follows that consumers are likely to be positively predisposed to this content. Findings from the present research illustrated this, whilst van Dam & van Reijmersdal (2019) also found positive attitudes were directed towards IM. The literature therefore needs to allow for the possibility of positive attitudes and revise the predominant definition of affective AL as relating to negative attitudes alone. It is recommended that more studies should be conducted underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm to gain further *understanding* of how young people feel about SM advertising. When greater understanding of the meanings young consumers place in such content is achieved, it will then be possible to make further recommendations as to how to empower them to respond critically, even if they feel positive towards advertising.

Similarly, further research is warranted regarding young people's ability (or indeed, motivation) to activate critical reflection in the context of advertising which they have sought out, e.g., IM. The present findings indicate that where adolescents opt-in to advertising, it mitigates their application of AL. This was especially apparent in the context of IM which emerged from influencers whom the participants were parasocially connected to. As such, further research is required to investigate whether young consumers (1) are able to fully understand the nature of IM as a form of advertising and (2) deploy this understanding as a defence in the case of influencers whom they actively seek out and relate to very closely.

The covert advertising practice of IM provides a rich area for further exploration. The present findings indicate that influencers act as socialisation agents for adolescents. Authors should continue to investigate this possibility. This research also demonstrated the deep connection adolescents felt with influencers they follow, thereby allowing insights into parasocial connection between SM users and influencers. This is an interesting and pertinent area for future research, given the present study's finding that this relationship can mediate the application of AL. The fragility of this relationship may be a particularly interesting path for future studies, given that some of the present participants demonstrated an awareness of the one-sided nature of this connection. Therefore, the contradictory and nuanced nature of the parasocial relationship lends itself to further research in terms of, for example, exploring consumers' motives for following specific influencers. Furthermore, the literature has highlighted the 'friend' and 'peer' status that an influencer can enjoy (van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019; Hudders et al., 2021). Such close ties can increase the perceived trustworthiness and persuasive appeal of an influencer (Hudders et al., 2021). Therefore, further research could investigate at what stage such close bonds are tested, or when the influencer is seen to over-step their relatable peer status, for example, with regard to excessive posting of content relating their brand collaborations, or indeed their overall communication

approach (e.g., use of a more natural speaking style versus curated content, working to a brand template).

Also, this study illustrated that any criticism regarding IM tends to be levelled at the influencer rather than the brand partner. Reasons for critiquing IM included where it was considered covert, where it was seen as exploitative, and where the advertised product was seen as unaligned with the influencers' personal brand. In each instance, the influencer was seen to hold responsibility, rather than the brand. Future research should continue to investigate this, given that it seems to suggest a level of insulation for brands, but risk for influencers.

Alongside this, the moral dimension of AL has received very little research attention. The present study found that participants tended to apply different standards of moral evaluation to IM as a genre, compared to specific influencers. In this way, they tended to accept IM when it emerged from familiar and enjoyable influencers yet on the other hand, they were also seen to condemn the practice in general. Therefore, further research could investigate the gap that seems to exist between moral AL in the context of advertising in general (dispositional AL), and willingness to apply this to known influencers and specific influencer communications (situational AL). Furthermore, Hudders et al. (2017) suggest that if consumers judge advertising as unfair/inappropriate, it may trigger other dimensions of AL to be applied more critically. In contrast, the present research found that affective AL was the determining dimension which impacted the application of cognitive and moral AL. Therefore, the interplay of the different nodes within dispositional and situational manifestations should be further investigated.

Alongside moral AL, the present study revealed that a gulf existed between the dispositional and situational manifestations of cognitive and affective AL, meaning the gap persisted across each dimension of AL. This led to the conclusion that although adolescents may have a high

level of dispositional AL, it's retrieval as a situational response depends on the nature and origin of advertising. This means that even though young consumers may be very knowledgeable and questioning regarding advertising as they speak generally, they do not always apply this during exposure. The present study suggests that adolescents are *choosing* not to apply their critical thinking (dispositional AL) to situational advertising which evokes positive attitudes within them. Other preliminary studies which have taken both manifestations into account (Lawlor et al., 2016; van Dam & van Reijmersdal, 2019) also suggest that a gap may be present between dispositional and situational AL. Therefore, future research should continue to investigate this gap by conducting studies which investigate both manifestations of AL within a single group of participants to further understand how these manifestations work together.

Additionally, the present research emphasised that advertising response does not rest on cognitive ability alone. Rather, responses were influenced by stages of emotional development (e.g., a heightened desire for peer acceptance) and moral reasoning (e.g., where moral judgements were made based on sustaining relationships) within adolescence. A major reason that AL research predominantly includes younger samples (Zarouali et al., 2019) is because of their limited levels of cognitive ability (Nairn & Fine, 2008). But cognitive development is only one side of the coin, and authors have critiqued the use of an ages-and-stages approach as an "ethical benchmark for assessing the fairness of advertising" (Nairn & Fine, 2008, p.459). Relying on frameworks of cognitive development alone to judge whether young consumers are susceptible to advertising is problematic (Nairn & Fine, 2008). The present research amplifies this, because the adolescents were *capable* of enacting the stop-and-think response but yet were not always motivated to do so based on desires for social learning and achieving conformity. Therefore, contemporary advertising tactics were not necessarily overwhelming their cognitive abilities. But it could be interpreted that their desire to learn about their environments and

conform with reference groups, as well as their propensity to judge morality based on sustaining interpersonal relationships, impacted their affective and moral responses and led to less critical reflection. The little research including adolescents in the AL literature is therefore concerning. AL researchers need to consider other developments (aside from cognitive ability) which are ongoing into adolescence and even adulthood, including moral reasoning and identity development, when deciding what age samples to include. Therefore, the author echoes recent calls in the literature (e.g., Zarouali et al., 2019) that AL research should investigate the AL of adolescents.

Furthermore, it is noted that the literature tends to predominantly consider young consumers from the perspective that they are *passively* consuming advertising. For example, the predominant definition of affective AL as a learned disliking of advertising (e.g., De Pauw et al., 2019; Hoek et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2016) promotes the idea that consumers need to be protected from advertising which is 'pushed' on them. But the present research emphasises that adolescents *actively seek out* advertising for several reasons, such as to stay informed about brand updates, and to achieve social learning. Therefore, it is recommended that future research looks at the relationship between advertising and young consumers through a new lens, acknowledging the interactive and 'pull' nature of contemporary advertising whereby consumers often take on an active rather than passive role. To do so, it is recommended that authors take a child-centric approach in their research by allowing young consumers to illustrate how they interact with new advertising formats, rather than deductively assuming they take a passive role. As noted, automatic negative responses are unlikely to be enacted on SM. Therefore, acknowledging that the relationship between consumer and advertising has changed might allow new recommendations to be developed as to how to empower young consumers to critically respond. The AL continuum (see Section 8.6) may help researchers to consider AL from a new lens.

In addition, the findings of this research indicate the prevalence and indeed importance of owned media as a point of contact between brand and target audience. It is clear that adolescents seek out owned media on SM to fulfil utilitarian needs (such as learning about new products) but also to learn about their environments (e.g., learning skills through watching product demonstrations). As such, the AL literature needs to acknowledge that young consumers interact with advertising outside the parameters of paid media on SM, and therefore further investigate their cognitive, affective, and moral AL in this regard. Particular attention should be paid to the context of owned media (e.g., brands' use of SM platforms), given the heavy emphasis placed on utilising owned media by the participants of this research. Afterall, owned media has many of the same characteristics as advertising and is responsible for addressing marketing objectives (Murphy et al., 2020; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015), so is therefore worthy of inclusion within AL empirical research. So far, this doctoral research and one other study (Lawlor et al., 2016) offer the only contributions to this area. This warrants further exploration.

Finally, on a more general note, the participants of this research also spoke about SM as being a "*lifeline*" and an "*addiction*". This demonstrates the arguably excessive dominance which SM had in these young people's lives. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the role and dominance of SM for teenagers who are undergoing a turbulent developmental period in terms of identity formation. Excessive use of SM may have implications for this, for example, in areas such as self-esteem. Alongside this, the participants placed great importance on keeping up with peers and knowing what is on trend. This was seen to result in conformity pressures, whereby they felt pressured to consume to keep up with trends on SM, as similar to findings reported by Cody (2013). It was also observed that this led to altercations with caregivers. Further research is therefore needed to investigate the relationship between use of SM and well-being of adolescents.

Recommendations for marketers and influencers are now presented, followed by those for educators and policymakers.

8.8 Recommendations for Marketers & Influencers

When considering the primary findings of the present research, there were many ways in which the participants had a developed AL. For example, whereby they showed an understanding of overt and covert advertising formats, the tactics in use in the SM landscape, and the intent behind them. They also showed an ability to critique SM advertising, for example where they stopped to think about the marketer's use of their data, or the contract present between brand and influencer to share a positive review of a product. Therefore, in these ways the participants showed a robust level of AL. However, other findings indicate that there is cause for concern regarding adolescents' ability to *use* their AL in certain contexts. In particular, their application of AL was dependent on the nature and origin of advertising. Namely, roadblocks exist which impeded their retrieval of AL, including where especial utility was associated with an advertisement (e.g., the provision of a tutorial); where it emerged from a source who the participant felt parasocially connected to; or where the source met certain standards, e.g., a micro influencer rather than macro.

This means that although teenagers may *believe* that they are experts in the context of SM advertising and that they are capable of critiquing it, its qualities are impeding their ability to critically respond when they are actually *exposed* to it. It is necessary to consider the implications of this for marketers and influencers. It is widely acknowledged that modern marketing is not solely about profit maximisation, but also has the potential to act in a way which benefits society long-term. Therefore, the first recommendation of this research is made on a macro level, whereby marketers and influencers should reflect on their ethical

responsibility to young and potentially vulnerable audiences. Namely, that they have a responsibility to utilise advertising in a way which does not take advantage of a young audience's more limited social, emotional and cognitive development which impacts their ability and motivation to critically respond (John, 1999; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006).

Based on the findings and contributions of the current research, the question could be posed regarding whether marketers and influencers should discontinue their use of covert advertising such as IM to target teenagers. The present author argues that instead of prohibiting particular advertising strategies and thereby preventing teenagers from becoming socialised to new advertising practices, the focus should be on empowering these goal-directed consumers to use critical thinking to support their own agency. This could be achieved through AL education (see Section 8.9), which marketers and influencers should take an active role in supporting and developing.

Specifically, a recommendation is that the development of new advertising techniques to target young people should only be in use where educational initiatives are introduced in tandem to help consumers develop their AL in this regard. In particular, firms and influencers should help to develop and disseminate educational programmes and content which may help young audiences to gain cognisance of new tactics in use in the SM environment. According to the European Parliament, "influencers are not the only actors in the eco-system who need to respect consumer rights but … platforms, brands and intermediaries must also contribute to a safe digital environment for consumers" (Michaelsen et al., 2022, p.96). Therefore, where new and covert advertising techniques are introduced, firms, practitioners, influencers and SM corporations alike have an ethical responsibility to provide education to develop young people's AL in this regard. For instance, as part of corporate social responsibility initiatives, firms could partner with organisations such as the FTC, ASAI and Media Literacy Ireland to develop educational initiatives and campaigns with the aim of bolstering the AL of adolescents

as a potentially vulnerable audience. Further detail is provided in Section 8.9 regarding educational strategies which can be used to achieve this.

The remaining recommendations are posed on a more micro level for marketers and influencers. Starting with a covert form of SM advertising, namely IM, the participants observed that where influencers employed disclosures to disclose their commercial collaboration arrangements with brands, they were not always fully visible. In keeping with previous studies, when influencers offer disclosures that are highly explicit, this can result in more positive consumer attitudes towards the promotional message. For example, Holiday, Densley & Norman (2020) highlight the importance of trust as a key foundation of the influencer-consumer relationship. They proceed to explain that consumers often view the influencer as a credible and trustworthy source of information and advice, and when influencer content is clearly labelled as being promotional in nature, such transparency can serve to reduce the consumer's perception that a manipulative intent is at play. Equally, the consumer acknowledges a *quid pro quo* where the influencer is recognised as receiving financial remuneration from a brand whilst continuing to provide relevant content to their community of followers.

Another key implication arising from the present study was that some participants viewed the practice of disclosure as being incumbent on the influencer, and to a far lesser extent, the brand. This would suggest a certain amount of insulation for brands but also raises ethical considerations regarding brands' responsibilities in this area. The fact that the primary focus of the participants' attention was on the influencer as opposed to the brands working with the influencer, does not absolve marketers from their duties with regard to the creation, execution and delivery of advertising that is up-front and transparent in nature. Equally, it follows that influencers who seek to monetise their content creation, should be careful to preserve their own personal brand and resulting brand equity. This speaks to both ethical and commercial

considerations. For example, judicious attention should be given to the amount and nature of commercial collaborations they engage in, and also how they integrate them into their content.

Furthermore, the participants demonstrated deep affection for (and indeed, parasocial ties with) certain influencers. This was seen to prevail where they could live vicariously through influencer content by looking into the lives of these figures. For instance, gaining deep insights into aspects such as weddings, home décor, gym training routines, and other personal aspects of life really appealed to these young participants and contributed to how positively they were evaluated. This may be of interest to influencers when building their personal brands. Specifically, the interest is often in their 'girl/boy next door' quality, i.e., the audiences' feeling of being able to gain deep and real insights into every aspect of the influencers' life to understand who they are as a person, not just as a public figure or business. Indeed, the literature acknowledges the importance of building an authentic identity for influencers (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Hudders et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). The findings from this research confirm the importance of allowing insight into personal aspects of their lives when attempting to build an authentic identity.

Central also to building an authentic identity as an influencer is the importance of being perceived as genuine. The participants continuously demonstrated the importance of forging alliances with brands whom the influencer was perceived to genuinely prefer and use and displayed scepticism towards IM when it was perceived that the influencer did not genuinely use the advertised product. Therefore, the importance of protecting one's authenticity by coming across as genuine to the audience is central to preserving a lucrative personal brand, e.g., to avoid losing followers.

In terms of making decisions regarding which influencers to collaborate with, the participants demonstrated a fondness for micro-influencers (i.e., influencers who have smaller follower

counts). Where micro-influencers were identified as working with a brand, this was celebrated as it meant favourite influencers were "*getting up in the world a bit*". This demonstrates the connection that can be felt with micro-influencers, suggesting that these figures may be attractive brand partners when compared with influencers who have larger audiences.

Recommendations for educators and policymakers are now presented.

8.9 Recommendations for Policymakers & Educators

A first recommendation is that regulatory bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority in Ireland (ASAI) and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) should introduce regulations which require covert advertising to be disclosed more directly. As discussed in Chapter Three (see Section 3.6.3), the ASAI (2018, p.6) allow IM to be disclosed using "hashtags such as #ad; #sp; #spon; #workwith; #paidpartnership, #brandambassador" (ASAI, 2018, p.6). But the participants of this research struggled to identify these disclosures when exposed to them, in particular '#sp'. Therefore, policymakers should revisit, not only whether disclosures are in place but whether they are in full view and are comprehensible by young consumers. This also reflects the US Food and Drug Administration (2020) recognition that different forms of disclosure can be used, namely direct language (e.g., use of 'paid ad') and indirect language (e.g., "#sp" meaning sponsored). Policymakers and researchers should work together to further investigate the impact of different types of disclosures on expediting ad recognition in order to set out regulations which make the practice of covert advertising fairer.

Once research has identified a clearly identifiable and comprehensible disclosure, a suggestion is that regulators should mandate this as a uniform disclosure for all sponsored content. This may make the process of AL development more straightforward, so that consumers must gain

cognisance of a single disclosure, rather than the several which are currently in use (e.g., #ad; #sp; #spon; #workwith; #paidpartnership, #brandambassador). It is acknowledged by the European Parliament that "there is no common harmonised approach" on regulating IM in Europe, but that "the EU could in principle publish EU-wide guidelines" (Michaelsen et al., 2022, p.95). If harmonised guidelines were used in the context of IM disclosures, this could expedite the development and deployment of AL amongst young consumers in this context.

For example, in this research, the participants used disclosures such as 'paid partnership' and '#ad' as clear identifiers of advertising. The meaning of both disclosures was seen as straightforward and upfront by the participants, who upon identifying them, were able to understand the presence of IM. However, on the other hand, they had trouble identifying wording such as '#sp'. During elicitation, many either did not identify this disclosure, or if they did notice it, did not understand it's meaning as a disclosure of sponsorship. Therefore, the introduction of a single identifier with clear wording such as 'ad: this is a paid partnership with …' may assist adolescents to recognise and understand the presence of brand sponsorship within influencer content.

The remaining recommendations address educators and policy makers alike. Specifically, adolescents should be aided in their development of AL to empower them to act as critical consumers in the SM landscape. The present findings indicate that teenagers are self-sufficient to a certain degree in their development of AL, whereby they were using their own experiences of interacting with SM advertising to inform and adapt their AL. For example, drawing on their own personal experiences of IM, they had developed their own self-developed schemata in attempts to identify this practice. This self-sufficiency could be read through two lenses, (1) it is impressive and reassuring for stakeholders in adolescent wellbeing to know that teenagers use their experiences of interacting with advertising to adapt and develop their AL; but also (2) it might suggest that educators, regulators and indeed researchers are failing young consumers,

since adolescents are being left to their own devices in their attempts to develop critical understanding of advertising in a new climate. The present research demonstrates that whilst teenagers had developed their own ways of *attempting* to recognise covert advertising, these methods did not always assist them to correctly identify it during exposure. In other words, they were *overestimating* their ability to identify covert advertising. Therefore, rather than leaving adolescents to find their own ways of attempting to adapt their AL to new contexts, policymakers, academics, and educators should be proactive in developing supports to empower them to bolster their AL in this context.

Two recommendations are made in this regard. The first is that young consumers need to be better informed about how to identify covert advertising. Although the adolescents of this study had tried to develop their own schemata, when they were confronted with advertising these self-developed schemata were often ineffective at helping them to correctly identify advertising. If the dispositional AL of adolescents was strengthened with more specific knowledge regarding how to identify covert tactics in use on SM, it is posited that this may expedite situational ad recognition.

Therefore, practical and informative messaging should be put together by regulatory bodies (such as the ASAI), together with the support of marketers and influencers, regarding the format of disclosures on SM, as well as what disclosures mean. Once this messaging has been developed, influencers could be utilised to disseminate it. This is recommended for two reasons. Firstly, this research indicates that influencers act as socialisation agents for adolescents. Therefore, they are primed to help adolescents develop as consumers and are likely to be particularly influential in this regard. Secondly, consumers react favourably when they feel as though brands and influencers are upfront regarding the presence of advertising according to both the current research and extant literature (e.g., Holiday et al., 2020). Using influencers to disseminate informative messaging should therefore act as a means of

strengthening young consumers' AL in this ecosystem, while also boosting the influencer's reputation as a credible, reliable, and honest information source. This may help to ensure that teenagers continue to adapt and develop their AL, making it a dynamic skill (Malmelin, 2010).

Similarly, because the teenagers in the current research relied on experiences of trial and error to develop their AL, it follows that if new tactics are put to use by marketers on SM, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to them since they will have no experience with the tactic to draw upon. Rather than leaving adolescents to engage in these processes of trial and error before coming to their own understanding, regulatory bodies should be proactive in creating informative messaging designed to educate consumers about new tactics as they are rolled out. Influencers could also be contracted to disseminate, and perhaps co-create this messaging. Indeed, because of their high level of influence over young audiences, influencers could be used to broadcast informative messaging across many spheres relating to the well-being of young people, not just AL.

A second recommendation is that training should be provided to adolescents which aims to bolster their AL in a SM context. Educational bodies could collaborate with researchers to develop an AL educational programme which could be delivered in schools. The AL continuum (see Section 8.6) could be utilised in this regard. The value of utilising the continuum in educational programmes is that it emphasises critical thinking, reflection, and therefore empowerment in the context of advertising practices. It also highlights AL as both an associative network (dispositional AL) and as a behavioural skill to be retrieved during exposure (situational AL), thus encouraging young people to reflect on and develop both manifestations of AL. This means that 'quick fixes', like advertising avoidance or disliking, would be evaded in favour of promoting a more dynamic approach which instills reflective thinking. Although the adolescents of the present study illustrated a level of independence and self-sufficiency in their development of AL, they should be supported in this endeavour to

guard against vulnerability in this context. Therefore, research attention should be paid to developing such a programme, as well as investigating its effectiveness at empowering teenagers to be more critical consumers.

A final recommendation addresses regulatory bodies in particular. The findings of this research indicate that where a parasocial connection exists with an influencer in the context of IM, persuasion takes place on a more implicit level for teenagers aged 15-17, i.e., without controlled, reflective thought. Suggestions have been made in this chapter regarding how to empower adolescents to enact their AL in this context, i.e., by using the AL continuum approach to encourage critical thinking during exposure to IM and other SM advertising strategies (see Section 8.6). However, it is acknowledged that critical thinking is more developed amongst adolescents than younger children, on account of teenagers' more developed levels of information processing, executive functioning, and emotion regulation (John, 1999; Moses & Baldwin, 2005; Roedder, 1981). Therefore, it is worth considering whether particular advertising practices in use on SM, such as influencer marketing, are suitable for younger age groups who are unlikely to be as adept at thinking critically as teenagers. Earlier it was argued that rather than prohibiting particular advertising strategies, adolescents should instead be aided in their development of AL so that they are empowered to respond in a way which achieves agency (see Section 8.8). However, such recommendations remain specific to the age group with which this research was carried out, i.e., teenagers aged 15-17. Younger children may require a different approach. Regulators may therefore use the findings from the current research, which indicate that adolescents are challenged by IM, as a call to action to consider how younger audiences cope with SM advertising and therefore whether further legislation is needed in this context. For younger children, the prospect of using critical thinking to make a more active response to advertising may not be feasible due to their more limited cognitive ability.

Therefore, regulators should consider whether certain advertising strategies, such as IM, are appropriate to use to target all young age groups. Currently, influencers as young as seven-years-old post sponsored content on YouTube in the form of 'toy unboxings' to target their peers (De Veirman et al., 2019). Subsequently, regulators should work with academics to consider legislating how covert SM advertising *manifests* for different age groups. For example, teenagers may be able to identify the presence of sponsorship as it is embedded within video content (e.g., where an influencer features sponsored brands without an ad bumper to delineate organic versus sponsored content). However, younger children may struggle to do so without the presence of an ad break, since those aged below 7 are limited processors and those aged 7-11 are cued processors (Roedder, 1981) (see Section 2.3.2). Therefore, the practice of IM requires further examination from legislators such as the FTC, the CCPC and the ASAI.

Limitations of the research are now acknowledged.

8.10 Limitations of the Research

Firstly, owing to employing an interpretive research design, it is recognised that the findings of the present research remain specific to the group of teenagers (15-17 years) with whom the research was conducted. While substantial justification was provided to rationalise this choice (see Section 2.5.1) and the focus on this age-group addresses gaps in the literature, it nonetheless does not consider early and late adolescents' AL in the context of SM advertising. Therefore, future research could investigate the nature of AL in the younger and older age segments that reflect early adolescence (i.e., those aged 10-14) and late adolescence/young adulthood (i.e., those aged 18-24) (SAHRC, 2013).

Furthermore, the findings are specific to the group of 29 teenagers, aged 15-17 years, who participated in this study. As such, it is acknowledged that the findings are not generalisable.

However, this was not the purpose of the present study which employed a qualitative methodology. The author found that a qualitative approach provided rich insights into the evaluations (and thought processes) which the participants had towards SM advertising, and as a result considered it especially useful in terms of exploring and probing the complex area of AL. In particular, the individual interview is underutilised with samples of young consumers (see Section 4.4.2) and particularly lent itself to this research that encouraged the participants to share their knowledge, feelings, and evaluations of SM advertising, including more personal perspectives relating to social learning and conformity pressures (see Sections 2.5 and 3.5.3). Therefore, the author encourages the use of qualitative methodology, and the use of in-depth interviews, within the field. Additionally, while the findings are not generalisable, the research does satisfy the transferability criterion (see Section 4.9.2).

Furthermore, limitations were placed by schools in terms of access to carry out interviews. This was particularly emphasised by school two, who allowed one day of access only. This meant that although further students were interested in taking part in the study, they were unable to since they had not remembered to return a parental consent form. The school setting was identified as most appropriate due to ethical considerations when conducting research with minors, e.g., to provide a familiar and neutral environment for the participants, as well as the need to ensure researcher and participants are always in sight of others (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). Indeed, the participants appeared comfortable and relaxed in the school environment, which meant it successfully facilitated the conduct of interviews. However, future research could consider other social spaces where it might be possible to conduct data collection with minors, which might not implement as many barriers in terms of access. For example, these might include after-school programmes or recreational club settings. The most important concern, however, must remain to be that of ethics. Therefore, in any of these spaces, researchers must first receive parental consent (as well as assent from the

participant), as well as ensuring that the space is one in which the participant feels familiar and comfortable to engage with the researcher, whilst being in sight of others.

As mentioned, limitations also arose whereby some pupils forgot to return parental consent forms when they were due to be interviewed, which meant that they could not take part in the research. The two-pronged process for navigating consent with teenagers (i.e., the need to attain both parental consent and participant assent) is non-negotiable, as it is one of the key ethical pillars underpinning research with minors (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012). However, future researchers could put plans in place to minimise delay caused by this. The author of the present research adapted her approach for the third and fourth school, by requesting the school to send out text reminders to parents, which alleviated the issue. This should be implemented from the start in future studies, where other steps could also be put into place, e.g., a parental information evening, where parents can sign consent forms on the spot.

Finally, the research design was cross-sectional, in that it allowed insight into one group of teenagers' AL at a particular point in time (Malhotra, 2019). While the design allowed the research question, aim and objectives to be addressed by allowing insight into both dispositional AL (through in-depth interviews) and situational AL (through elicitation), it may have been useful to employ a longitudinal research design. Specifically, Malmelin (2010) suggests that AL is a dynamic skill which needs to continue developing and changing over time alongside developments in advertising practices. Therefore, a longitudinal research design which seeks to investigate the strength of adolescents' ability to develop and adapt their AL in the context of SM could be a worthwhile approach. Depending on the outcome, this might add impetus to the creation of an educational AL programme designed to empower young consumers to develop a dynamic approach to AL.

Even so, it must be acknowledged that the author's access to the participant sample was governed by the school principals' granting of permission for (1) the research to be conducted in their schools and during the school-day, and (2) allowing a limited amount of access in which to conduct the interviews. Also, the principals' preference was that the participants be drawn from the Transition Year cohort of students (a non-examination year). Therefore, repeated or ongoing access to the same cohort of students that a longitudinal research design would require, might prove difficult to achieve.

Final remarks are now presented to conclude the thesis.

8.11 Final Remarks

The academic community have an important role to play in empowering young people to be critical consumers in the context of contemporary advertising. This thesis provides several contributions which help us to understand more about adolescents' understanding, attitudes, and moral evaluations of advertising on SM (see Table 8.2). Based on the knowledge contributed, it is clear that although teenagers may understand tactics used to target them, as well as having the propensity to critique the appropriateness of such strategies, the application of this knowledge is dependent on the nature and origin of advertising. This means that the marketer's ability to craft messaging which pleases the consumer; emerges from a meaningful source; or provides opportunities for social learning can impede critical response.

Therefore, the AL of adolescents requires bolstering, and that is the responsibility of educators, policymakers, and academics to work together to develop a programme which is effective at doing so. It is posited that an educational programme which utilises a continuum approach might be useful in this regard. The findings of this research reveal that the consumer socialisation of adolescents is currently mostly informed by experiences of trial and error, rather than interactions with socialisation agents. Steps should be taken to address this, rather than leaving adolescents to their own devices in their attempts to adapt and develop their AL in a new media environment.

Table 8.2: *The Contributions Made to Knowledge by the Present Research.*

Number & Section	Contribution	Addressing Gaps in the Literature
1 (Section 8.3)	Identification of a demonstrable gulf that exists between dispositional AL (i.e., awareness and understanding of the nature of advertising in general) and situational AL (i.e., retrieval and deployment of this knowledge when exposed to specific advertising episodes).	• Emphasis in previous studies on focusing on one manifestation (Zarouali et al., 2019) • Presumption that one manifestation leads to the other (De Pauw et al., 2019) but this is not empirically explored (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018)
2 (Section 8.3)	Demonstration that positive affective AL impacts the application of the detachment effect, where positive dispositions towards advertising meant that participants did not seek to detach themselves from advertising, but rather responded with interest, and sometimes, purchase intent.	• Lack of AL studies which remain open to affective AL including positive attitudes (Hudders et al., 2017) • Challenges assumptions which have been present in the literature for almost three decades – the principle that identification of advertising leads to critical responses via the change-of-meaning and detachment effect (An et al., 2014; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hudders et al., 2017; Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011).
3 (Section 8.4)	Illustration that within their moral AL, the participants had a transactional approach to SM advertising in terms of weighing up the costs of being exposed to advertising (e.g., the marketers' access and subsequent use of their personal data within targeted advertising) versus the benefits (e.g., receiving relevant and personalised advertising).	• Dearth of research on the moral dimension of AL (Hudders et al., 2017; Zarouali et al., 2019) • Extends privacy calculus model (Laufer & Woulfe, 1977; Zarouali et al, 2018b) by demonstrating that a cost-benefit analysis is not only carried out in the context of targeted advertising, but also other SM advertising strategies, including influencer marketing • Extends the findings of van Reijmersdal et al.'s (2012) study by indicating that the adolescent participants of the current research were *choosing* not to retrieve and apply their moral evaluations of advertising where SM advertising was seen to benefit them as

		opposed to other studies focusing on younger children who did not have the ability to retrieve and apply such knowledge (e.g., Mallinckrodt & Mizerski, 2007)
4 (Section 8.5)	Demonstration that affective AL mediates the application of the cognitive and moral dimensions of AL, whereby positive attitudes towards advertising led to moral evaluations of the advertisement as fair, and a reluctance to activate cognitive knowledge.	• Calls for research to investigate how the different nodes of AL (cognitive, affective, and moral) interact, in absence of similar studies (Hudders et al., 2017)
5 (Section 8.6)	Conceptualisation of AL as a continuum, rather than a binary condition, which acknowledges that a gulf can occur between dispositional and situational AL.	• Addresses the prospect that young consumers' perceptions about their AL might not match reality (De Jans, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018, p.415), i.e., that dispositional and situational AL may not always be aligned, as demonstrated by the first contribution. • Encourages the use of reflection and critical thinking in the context of advertising, and emphasises that outcomes of nuanced thinking can be both negative and positive evaluations of advertising (De Pauw et al., 2017)
6 (Section 8.6)	Proposal of a new definition of AL, as follows: *Advertising literacy is the dynamic, critical skill of understanding and evaluating advertising practices, as well as the use of this skill to achieve agency during exposure, and as such comprises the interplay between an overall awareness, understanding and moral evaluation of advertising (dispositional literacy) and the ability to retrieve and deploy this understanding when exposed to specific advertising episodes (situational literacy).*	• Acknowledges active, goal-directed consumers (e.g., adolescents), in absence of such an approach in the literature, which instead tends to conceptualise young consumers as passive conduits which advertising passes through (e.g., Rozendaal, Lapierre, et al., 2011) • Acknowledges 'advertising practices', thereby calling to attention the blurred and oblique nature of new advertising contexts, such as SM where advertising emerges in paid, owned and earned media, in response to calls in the literature for SM advertising to be defined more broadly (Voorveld, 2019)

Source: developed by the author.

The social constructionist perspective underpinning the research allowed the author to appreciate the social learning which took place for the adolescents as a result of interacting with advertising, especially where it emerged from influencers. When considering contemporary advertising, the entertaining and 'fun' nature of the content is a concern for authors who believe this might lead to implicit persuasion (e.g., Hudders et al., 2017; Nairn & Fine, 2008). But this research reveals that adolescents place deeper meanings within advertising which go beyond entertainment value and relate to social learning, developing and managing their sense of identity, and navigating relationships with peers. As such, the relationship between adolescents and SM advertising is deeper than relating to entertainment alone.

In conclusion, the current research reveals that while adolescents display sophisticated knowledge in the context of SM advertising and a fascinating level of self-sufficiency in developing it, they may indeed be susceptible to certain aspects which evoke strong positive attitudes within them, which promotes a reluctance to enact critical response. The AL literature therefore needs to update the lens it uses when considering the relationship between young consumers and advertising. Specifically, it needs to adapt from conceptualising children and teenagers as passive conduits from which advertising passes through, to active agents who seek out advertising to meet their own goals. In this way, it may be possible to move from promoting quick heuristics like automatic negative responses, to responses which utilise critical thinking. The latter promotes a reflective approach which may be useful over a lifetime, making AL a lifelong skill which can always be improved.

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List of Employability Skills and Discipline Specific Skills Training

Employability skills training undertaken as follows:

- Business Research Methods (5 credits, TU Dublin Aungier Street)
- Qualitative Research Summer School 2017 (2 credits, DCU)
- Introduction to Pedagogy (5 credits, TU Dublin Sackville Place)
- Hospitality, Tourism, Leisure & Event Research Workshop (5 credits, TU Dublin Cathal Brugha Street)
- Qualitative Research Summer School 2018 (5 credits, DCU)
- Research Integrity (5 credits, online TU Dublin)

Discipline specific training undertaken as follows:

- Project Management (5 credits, TU Dublin Aungier Street)
- Marketing Communications (5 credits, TU Dublin Cathal Brugha Street)
- Integrated Marketing Communications (5 credits, TU Dublin Aungier Street)

Therefore I have achieved 42 credits overall, surpassing the 40 required by the end of the programme.

Appendices

Appendix A

Theme Sheet for Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

Opening Questions
- Do you use the internet often?
- What do you use to go on the internet? (Smartphone, laptop, etc.)
- What do you use the internet for?
- Do you use social media? (Why? What platforms? How often?)
- What do you do on these sites? (Who do you follow? Why? Who is your favourite?)

Main body of Interview - questions to be asked in no particular order but may be introduced at relevant junctures according to flow of conversation

Research Objective One: Cognitive AL
- Do brands use social media? In what ways do they use it? Can you tell me a little about that?
- Do they act the same way on TV? Can you tell me a bit about that?
- Have you ever felt that marketers are trying to target you? In what way?
- Have you ever come across advertising online? (then ask specifically on social media)
- How do you know that it's advertising? (adapted to whatever format introduced by participant)
- Have you or your friends ever posted about a brand on social media? In what way?

Research Objective Two: Affective AL
- Why would you decide to 'like' or follow a brand page on social media?
- How do you react to advertising on social media? (*this may also address research objective three*)
- Do you ever find it irritating? When? Can you give an example?
- Are there ads that you enjoy on social media? Can you give an example?
- If a friend posts on _____ (e.g., Facebook, Instagram – whatever social media platforms the participant has mentioned) about a brand, how do you react?

Research Objective Three: Moral AL
- Why do you think marketers/brands use social media?
- Do you think people get paid to post about brands on social media? Can you tell me a little about that? (*this also addresses research objective one*)
- Do you think this can be considered as advertising? Why/why not? (*this also addresses research objective one*)
- Do you think you always recognise when this happens? Why/why not? How do you react?
- Have you ever experienced an ad that you felt was tailored specifically to you? What did you think about that?

End of interview: Elicitation – stimulus material (examples of IM) will be introduced at the end of each interview.

Questions at this point will be guided by the participants' response to and discussion on the material, but might include:
- What do you think this is about?
- Why has the influencer shared this?
- Do you usually read all the text on these kinds of posts?
- What do you think about this?
- How would you react to this?
- Would you spend time having a look at it?

If they identify it as sponsored:
- How did you know/why do you think this has been sponsored?
- What about the content tells you that?
- Did you notice that straight away?
- What are your thoughts on this practice?

Appendix B

Garda Vetting Confirmation

Appendix C

Initial Contact with School Principal

Dear Principal,

My name is Emma Sweeney, and I am a PhD researcher at Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street. The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral thesis involves exploring teenagers' advertising literacy in the context of social media (in other words, how adept they are at recognising and responding to advertising and branded content such as third-party advertising on social media). This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor (email: malawlor@dit.ie, phone: 01 402 7172).

I am contacting you to seek your permission to carry out my research in your school. The age of participants I would like to interview is 15-17 (approximately fourth- and fifth-year students, depending on what is convenient for the school). I would hope to carry out an individual interview with approximately 20 students (depending on parental consent and their agreement to take part). I would envisage this being concluded within a school week (approximately 3 to 4 school days). To carry out the interviews, I would require a room or social space (such as an assembly area) near to the classrooms so that I can escort each student to and from class. I have been Garda vetted, and my research adheres to all applicable ethical guidelines set out by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs: Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Kids, the Data Protection Act 1988, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the IUA Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland and Esomar World Research Codes and Guidelines: Interviewing Children and Young People (for example: during the individual interviews I will implement an open door policy to remain in sight of others as recommended by the Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2012). Pending your permission, I would then contact parents with information sheets and consent forms, and pending parental consent, I would then approach students with the same.

Please find enclosed an information sheet detailing my project and the research process in more detail. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0872078978.

Yours sincerely,
Emma Sweeney

Information Sheet for School Principal

Title of Research: Young People's Advertising and Commercial Literacy in the Context of Social Media

I would like to invite a number of your students (aged 15-17, approximately fourth- and fifth-year students) to take part in a PhD research study. Please take the time to read this information sheet on why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for the school and its students. Please ask any questions if anything you read is unclear or if you would like more information.

Who I am and what this study is about

My name is Emma Sweeney, and I am currently studying for my PhD in marketing under the supervision of Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor in the College of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street. The aim of this study is to explore young people's advertising literacy or understanding of advertising content in an online context, with a particular focus on social media, i.e. how young people evaluate and interpret commercial content such as third-party advertising on social media. The age-group I hope to interview are 15–17-year-olds, however this will depend on what is convenient for the school. Our hope for the study is that by understanding how young people interact with embedded marketing techniques online, we can present our findings with the aim of suggesting advertising guidelines which are more ethically appropriate for younger age groups.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part will involve students participating in an individual interview with me which will be concluded within approximately an hour. The interviews will take place at a time which suits the school, but the aim is for November or December. Permission will be sought from the student to voice record the interview, however they are welcome to decline. Pending permission, I will use a dictaphone to record the interviews, which will then be uploaded into a password protected google drive folder (an individual file for each interview). Only myself and my supervisor will have access to this data. I will require access to a classroom or social space (such as an assembly area or canteen) during the school day for the duration of the research. Permission will be sought via information sheet and consent form from both parents/guardians and the student themselves. Those students who have obtained parental consent will decide for themselves whether they wish to take part or not (the final say being left up to themselves). However, the student is free to withdraw from the research at any time, at which point I will immediately delete any recording of their interview/partial interview. If access is granted, the interview will take part in the school during the school day and the students will be escorted to and from the interview by myself. The use of visuals (such as examples of advertisements which appear on social media, and which are appropriate to this age-group) may be used to stimulate discussion. Some examples are provided below:

Instagram

hollywilloughby
Paid partnership with **dietcokegb**

3,805 likes
hollywilloughby Loving the new cans
@DietCokeGB... swipe to see the beautiful new
designs that inspired this look 💋
#ItStartedWithADietCoke #ad xx

jamesalankavanagh
3Arena

Following

jamesalankavanagh OH DON'T MIND ME
DOING MY DJ DEBUT for @cocacola at the
Premium Club in the 3Arena 😎
#ShareTheMusic #DJames 🎧⚡Ad

Load more comments

iandfitz @robkenny_ ☐☐☐

claireoconnor38 @_kerricrowe.x hope we
win so bad😂😂 need to meet him and see
picture this😍😍😍

catherinee @teresamartinamcc better
get ready for the concert tomorrow, need
to wash my make up brushes ☐☐☐☐

2,366 likes

17 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...

roblipsett ✓
Dublin, Ireland

Follow

roblipsett The dark evenings are closing in,
time to go into hibernation mode 🐻🍫
Jacket: @Primark
#IWorkWithPrimark

Load more comments

adam_fit Freshh 👌👌👌

ben.f9 @roblipsett ok i will be counting
down till march 17th then haha 😂

marquitosk88 #lfarmy

jemmakatie73 What size are you wearing
@roblipsett ? ☐

silispongegiveaway XMy bo 🎅🧑

scolly86 Wtf is Primark man...it's pennys
#lfarmy

hynes2021 #lfarmy

ethan_murray1 When's the baby due?

andrea_lav ☐☐☐☐☐☐🔥🔥🔥🔥

15,816 likes

4 DAYS AGO

Add a comment...

410

Topics discussed will include:

- Social media use (e.g. on what platforms, frequency of use, choice of device, likes and dislikes, etc.)

- Advertising online (in particular on social media)

- What types of advertising and marketing tactics the student encounters on social media

- How brands act on social media

- Recognition of commercial intent and covert marketing tactics on social media

- How the student reacts to such marketing

Why have the students at this school been invited to take part?

Your school has been invited to take part because students of this age in Ireland actively use the internet and are prolific social media users on platforms including Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube (based on Irish statistics for their age bracket).

Does your school have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and is up to the discretion of the school. You have the right not to participate at all.

Will taking part be confidential?

Anonymity will be granted to participants and the school at all times. Participant names will not be used in either the data analysis or when findings from this research are published.

How will information provided by participants be recorded, stored and protected?

The interview will be voice recorded using a dictaphone and will then be uploaded into an individual password protected google drive folder (and subsequently deleted from the dictaphone). The password will be known only to me. The data will be accessed by myself and my supervisor, Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor and may be re-used in further publications (detailed below).

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be published in my doctoral thesis. Findings related to the research project may be disseminated in conferences, journal articles and used for teaching purposes. As stated previously, anonymity will be granted to participants.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you have any queries, you would like addressed, please contact:

Emma Sweeney (emma-sweeney@live.co.uk), phone number: 0872078978

Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor (malawlor@dit.ie), phone number: (01) 402 7172

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

<u>Appendix E</u>

Information Sheet for Parents

Title of Research: Young People's Advertising and Commercial Literacy in the Context of Social Media

I would like to invite your son/daughter to take part in a research study. Please take the time to read this information sheet on why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for your son/daughter. Please ask any questions if anything you read is unclear or if you would like more information.

Who I am and what this study is about

My name is Emma Sweeney, and I am currently studying for my PhD in marketing under the supervision of Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor, School of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street. The aim of this study is to explore young people's advertising literacy in an online context, with a particular focus on social media, i.e. how young people evaluate and interpret commercial content on social media. Our hope for the study is that by understanding how young people interact with embedded marketing techniques online, we can present our findings with the aim of suggesting advertising guidelines which are more ethically appropriate for younger age groups.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part will involve your son/daughter participating in an individual interview with me which will be concluded within approximately an hour. The interviews will take place at a time which suits the school, but the aim is for November or December. If you decide to give permission for your son/daughter to take part in the research, I will then invite him/her to take part via information sheet and consent form. He/she will then decide for themselves whether they wish to participate or not. Permission will be sought from your son/daughter to voice record the interview, however they are welcome to decline. Pending permission, I will use a dictaphone to record the interviews, which will then be uploaded into a password protected google drive folder (an individual file for each interview). Your son/daughter is free to withdraw from the research at any time, at which point I will immediately delete any recording of their interview/partial interview. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to this data. Your son/daughter will be escorted to and from the interview by myself. The use of visuals (such as examples of advertisements which appear on social media, and which are appropriate for this age-group) may be used to stimulate discussion. Some examples are provided below:

Topics discussed will include:

- Social media use (e.g. on what platforms, frequency of use, choice of device, likes and dislikes, etc)

- Advertising online (in particular on social media)

- What types of advertising and marketing tactics your son/daughter encounters on social media

- How brands act on social media

- Recognition of commercial intent and covert marketing tactics on social media

- How your son/daughter reacts to such marketing

Why has your son/daughter been invited to take part?

Your son/daughter has been invited to take part because adolescents of their age-group in Ireland are active users of the internet and are prolific social media users on platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube (based on Irish statistics for their age bracket).

Does your son/daughter have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your son/daughter has the right not to participate at all, to refuse any question or to leave the study at any time. If you decide to give consent for your son/daughter to participate, he/she will then be invited to participate. They are free to consent or decline to take part in the research.

Will taking part be confidential?

Anonymity will be granted to participants at all times. Participant names will not be used in either the data analysis or when findings from this research are published.

How will information provided be recorded, stored and protected?

The interview will be voice recorded using a dictaphone and will then be uploaded into an individual password protected google drive folder (and subsequently deleted from the dictaphone). The password will be known only to me. The data will be accessed by myself and my supervisor, Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor and may be re-used in further publications (detailed below).

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be published in my doctoral thesis. Findings related to the research project may be disseminated in conferences, journal articles and used for teaching purposes. As stated previously, anonymity will be granted to participants.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you have any queries, you would like addressed, please contact:

Emma Sweeney (emma-sweeney@live.co.uk), phone number: 0872078978

Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor (malawlor@dit.ie), phone number: (01) 402 7172

Appendix F

Parental Consent Form

Your son/daughter has been invited to join a research study which looks at how marketers target young people online, particularly on social media. The title of the research project is "Young People's Advertising and Commercial Literacy in the Context of Social Media". It is being conducted by Emma Sweeney (PhD student) under the supervision of Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor, Dublin Institute of Technology. The decision to let your son/daughter join, or not to join, is up to you.

Your son/daughter will be asked to take part in an individual interview with Emma to explore their evaluation and interpretations of commercial content on social media platforms. This will be completed within approximately an hour and will be voice recorded on a dictaphone (pending the permission of your son/daughter), and subsequently stored in an individual password protected encrypted format. The interview will take place at school during a school day. Your son/daughter will be escorted to and from the classroom by the researcher (Emma) when conducting the interview, and the permission of the school's principal will be obtained. Your son/daughter may decide to withdraw from the study at any time at their own discretion.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your son/daughter has the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Your son/daughter's name will not be used when findings from this study are published.

Our hope for the study is that by understanding how young people interact with embedded marketing techniques online, we can present our findings with the aim of suggesting advertising guidelines which are more ethically appropriate for younger age groups.

The following section offers you two options. Please fill in your preferred option:

Permission for a Child to Participate in Research

As parent or legal guardian, I authorize _____ (child's name) to become a participant in the research study described in this form.

Child's Date of Birth

_____

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature   Date

_____   _____

As parent or legal guardian, I decline to give my consent for _____ (child's name) to participate in the research study described in this form.

Child's Date of Birth

_____

Parent or Legal Guardian's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Information Sheet for Participants

Title of Research: Young People's Advertising and Commercial Literacy in the Context of Social Media

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, please take the time to read this information sheet on why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Please ask any questions if anything you read is unclear or if you would like more information.

Who I am and what this study is about

My name is Emma Sweeney, and I am currently studying for my PhD in marketing under the supervision of Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor, School of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street. The aim of this study is to explore your online advertising literacy or, in other words, your understanding of advertising online, i.e. how you evaluate and interpret commercial content on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. Our hope for the study is that by understanding how young people interact with embedded marketing techniques online, we can present our findings with the aim of suggesting advertising guidelines which are more ethically appropriate for your age group.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part will involve participating in an individual interview with me which will be concluded within approximately an hour. The interviews will take place at a time which suits the school, but the aim is for November or December. Permission will be sought from you to voice record the interview; however you are welcome to decline. Pending permission, I will use a dictaphone to record the interviews, which will then be uploaded into a password protected google drive folder (an individual file for each interview). Only myself and my supervisor will have access to this data. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time, at which point I will immediately delete any recording of your interview/partial interview. The interview will take part in school during a school day, and you will be escorted to and from the interview by myself, (Emma). Topics discussed will include advertising online (in particular on social media), what types of advertising and marketing techniques you encounter on social media, if you feel you are being targeted by marketers online, and so on. The use of visuals (such as examples of advertisements which appear on social media, and which are appropriate for your age-group) may be used in the discussion. Some examples are provided below:

Instagram

hollywilloughby
Paid partnership with **dietcokegb**

3,805 likes

hollywilloughby Loving the new cans
@DietCokeGB... swipe to see the beautiful new
designs that inspired this look 💋
#ItStartedWithADietCoke #ad xx

jamesalankavanagh
3Arena
Following

jamesalankavanagh OH DON'T MIND ME
DOING MY DJ DEBUT for @cocacola at the
Premium Club in the 3Arena 😊
#ShareTheMusic #DJames 🎧⚡Ad

Load more comments

iandfitz @robkenny_ □□□

claireoconnor38 @_kerricrowe.x hope we
win so bad😂😂 need to meet him and see
picture this😊😊😊

catherinee @teresamartinamcc better
get ready for the concert tomorrow, need
to wash my make up brushes □□□

2,366 likes

17 HOURS AGO

Add a comment...

roblipsett ✔
Dublin, Ireland
Follow

roblipsett The dark evenings are closing in,
time to go into hibernation mode 🐻🍫
Jacket: @Primark
#IWorkWithPrimark

Load more comments

adam_fit Freshh 🔥🔥🔥

ben.f9 @roblipsett ok i will be counting
down till march 17th then haha 😂

marquitosk88 #lfarmy

jemmakatie73 What size are you wearing
@roblipsett ? □

silispongegiveaway XMy bo 📷 👤

scolly86 Wtf is Primark man...it's pennys
#lfarmy

hynes2021 #lfarmy

ethan_murray1 When's the baby due?

andrea_lav □□□□□□🔥🔥🔥🔥

15,816 likes

4 DAYS AGO

Add a comment...

417

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because people your age are popular social media users according to statistics based on your age group in Ireland.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all, to refuse any question or to leave the study at any time.

Will taking part be confidential?

Anonymity will be granted to participants at all times. Participant names will not be used in either the data analysis or when findings from this research are published.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

The interview will be voice recorded using a dictaphone and will then be uploaded into an individual password protected google drive folder (and subsequently deleted from the dictaphone). The password will be known only to me. The data will be accessed by myself and my supervisor, Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor and may be re-used in further publications (detailed below).

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be published in my PhD thesis. Findings related to the research project may be disseminated in conferences, journal articles and used for teaching purposes. As stated previously, anonymity will be granted to participants.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you have any queries, you would like addressed, please contact:

Emma Sweeney (emma-sweeney@live.co.uk)

Phone Number: 0872078978

Or

Dr. Margaret-Anne Lawlor (malawlor@dit.ie)

Phone Number: (01) 402 7172

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix H

Assent Form for Participants

Hi, my name is Emma and I'm a PhD student in Dublin Institute of Technology.

My research involves looking at how your age group evaluates and interprets commercial content on social media.

I would like your permission to interview you and use the information you provide in my PhD thesis. You will be granted anonymity, and if you want to stop taking part at any time you are free to do so. The interview will be finished within approximately an hour and will be voice recorded on a dictaphone pending your permission, and subsequently stored in an individual password protected encrypted format. If you change your mind about taking part in the study at any time, that's completely fine and up to you.

I would like to ask you questions about what you think of advertising, how you deal with it online, what you like and dislike about advertising online and how you feel you may be targeted.

If you have any questions for me, please feel free to ask them at any time.

If that sounds ok and you would like to take part in my research, please sign below. If you do not wish to take part, that's ok.

Name (block capitals): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I – Pre-Selected Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix J - Pre-Selected Visual Used in Elicitation
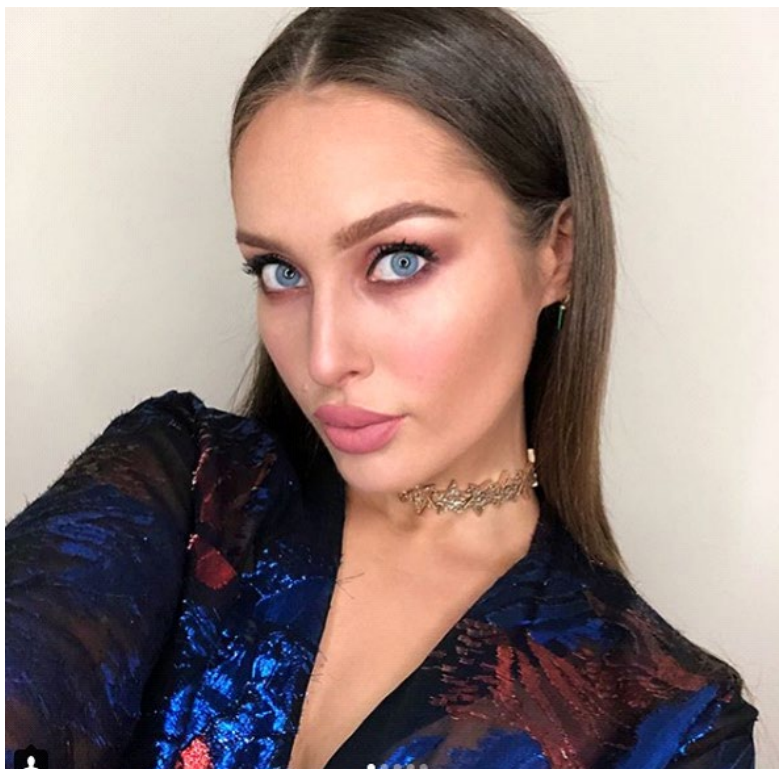
420

Appendix K- Pre-Selected Visual Used in Elicitation

Terrie
18h ago from Camera Roll

I loooove these 😭 (swipe up for affiliated link)

Appendix L - Pre-Selected Visual Used in Elicitation

sosueme_ie ✓ • Follow

sosueme_ie Snow day = photo op 🙆 ☺
Like most, I adore anything personalised!
I'm in love with my new studded handbag
from @loverofluxe! Spot the little 'SJ' at the
bottom 😍🙆 If you're on the hunt for a
bag, clutch or card wallet, check out
www.loverofluxe.com! Such lovely gift ideas
too. (Nudge: Mother's Day is coming up 💁
If you prefer to see things in person, then
check out Lover Of Luxe POP up shop this
weekend (3rd & 4th) at @dundrumtc 👯‍♀️
🌿#personalisedgifts #sp #loverofluxe

treatboutiquedublin Gorgeous SJ .. We
love some personalization ourselves 😍

only_simona @katezenky looks gorgeous?!

vickinotaro Adore this!

katezenky @only_simona 😍

sosubysjlover Gorge😍

1,139 likes

MARCH 1

Add a comment...

Appendix M - Pre-Selected Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix N – Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix O - Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix P - Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix Q - Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix R - Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Appendix S - Participant Driven Visual Used in Elicitation

Master Document of Codes (Manual Analysis)

1. Daily Internet Use
2. uses a phone to access internet
3. Uses internet for social media
4. Does not use twitter
5. snapchat to communicate with friends
6. snapchat as essential
7. everyone on snapchat
8. Favourite as Instagram
9. most time on snapchat
10. keeping up to date with friends
11. using social media to share personal updates
12. brands using social media
13. brands sharing new products
14. brand profile page updates as a form of advertising
15. Suggested ads
16. Pre-roll ads on YouTube
17. Overlooking IM
18. Overlooking native ads
19. Identifying ad by tone
20. Ads on all social media
21. more ads on some social media platforms than others
22. not many ads on snapchat
23. Ads on snapchat
24. Ignoring ads
25. attention to ads moderated by personal interest
26. attention to ads moderated by frequency of ad
27. Targeted Advertising
28. knowledge of influencers getting paid to post about brands
29. Recognition of disclosure
30. Indifference to IM
31. would not take recommendation from IM
32. would read IM
33. not confident in recognising IM
34. Lack of awareness of hashtag disclosures
35. trust of IM
36. trust moderated by overtness of IM
37. knowledge of marketers tactics in using social media to access young audience
38. every young person on social media
39. does not feel targeted by marketers
40. indifference to social media ads
41. considering perspective of brand
42. considering perspective of social media site
43. Informational value
44. Irritation resulting from ads which are too frequent
45. Preference of TV ads
46. Social media ads as not enjoyable
47. indifferent to UGC by friends
48. negative towards friends UGC
49. prefers content originating from brand than from friend
50. trusts brand & friend content equally
51. assumption of compensation in influencer recommendation
52. payment doesn't change meaning of recommendation/post
53. payment doesn't affect trust of influencer post/recommendation
54. Ads on TV are longer
55. Ads on social media are repetitive
56. ads on social media and TV are the same - no preference
57. identified as ad because of tagged brand
58. Identifying disclosure
59. Identifying #ad
60. Influencer perceived as showing off
61. Brand gifting influencer
62. Doesn't understand affiliate link
63. Positive towards social media ad
64. Ads as useful
65. Uses internet for homework

66. Uses internet for viewing purposes
67. Social media to keep up to date
68. Favourite as snapchat
69. follows influencers
70. follows same people across all social media
71. Security on social media as a concern
72. Brands use of social media increasing recently
73. Social media as important for brands
74. Public stories as ads on snapchat
75. Pop ups
76. Recognition of overt ad
77. Explicit disclosure
78. Follows brand pages
79. Follows clothes brands
80. Opting-in to advertising
81. brands leveraging fame/influence of influencers for advertising
82. Aware of advertiser's responsibility
83. Scepticism towards IM
84. Compensation resulting in lack of trust
85. awareness of subtle advertising present in sponsorships
86. Concern for genuineness in IM
87. lack of congruity with brand resulting in negative attitude
88. never persuaded/purchased as a result of IM
89. acknowledgement of UGC acting as brand endorsement
90. Social media as more popular than TV
91. Social media as economical to place ads
92. Social media ads active rather than passive
93. acknowledgment of targeting of age group
94. Dislike of snapchat ads
95. Dislike of ads which disrupt experience

96. Dislike of advertising content disguised as editorial/organic
97. More positive to ads on Instagram
98. Social media ads as enjoyable
99. Trusts friend post over brand post
100. Scepticism towards brand post
101. Taking recommendation from IM
102. Trusts friend post over IM
103. Missed signpost
104. Missed #sp
105. Lack of awareness of #sp
106. Guessing what disclosure means
107. Identifying ad by discount code
108. uncertainty regarding relationship between brand & influencer
109. Identification of compensation for influencer
110. Identified #sp
111. Participant learned as they went along
112. Not reading hashtags
113. Not reading full captions of cosmetics posts
114. Understanding of brand ambassador
115. Identifying brand ambassador as ad
116. Influencer post as trying to get attention of brand
117. Identification of working with brand
118. Unsure whether influencer is being compensated
119. Missed paid partnership
120. Unfamiliar with paid partnership
121. Affiliate link
122. Some understanding of IM
123. Unaware of compensation
124. Unfamiliar with affiliate
125. Uses internet for research

126. Snapchat for friends exclusively
127. Instagram better platform to follow celebs on
128. Favourite to follow
129. Enjoys youtubers
130. Enjoys following companies
131. Social media as complementary to interests/hobbies/lifestyle
132. conscious of world news in relation to social media
133. conscious of data protection in relation to social media
134. Social media as causing drama
135. Brands using social media to interact with customers
136. Brands using customer experience to advertise
137. Reports ads
138. Knowledge of IM
139. youtubers as doing a lot of sponsored content
140. audiences not liking sponsored content
141. Considering perspective of influencer
142. Enjoys IM
143. Follows brand profiles of brands he/she uses
144. IM as helpful
145. Avoids news sources on social media
146. Avoids native advertising
147. Explicitly stating sponsorship deal
148. Trust in influencers to disclose sponsorship
149. Endorses brand/company on social media
150. Tolerance of ads differing by platform
151. Has created branded UGC

152. UGC as a way to achieve/gain something
153. Trusts influencer & friend content equally
154. Not confident that they will recognise IM all of the time
155. Preference of social media ads
156. Not reading full captions
157. People likely to be influenced by style of influencers
158. Uncertainty regarding compensation of influencer
159. Uncertainty regarding meaning of paid partnership
160. Liking of ad moderated by overtness
161. No favourite social media
162. What they dislike about social media is ads
163. Ads as irritating
164. IM as implicit
165. Unaware of disclosure
166. Admiration of marketers' tactics
167. Positive towards IM
168. Ads considered subtle
169. IM more prevalent on Instagram
170. Knowledge of marketers' tactics
171. People want to be like influencer
172. Feeling targeted by marketers
173. Attitude to ads moderated by frequency
174. trust increased if influencer regularly uses product/brand
175. ads on social media geared towards young generation
176. Familiar with paid partnership
177. assumption/first reaction is to consider influencer post as ad

178. Likes Instagram shopping function
179. scepticism
180. Uses internet for viewing purposes
181. Favourite as YouTube
182. Following people differing by platform
183. More likely to follow influencers on Instagram
184. Uses social media to access news
185. Ad avoidance
186. Paying attention to ads as a last resort/boredom
187. Dislike of ads
188. Primarily talking about explicit/overt ads
189. Enjoys content from brand profile
190. Purchase intention
191. Content on brand profiles resulting in purchase
192. Unaware that people get paid to post about brands
193. Knows that UGC benefits the brand
194. Takes recommendations from friends posts on social media
195. marketers use social media to access large audience
196. general liking of/positive towards social media ads
197. tolerance of ads the same across all platforms
198. Liking of ads moderated by interest in product/brand
199. Enjoyment of clothes ads
200. positive about ads featuring familiar brands
201. posting about brands/products as normal on social media
202. Social media as place to boast

203. Mistaking IM for organic recommendation
204. Does not use Facebook
205. Instagram for observing/consuming content
206. Snapchat for interaction
207. Dislikes unrealistic portrayal of life on social media
208. Dislikes brand profiles which don't interact with followers
209. values interaction with brands on social media
210. Social media advertising interactive while TV advertising is passive
211. Embedded advertising
212. Ad considered hidden
213. Dislike of ads which are attempting to be hidden
214. Brand profile content not considered advertising
215. avoids following profiles which post too much promoted material
216. Most ads on Instagram
217. Ads based on analytics
218. lack of genuineness resulting in lack of trust
219. trust of IM depends on overall trustworthiness of influencer
220. disclosure doesn't stop him/her looking at post
221. disclosure changes meaning of post
222. Does not follow brand profiles
223. Brands act same way on TV as on social media
224. Has noticed ads on social media
225. Paid appearances as ads
226. Does not understand #sp
227. sees person they follow online as role model
228. Ads mostly on Facebook

229. Positive towards friends UGC about brands
230. friends posts show you realistic portrayal of product/brand
231. Doesn't know whether it's an ad or not
232. feelings of confusion about IM
233. Uses internet for shopping
234. Snapchat as easy to use
235. Aware of disclosures
236. Follows brand profiles which are unique
237. Hard to tell if influencer is advertising
238. Social media saturated in ads
239. Following brand because of influencer
240. Dislikes IM
241. Considering perspective of marketer
242. Online ads cause pressure
243. Ads on TV target older generation
244. confusion about which brand is sponsoring the post
245. Unsure about meaning of brand ambassador
246. Not actively looking for disclosures
247. Compensation changes meaning of influencer post
248. Purchase decisions unaffected by influencer
249. won't follow brands which were involved in scandals/have had bad PR
250. attention to ads moderated by length of ad
251. attention moderated by excitement of ad
252. Dislikes clutter on social media
253. Follows brands based on recommendations from friends

254. Enjoys following cosmetics brand profiles
255. Trust of IM
256. Knowledge of compensation in kind
257. knows when to expect ad by language of favourite influencers
258. Consumer socialisation
259. Pays attention to IM
260. IM as selling out
261. Irritation caused by ads which are too long
262. Organic influencer content as more genuine
263. attention/attitude to IM depends on attitude towards influencer
264. Preference of ads which are clearly disclosed
265. Actively checks for disclosures
266. Enjoys following influencers
267. Follows brand profiles which are entertaining
268. Follows brand as a result of a competition
269. Avoids some brand profiles
270. Likes interactive social media ads
271. Concern for younger people in relation to IM
272. more attention paid to influencer content when it is sponsored
273. brands show more information on social media than TV
274. Prefers ads for smaller brands
275. negative evaluation of IM given to influencer rather than brand
276. Likes ads related to hobby

Appendix U - Preliminary Themes & Codes (Manual Analysis)

Acceptance of Advertising Moderated by Platform
94 - Dislike of Snapchat ads 97 - More positive to ads on Instagram 126 - snapchat for friends exclusively 127 - Instagram better platform to follow celebs on 150 - tolerance of ads differing by platform 178 - likes Instagram shopping function 182 - following people differing by platform 183 - more likely to follow influencers on Instagram 205 - Instagram for consuming/observing content 206 - snapchat for interaction 216 - most ads on Instagram 228 - ads mostly on Facebook

Ignoring Ads
24 - ignoring ads 25 - attention to ads moderated by personal interest 26 - attention to ads moderated by frequency of ad 146 - avoids native advertising 185 - ad avoidance 222 - does not follow brand profiles 250 – attention to ads moderated by length of ad 156 - not reading full captions

Advertising as Confusing to Navigate on Social Media
33 - not confident in recognising IM 106 - guessing what disclosure means 108 - uncertainty regarding relationship between brand & influencer 118 - unsure whether influencer is being compensated 122 - some understanding of IM 124 - unfamiliar with affiliate 154 - not confident that they will recognise IM all of the time 203 - Mistaking IM for organic recommendation 212 - Ad considered hidden 226 - does not understand #sp 231 - doesn't know whether it's an ad or not 232 - feelings of confusion about IM 237 - Hard to tell if influencer is advertising 244 - confusion about which brand is sponsoring the post

| 282 - does not understand advertising terms |
| 116 - influencer post as trying to get attention of brand |

Not Enacting Detachment Effect

35 - trust of IM
49 - prefers content originating from brand than from friend
52 - payment doesn't change meaning of recommendation/post
53 - payment doesn't affect trust of third-party post/recommendation
101 - Taking recommendation from IM
142 - Enjoys IM
144 - IM as helpful
153 - trusts influencer & friend content equally
157 - people likely to be influenced by style of influencers
167 - positive towards IM
174 - trust increased if influencer regularly uses product/brand
178 - likes Instagram shopping function
189 - enjoys content from brand profile
190 - purchase intention
191 - Content on brand profiles resulting in purchase
196 - general liking of/positive towards social media ads
200 - positive about ads featuring familiar brands
220 - disclosure doesn't stop him/her looking at post
227 - sees person they follow online as role model
239 - following brand because of influencer
255 - trust of IM
259 - pays attention to IM
272 - more attention paid to influencer content when it is sponsored
276 - likes ads related to hobby
379 - trusts influencer over friend

Social Media Ads as Useful

13 - brands sharing new products
43 - informational value
64 - ads as useful
130 - enjoys following companies
142 - enjoys IM
144 - IM as helpful
178 - likes Instagram shopping function
199 - enjoyment of clothes ads
272 - more attention paid to influencer content when it is sponsored
276 - likes ads related to hobby
255 - trust of IM
259 - pays attention to IM
276 - likes ads related to hobby

379 - trusts influencer over friend
101 - Taking recommendation from IM

Social Media as Commercial Space

12 - brands using social media
13 - brands sharing new products
14 - brand profile page updates as a form of advertising
20 - ads on all social media
21 - more ads on some social media platforms than on others
23 - ads on snapchat
27 – targeted advertising
37 - knowledge of marketers tactics in using social media to access young audience
50 - assumption of compensation in influencer recommendation
69 - follows influencers
72 - brands use of social media increasing recently
73 - social media as important for brands
80 – opting-in to advertising
91 - social media as economical to place ads
98 - social media ads as enjoyable
130 - enjoys following companies
135 - brands using social media to interact with customers
139 - youtubers as doing a lot of sponsored content
155 - preference of social media ads
169 - IM more prevalent on Instagram
178 - likes Instagram shopping function
197 - tolerance of ads the same across all platforms
216 - most ads on Instagram
224 - has noticed ads on social media
231 - doesn't know whether it's an ad or not
235 - aware of disclosures
238 - social media saturated in ads
257 - knows when to expect ad by language of favourite influencers
273 - brands show more information on social media than TV
177 - assumption/first reaction is to consider influencer post as ad

Difficulty Identifying Covert Ads

112 - not reading hashtags
113 - not reading full captions of cosmetics posts
120 - unfamiliar with paid partnership
124 - unfamiliar with affiliate
154 - not confident that they will recognise IM all of the time
156 - not reading full captions
158 - uncertainty regarding compensation of influencer

159 - uncertainty regarding meaning of paid partnership
165 - unaware of disclosure
214 - brand profile content not considered advertising
226 - does not understand #sp
231 - doesn't know whether it's an ad or not
237 - hard to tell if influencer is advertising
245 - unsure about meaning of brand ambassador
246 - not actively looking for disclosures
282 - does not understand advertising terms
34 - lack of awareness of hashtag disclosures
62 - doesn't understand affiliate link
105 - lack of awareness of #sp
106 - guessing what disclosure means
192 - Unaware that people get paid to post about brands
19 - Identifying ad by tone

Dislike of Social Media Ads

31 - would not take recommendation from IM
44 - irritation resulting from ads which are too frequent
46 - social media ads not enjoyable
95 - dislike of ads which disrupt experience
96 - dislike of advertising content disguised as editorial/organic
140 - audiences not liking sponsored content
150 - tolerance of ads differing by platform
160 - liking of ad moderated by overtness
162 - what they dislike about social media is ads
163 - ads as irritating
173 - attitude to ads moderated by frequency
186 - paying attention to ads as a last resort/boredom
187 - dislike of ads
213 - dislike of ads which are attempting to be hidden
240 - dislikes IM
242 - online ads cause pressure
260 - IM as selling out
261 - irritation caused by ads which are too long
283 - does not enjoy brand activity on social media
137 - reports ads

Disapproval of Covert Advertising on Social Media

264 - preference of ads which are clearly disclosed
271 - concern for younger people in relation to IM
96 - dislike of advertising content disguised as editorial/organic
164 - IM as implicit

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ 168 - ads considered subtle                                           │
│ 212 - ad considered hidden                                            │
│ 213 - dislike of ads which are attempting to be hidden                │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Opting-In to Brands on Social Media                      │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ 78 - follows brand pages                                              │
│ 79 - follows clothes brands                                           │
│ 143 - follows brand profiles of brands he/she uses                    │
│ 209 - values interaction with brands on social media                  │
│ 253 - follows brands based on recommendations from friends            │
│ 254 - enjoys following cosmetics brand profiles                       │
│ 236 - follows brand profiles which are unique                         │
│ 239 - following brand because of influencer                           │
│ 267 - follows brand profiles which are entertaining                   │
│ 268 - follows brand as a result of a competition                      │
│ 14 - brand profile page updates as a form of advertising              │
│ 80 – opting-in to advertising                                         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                      Paying attention to ads                          │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ 25 - attention to ads moderated by personal interest                  │
│ 26 - attention to ads moderated by frequency of ad                    │
│ 32 - would read IM                                                    │
│ 82 – opting-in to advertising                                         │
│ 186 - paying attention to ads as a last resort/boredom                │
│ 259 - pays attention to IM                                            │
│ 263 - attention/attitude to IM depends on attitude towards influencer │
│ 272 - more attention paid to influencer content when it is sponsored  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                       Ad Types Recognised                             │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ 15 - suggested ads                                                    │
│ 16 – pre-roll ads on YouTube                                          │
│ 23 - ads on snapchat                                                  │
│ 20 - ads on all social media                                          │
│ 29 - recognition of disclosure                                        │
│ 74 - public stories as ads on snapchat                                │
│ 75 - pop ups                                                          │
│ 76 - recognition of overt ad                                          │
│ 85 - awareness of subtle advertising present in sponsorships          │
│ 81 - brands leveraging fame/influence of influencers for advertising  │
│ 89 - acknowledgement of UGC acting as brand endorsement               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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115 - identifying brand ambassador as ad
121 - affiliate link
122 - some understanding of IM
138 - knowledge of IM
188 - primarily talking about explicit ads/overt ads
225 - paid appearances as ads

Dislikes Influencer for disseminating advertising

260 - IM as selling out
262 - Organic influencer content as more genuine
263 - attention/attitude to IM depends on attitude towards influencer
275 - negative evaluation of IM given to influencer rather than brand
31 - would not take recommendation from IM
219 - trust of IM depends on overall trustworthiness of influencer
60 - influencer perceived as showing off

Limited Knowledge of Marketers Tactics

284 - rudimentary knowledge of why brands use social media
123 – unaware of compensation
124 - unfamiliar with affiliate
188 - primarily talking about explicit/overt
192 - unaware that people get paid to post about brands
214 - brand profile content not considered advertising
245 - unsure about meaning of brand ambassador
246 - not actively looking for disclosures

Limited Knowledge of Covert SM Advertising

17 – overlooking IM
18 – overlooking native ads
33 - not confident in recognising IM
34 - lack of awareness of hashtag disclosures
121 - affiliate link
122 - some understanding of IM
203 - mistaking third party ad for organic recommendation

Frustration

173 - attitude to ads moderated by frequency

277 - attitude to ads moderated by how relevant they are
150 - tolerance of ads differing by platform
213 - dislike of ads which are attempting to be hidden
261 - irritation caused by ads which are too long
263 - attention/attitude to IM depends on attitude towards influencer
277 - attitude to ads moderated by how relevant they are
215 - avoids following profiles which post too much promoted material
252 - dislikes clutter on social media

Tolerance

40 - indifference to social media ads
30 – indifference to IM
150 - tolerance of ads differing by platform
197 – tolerance of ads the same across all platforms
198 - liking of ads moderated by interest in product/brand
200 - positive about ads featuring familiar brands
274 - prefers ads for smaller brands
39 - does not feel targeted by marketers
30 - indifference to IM

Knowledge of IM

28 - knowledge of influencers getting paid to post about brands
81 - brands leveraging fame/influence of influencers for advertising
85 - awareness of subtle advertising present in sponsorships
115 - identifying brand ambassador as ad
117 - identification of working with brand
121 - affiliate link
122 - some understanding of IM
138 - knowledge of IM
147 - explicitly stating sponsorship deal
148 - trust in influencers to disclose sponsorship
84 - compensation resulting in lack of trust
109 - identification of compensation for influencer

Aware of Disclosures

29 - recognition of disclosure
58 - identifying disclosure
59 - identifying #ad
77 - explicit disclosure
82 - aware of advertiser's responsibility
110 - identified #sp

148 - trust in influencers to disclose sponsorship
176 - familiar with paid partnership
221 - disclosure changes meaning of post
235 - aware of disclosures

Likes IM

32 - would read IM
259 - pays attention to IM
101 - taking recommendation from IM
142 - enjoys IM
144 - IM as helpful
167 - positive towards IM
171 - people want to be like influencer

Trusts IM

35 - trust of IM
36 - trust moderated by overtness of IM
174 - trust increased if influencer regularly uses product/brand
53 - payment doesn't affect trust of influencer post/recommendation
153 - trusts influencer & friend post equally
219 - trust of IM depends on overall trustworthiness of influencer
255 - trust of IM
279 - trusts influencer over friend
280 - cosmetics influencers as more genuine

Scepticism

83 - scepticism towards IM
88 - never persuaded/purchased as a result of IM
100 - scepticism towards brand post
179 - scepticism
221 – disclosure changes meaning of post

Awareness of Marketers' Tactics

89 - acknowledgement of UGC acting as brand endorsement
93 - acknowledgement of targeting of age group
114 - understanding of brand ambassador
115 - identifying brand ambassador as ad

117 - identification of working with brand
121 - affiliate link
135 - brands using social media to interact with customers
136 - brands using customer experience to advertise
166 - admiration of marketers tactics
170 - knowledge of marketers tactics
171 - people want to be like influencer
175 - ads on social media geared towards young generation
193 - knows that UGC benefits the brand
195 - marketers use social media to access large audience
217 - ads based on analytics
211 - embedded advertising
243 - ads on TV target older generation
256 – knowledge of compensation in kind
210 - social media advertising interactive while TV advertising is passive
92 - social media ads active rather than passive
61 - brand gifting influencer

Identifying ad by tone

57 - identified as ad because of tagged brand
107 - identifying ad by discount code
256 – knowledge of compensation in kind
257 - knows when to expect ads by language of favourite influencers
19 - identifying ad by tone

Does not trust IM

218 - lack of genuineness resulting in lack of trust
219 - trust of IM depends on overall trustworthiness of influencer
102 - trusts friend post over IM
86 - concern for genuineness in IM
87 - lack of congruity with brand resulting in negative attitude
218 - lack of genuineness resulting in lack of trust

Enacts Detachment Effect

247 - compensation changes meaning of influencer post
265 - actively checks for disclosures
31 - would not take recommendation from IM
84 - compensation resulting in lack of trust
86 - concern for genuineness in IM
87 - lack of congruity with brand resulting in negative attitude

88 - never persuaded/purchased as a result of IM
100 - scepticism towards brand post
102 - trusts friend post over IM
218 - lack of genuineness resulting in lack of trust
221 - disclosure changes meaning of post
247 - compensation changes meaning of influencer post
265 - actively checks for disclosures
275 - negative evaluation of IM given to influencer rather than brand
248 - purchase decisions unaffected by influencer

Marketer as Impinging on Privacy

27 – targeted advertising
71 - security on social media as a concern
133 - conscious of data protection in relation to social media
217 - ads based on analytics

UGC

149 - endorses brand/company on social media
151 - has created branded UGC
152 - UGC as a way to achieve/gain something
193 - knows that UGC benefits the brand
201 - posting about brands/products as normal on social media
202 - social media as place to boast
278 - UGC as not endorsing brand
229 - positive towards friends UGC about brands
230 - friends post shows you realistic portrayal of product/brand
47 - indifferent to UGC by friends
48 - negative towards friends UGC
89 - acknowledgement of UGC acting as brand endorsement
90 - social media as more popular than TV
194 - takes recommendations from friends posts on social media

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Interaction with Brands

208 - dislikes brand profiles which don't interact with followers
210 - social media advertising interactive while TV advertising is passive
270 - likes interactive social media ads
135 - brands using social media to interact with consumers
206 - snapchat for interaction
14 - brand profile page updates as advertising

Positive towards social media ads

196 - general liking of/positive towards social media ads
198 - liking of ad moderated by interest in product/brand
199 - enjoyment of clothes ads
200 - positive about ads featuring familiar brands
276 - likes ads related to hobby
43 - informational value
63 - positive towards social media ad
64 - ads as useful
97 - more positive to ads on Instagram
142 - enjoys IM
155 - preference of social media ads
167 - positive towards IM
178 - likes Instagram shopping function
270 - likes interactive social media ads
276 - likes ads related to hobby

Considering Others' Perspectives

41 - considering perspective of brand
42 – considering perspective of social media site
141 - considering perspective of influencer
241 - considering perspective of marketer

Uses of the Internet

222 - uses internet for shopping
285 - social media as addiction
1 - daily internet use
3 - uses internet for social media
4 - does not use twitter
5 - snapchat to communicate with friends
6 - snapchat as essential
7 - everyone on snapchat
8 - favourite as instagram
9 - most time on snapchat
10 - keeping up to date with friends
11 - using social media to share personal updates
38 - every young person on social media
65 - uses internet for homework
66 - uses internet for viewing purposes
67 - social media to keep up to date
68 - favourite as snapchat
70 - follows same people across all social media

125 - uses internet for research
131 - social media as complementary to interests/hobbies/lifestyle
181 - favourite as YouTube
184 - uses social media to access news

Appendix V - Main themes & sub-themes which emerged from manual analysis

Cognisance of the marketers' agenda

Awareness of marketers tactics
Knowledge of IM
    ● Aware of disclosures
Social media as commercial space
    ● Ad types recognised

Limited Cognitive AL

Difficulty identifying covert ads
    ● Identifying ad by tone / brand scripts
Advertising as confusing to navigate on social media
    ● Lack of knowledge of covert SM advertising - IM

Marketer as foe - Disapproval of SM Advertising
Frustration Disapproval of covert advertising on social media Marketer as impinging on privacy Does not trust IM Scepticism

Tolerance of SM Advertising
Acceptance of advertising moderated by platform Tolerance

Positivity: Advertising as helpful

Not enacting detachment effect
    ● Paying attention to ads
    ● Positive towards social media ads
    ● Social media ads as useful
    ● Likes IM
    ● Trusts IM
    ● Considering others' perspectives

Social media as a resource

Opting-in to brands on social media
    ● Interaction with brands
    ● UGC
Uses of the Internet

Detachment
Ignoring ads Enacts detachment effect Dislikes influencer for disseminating advertising Dislike of social media ads

Appendix W - Screenshot from MaxQDA portraying the composition of an overarching theme (Cognitive AL)

- Identified through disclosure
  - learned to identify disclosures during elicitation
  - identified #ad
  - identified #sp
  - identified #spon
  - identified paid partnership
- told by youtuber
- misinterpreted IM as organic content
  - doesn't understand affiliate
  - Overlooked disclosure
- confusion/uncertainty
  - does not think compensation has taken place
  - unsure whether ad
  - guessing at affiliate
  - unfamiliar with disclosures
    - does not seek out disclosures
  - guessing ad
  - unsure what #sp means
  - identfied wrong brand as source
  - confusion regarding intent of post
  - doesn't understand brand ambassador
  - does not know what #spon means
- Awareness of commercial purpose of owned media

- ⌄ Understanding of the Advertiser's Objectives and Tactics
  - ⌄ Understanding of segmentation & targeting at play within SM ads
    - Understanding of platforms used to target
    - Retargeted advertising
    - aware of cookies
    - social media advertising as best way of reaching audience
    - Perception of intended audience
    - recognition of tailored advertising
    - social media ads more effective than TV
  - ⌄ Understanding of persuasive tactics & persuasive intent
    - understands persuasive intent
    - influencers affect consumer behaviour
  - ⌄ Widespread understanding of marketers intent
    - understands selling intent
  - understands advertising's bias
  - ⌄ Understanding of the power of earned media
    - UGC as what the marketer wants
    - ⌄ Earned media
      - UGC as boasting
      - takes recommendations from UGC
      - UGC as brand promotion
    - personal creation of UGC
  - ⌄ Understanding of compensation & editorial control within IM
    - understands influencer as message conduit
    - understands advertising's source

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Appendix X – Sample Interview Transcript

1	**Alice – 16**
2	**Ok so the recording has started now, so I'm here with Alice, and you're 16 Alice?**
3	Yeah.
4	**Ok, so do you use the internet often?**
5	Eh, yes. Everyday. It's like a very big part of my life I'd say.
6	**Ok, Ok. And so what do you use to go on the internet? Do you use your smartphone? Do you use your laptop?**
7	Ehm I use my smartphone, my iPad and my PlayStation only for when I want to watch like Netflix or something.
8	**Ok.**
9	So I use … I use a good bit.
10	**Cool. And so what do you use the internet for?**
11	Ehhhm I'll use it mainly for talking to my friends, so like on messenger, snapchat, ehhhm post pictures on Instagram or Facebook. Ehhhm if I need help with homework or something I'll just text one of my friends or I'll just look up y'know help …. Y'know just to help me out cause like if I'm getting confused … and I'll just use it if I want to watch a YouTube video if I want to wind down like.
12	**So then what different social media sites do you use? You mentioned Instagram and Facebook, any other ones?**
13	Ehhm I use Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and yeah, that's about it. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat.
14	**Ok. And so why do you think you use those three?**
15	Ehhm I'd use Facebook mainly because like y'know I get … I don't know there's just something I like about Facebook. Just like, it's like all the connectivity. Ehhm like Instagram because like it's mostly pictures so like it's unlike Facebook. Like if you're following a fashion like blog you can just like go on their like Instagram story and see like all of the stuff they're selling or they have or their models and stuff. Or it's the same for like make-up artists and stuff. For snapchat, I'm on it a lot because most of my friends are and that's where we have our groupchats and stuff so I'm only really on it because that's what my friends use the most so like it's more so a direct line to them instead of waiting hours for them to get back to me on messenger … I would prefer messenger over them all but my friends prefer snapchat and I'm starting to prefer snapchat as well so it's just like … whatever I can reach people easier on. It really depends on the person I'm texting.
16	**Oh ok.**
17	So if I wanna get in touch with a certain person more quickly

Annotations (left margin):

- ..Daily internet use
- ..social media as addiction
- ..Tablet to access internet
- ..Smartphone to access internet
- ..contact with your friends
- ..using internet for homework
- ..using social media to relax
- ..contact with your friends
- ..Social media uses
- ..following influencers
- ..utility on social media
- ..Utility
- ..social media as having particul
- ..contact with your friends

18   **Oh ok, so you feel like that's snapchat for most of your friends?**

19   Yeah.

20   **Ehhhm and so what do you do on those sites? Who's your favourite or who do you follow or what do you like doing the best?**

21   Ehhm on Instagram like I mainly just like let's say Instagram just for instance, I mainly just follow like y'know various y'know … sometimes like celebrities like maybe like mainly I follow … like it's a range of different celebrities, like I don't only follow y'know like fashion icons like let's say Kim Kardashian or Arianna Grande, I would also follow like Patrick Stewart or ehhm y'know Ryan Gosling or something. Like y'know cause my interests y'know range from different things like I'll follow Star Trek blogs but I'll also follow fashion blogs. Ehhhm for Facebook and stuff it's mainly to look up … do you know what memes are?

22   **Yes (laughter).**

23   Yeah, Facebook is mainly for memes that's where I get like most of my memes from so like whenever I want memes I just go on Facebook. Or like, y'know … Yeah. And then for Snapchat a load of people follow celebrities on snapchat, I don't really ehh … cause I don't really like looking at their stories sometimes. Cause like there's ones like I rather just look at it on Instagram. So for snapchat it's mainly just for talking to friends I don't really follow like … celebrities or anything on snapchat.

24   **And so what kind of 'stories' would celebrities have?**

25   I mean, it's a load of them just gloating about their rich life. I mean like I'm not a fan of things like Keeping up with the Kardashians like I would let's say admire Kim Kardashian for some of the things that she's done, like y'know building y'know an empire, like no matter how she did it she still built it from the ground up and stuff. Ehhhm I'd admire her for that but like I don't like I wouldn't watch them like Keeping up with the Kardashians cause while I like drama I don't like that kind of drama, or like someone like DJ Khaled. Like y'know, him just living his life y'know like his rich life, like y'know they're gloating and just showing off … y'know, oh their fancy jets or fancy y'know like Bahama trips like.

26   **So then it doesn't feel relevant to you?**

27   No.

28   **Ok. Ehhm so do you have a favourite person to follow on any of them?**

29   Ehhhhm … not really like I used to when I was younger like

I was younger. So I would have a favourite then but not really now because I mostly just watch like different stuff like I'll watch, y'know information about new movies coming out or y'know like I'll watch … like sometimes I'll watch stuff to do with fashion and stuff. I don't really have like a favourite anymore.

30   **Ok, so you feel like you've kinda grown out of the videogame YouTubers, that kind of thing is it? And towards more fashion?**

31   Honestly like the only time I'd watch like videogame youtubers now for some reason they help me sleep. So whenever I want to sleep at night I put on a gaming video and just for some reason that just helps me sleep.

32   **It's comforting or something like that?**

..using social media to relax

33   Yeah, it's cause I have a thing where like I can only really sleep when like it feels like there's someone in the room. So like because like they're talking to you it's like .. I think that puts in my mind that they're actually there. So I think that's like … in my head. I dunno. It's just like … it's a weird thing.

34   **No, that's ok. Ehhm so you didn't mention some social media sites, like you didn't mention Twitter. Do you not use Twitter?**

35   My thing with Twitter is I'm someone who likes to say a lot and I don't like an app that can limit what I say which is why I don't use Twitter.

36   **Ah, ok.**

37   Also, Donald Trump frequents Twitter and no… I don't want to go near that to be honest. Its mainly though the fact that it limits what you can say. I don't like that.

..freedom is limited

..dislikes twitter

38   **Ok. Would any of your friends use twitter?**

39   A few of them would, but it wouldn't be as big as let's say it is in America where like y'know … like y'know oh they tweet about something blah blah blah blah and that's how like … it's mostly facebook over here. Like in my opinion from what I've seen like my friends and all it's mostly Facebook and Snapchat. Twitter is used but it's mainly used by celebrities and all. And like, I'll still look at celebrity twitters because like they have funny things to say but I just don't like the fact that it's limiting what I can say. I don't like the fact that I have a limited number of stuff to say.

..freedom is limited

40   **Yeah, that's fair. Ehhhm so is there anything about social media that you dislike?**

..social media as creating pressure

41   Ehhhm I like … or I dislike …

42   **Well you can say what you like too.**

43	I meant to say dislike ... Ehhhm, I dislike the fact that it tries to cast an image for people, like it's … it can be good but it can be bad in a way that it can cast a bad image for people. Like you know, you have too try this fad diet, you have to starve yourself, you have to try this.
44	**Mmhhhm.**
45	It's kind of like … it's like, because like basically the internet's the new television and anything that's going on there is going to be big with you know, teenagers especially. So like if there's new fashion trend online it's going to be followed, now that's good … fashion trends are good. But when it's bad trends like y'know, like deadly challenges. When it's promoting stuff like the ice salt challenge, the blue whale challenge, the recent tide pod challenge … like it can be harmful in ways. And I know we all have freedom of speech but it can be used to say very nasty things.
46	**Ok.**
47	Like it can be used to say very homophobic, transphobic, sexist, misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic things. Like yes, the internet can be a very liberal place but there's also the very dark side of the internet where you have … ehhhm … like I'm not trying to say, like I know conservatives, and they're great. But like, y'know people who you know believe in Nazism, people who believe in white supremacy, people who believe in homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia and all that, it can be a bad place. Y'know, it not only gives people like let's say ehhhhm y'know people like let's say Beyonce to say more things to get to a wider bunch of people, or Obama to get to a wider bunch of people … but it still leaves people like Donald Trump and Dick Chaney and like … actual Nazis,like white supremacists and all to get to wider places. And then there's also the dark side of the web which many people don't know about where ehhhhm organ trafficking happens where human trafficking happens, where some of the sickest stuff you'll ever find is on the dark side of the web. Now it's hard to get into, it's hard to find, but it's there. You can buy weapons online, you can buy all this stuff online so I'd say that's the things that I'd be very y'know … about the internet. The internet y'know … it's great, but it's very … there is a dark side to people I've seen on it.
48	**And do you think that comes out on social media?**
49	Yes ... that's one bad thing I'd say is just people can … you can literally pose as anyone. It also can be … like, I love social media it's great like I can talk to all my friends. But like there are dark sides to it like the fact that sometimes paedophiles pose as teenagers, and pose as children. Sometimes like just genuine assholes pose as you know,

..social media as creating pressure

..peer pressure

..pressure to follow trends

..social media as harmful

..weighing up
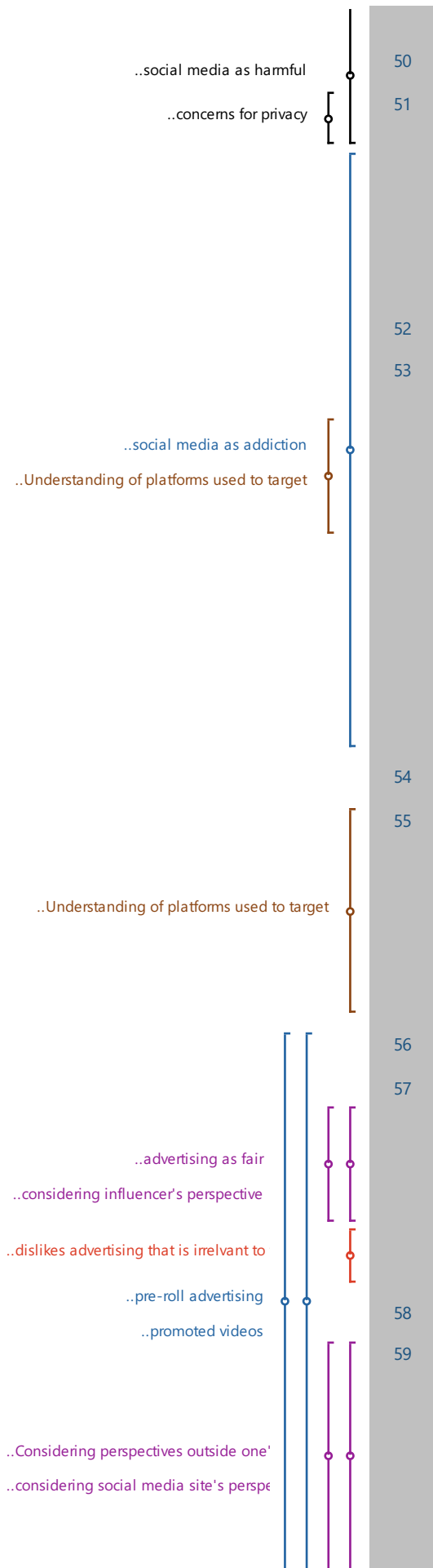
once you tell them a secret they'll tell everyone.

50   **Yeah, yeah.**

51   Like it can be a very dangerous place and privacy can be an issue but like, yeah. Cause like it's what … it's everyone … it's people's lifelines, Like it's my lifeline. I cannot go five minutes … like when I have wifi without checking facebook or if I have snapchat or something I just can't cause like my friends are my lifeline to be honest. So if I can't talk to them I'm just … it would make me go a bit crazy.

52   **Yeah.**

53   So I kind of like, I need it. And like I know it's bad, it's a new addiction. It's like the way television would have been a few years ago, or the telephone. Like it's every generation's new thing. So the TV, that was huge in like … it's still big now but it's definitely dying out because of the internet . The internet has opened such a wide thing. And people are complaining about the internet, but back in their day their parents would have complained about TV or whatever fad they're into. It's very hypocritical because parents and grandparents are always complaining about the internet and tv and stuff, well their grandparents would have complained about something similar to what they're complaining about now.

54   **Yeah.**

55   It's just, it's kind of like a generational thing. From each generation … sure like, in a few years … like in the next, however long years there might be something that will replace the internet. Now, I don't see what would replace the internet, cause y'know it's the internet. But like we don't know that, something might. Replace the internet in a few years.

56   **Ok, so have you ever noticed brands using social media?**

57   Yes, ehhhm definitely. Especially on YouTube because ehhhm that's how a lot of youtubers make … well used to make money was when their videos would be monetised. So ads would … ads from different companies would be on y'know their videos. So like you'll have a Heineken ad or you'll have …. It's not even ads for things that people would be interested in it's like ads for Heineken and cars and stuff.

58   **Ok.**

59   And you can definitely notice because like a lot of companies have like big stakes in youtube and stuff and stuff so you'll see their …. Like NFL for example. You'll have like let's say a star wars trailer that will have millions maybe billions of views, but then you'll have an NFL thing with only like hundreds of millions of views but that will be at

..pre-roll advertising

..promoted videos

..Considering perspectives outside one's o

..considering social media site's perspectiv

..social media advertising as best way of r

..Understanding of platforms used to targe

..identified pop-ups

..considering influencer's perspective

..Weighing up - contradictory but simultan

..pre-roll advertising

..Retargeted advertising

..brands creating pressure

..IM as creating pressure

..IM as biased

..understands advertising's bi

..influencers affect consumer

..Understanding of persuasive

..advertising as deceptive

YouTube than let's say another one would.

60   **Ok.**

61   Ehhhm you also notice it on Snapchat. Sometimes when you're clicking on people's stories there'll be a recommended from H&M, it's the same on Instagram, it's really the same on everything. Like advertising, again it's like tv. Cause back in the day, y'know like there's so many ads on TV, they're starting to come on the internet.

62   **Yeah, yeah. So those type of ads … can you click to get rid of them? Like are they in the video? What way is it?**

63   Ehhm it depends. Like usually on youtube the ads are like "wait 5 seconds" then you can skip it. But sometimes you can't or sometimes it's like 10 seconds out of your time. Now I know that gives money to the YouTubers or whatever, and like that's … they need to make money. And recently they've actually had a real hit in what money they've been making. But y'know if you're watching a video and it's just like … like I don't mind that sometimes but when it's constant … when you're constantly clicking on videos and there's an ad for something … and it's really weird though because you can go to another country and you come back to this country you'll still get ads from that country for a while cause I went to America and you … for a while when I came back for a month I still had American ads. And like that's no use to me because I can't get any of the stuff. So like for Red Lobster or something, like I can't eat that, I'm in Ireland! Plus like, I think, yeah.

64   **Yeah, ok. Ehhhhm, so what way do brands act on social media? So do they act the same as they would on television, or do you …**

65   Very similar but different. Like they act in a way like if you don't have this like, y'know, you're not … like you know, it's like if you don't have this you know you're know going to be y'know, up there or whatever cause they use people's high profiles like Kim Kardashian or Kylie Jenner or Nicki Minaj. Like oh my god look what shes wearing, omg it's from H&M. Like she wouldn't actually wear that in real life … it's just because you see her wearing and you're just like "I wanna wear that I wanna dress like her, I wanna dress like her, I wanna dress like Kim, I wanna dress like whoever". Like they act like y'know, "oh we're your friend we have your interest at heart, like y'know, oh look at what they're wearing you'd look so cool wearing this", they just want to make money off ya.

66   **Ok, so you think it's quite fake?**

67   Yeah, definately, like I love the internet and I love social

The margin annotations, from top to bottom:

..advertising as deceptive
..sceptical
..understands advertising's bias

..dislikes ads when too frequent

..Avoidance based on frequency
..advertising constant on social media
..identified pop-ups
..dislikes advertising that is irrelvant to

..Weighing up - contradictory bu

..dislikes when influencers do ind

..pre-roll advertising

..dislikes ads which cause disrup
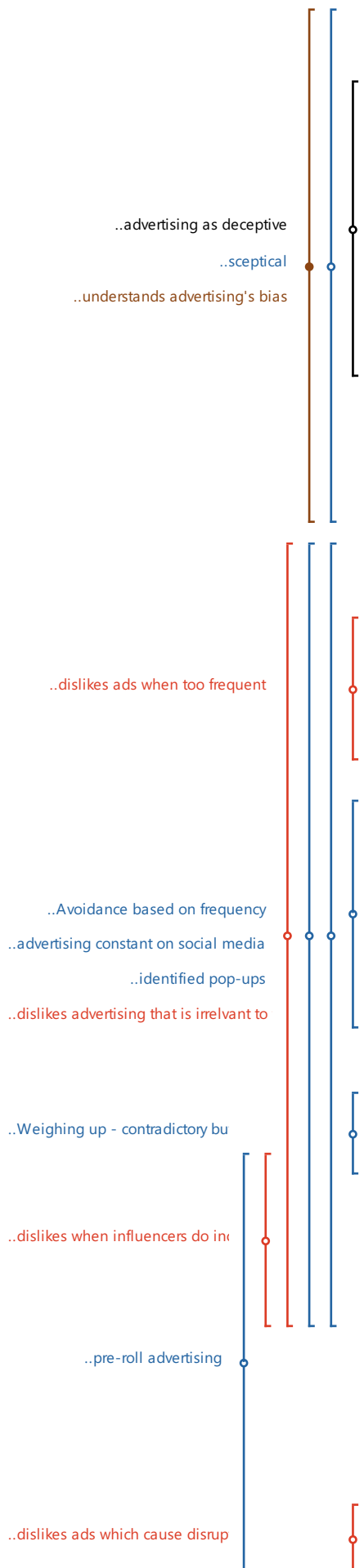
| 68 | **And so, is that a bit different to how they are on tv?** |

| 69 | Ehhm no, television … I think it's always been the same, advertising has always been the same. False advertising is such a big part of like … if you watch an ad for let's say McDonalds or something they make the burgers look a lot better than they look in real life, or they make let's say an outfit look a lot better than it is in real life. They basically make everything look better. It can look so much better on TV. Like they make everything look good on TV and then like in real life you'd get it and you're like "this is not what I paid for" and you fell a bit like, y'know disappointed and like you know, lied to. |

| 70 | **So it's just that that has kind of migrated on to social media now?** |

| 71 | Yeah, like everything … the fact is everything that was popular on tv is migrating on to the internet. |

| 72 | **Ok, ehhhm so have you ever come across like ads online or specifically on social media?** |

| 73 | Yes. Ehhhm basically you can't … like literally you cannot visit any website now, especially on social media ones without having some sort of ad for something, be it pop up ads or … it's not even, it's always like … it can even be ads at the side for Vodaphone or something. It's just like you know, it's basically like sponsorship. You know, blah blah blah presents … like you can't go anywhere. Like you have to pay to not like on YouTube, you have to pay to not have ads like. |

| 74 | **Ok, yeah.** |

| 75 | It's called YouTube red and like you literally, you can pay to not have ads but y'know it's like if you want to watch something you don't want to see a bunch of ads like. |

| 76 | **Yeah, so you find it … irritating then?** |

| 77 | Irritating, or like I mean sometimes like I'll be like oh my god I want to go see that or oh my god I want to get that. Like sometimes, but not always. Like there's YouTubers like they'll have like Heineken ads, and most of their viewers are kids like! They're not going to be going out and buying Heineken anytime soon! Like let's say the live in American where the age to drink is 21 and they're only 16 or like 9 or something. |

| 78 | **Yeah, and is that like a type of ad so it comes up before the video starts?** |

| 79 | Yeah.And sometimes half way through. |

| 80 | **Ok.** |

| 81 | Yeah, sometimes you'll be watching a video and it'll just … |
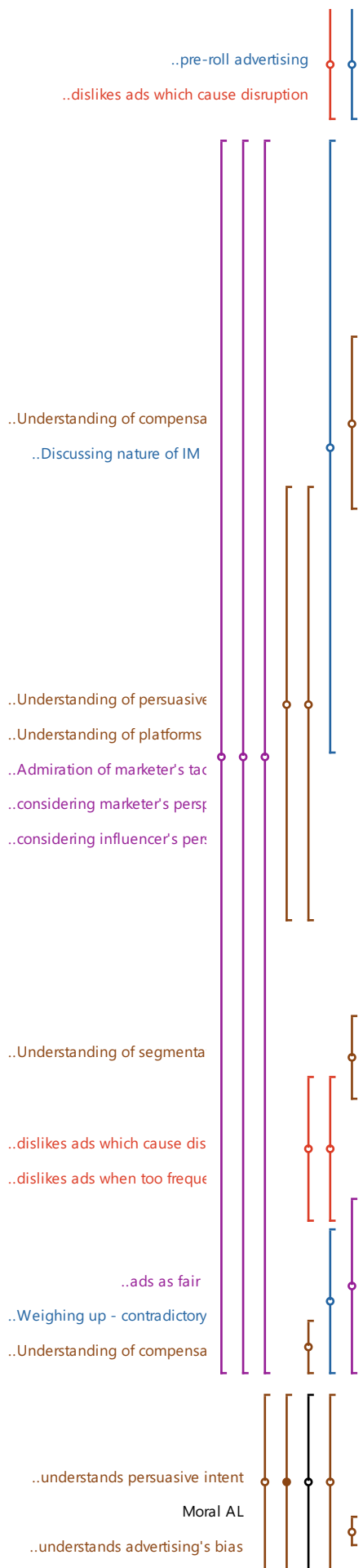
start a video and like there'll be no ad and you're like "grand" but then like halfway through it's just like "blah blah blah Heineken blah blah blah" and you're just like "ohhh my god".

82 **(Laughter) And have you ever noticed like an ad maybe in a video?**

83 Yes. Eh some eh like … again it's like with movies and tv shows, product placement. Like if you watch let's say like … I'm just going to make a few comparisons here, if you watch an Adam Sandler movie you'll notice tonnes and tonnes of things you'd use in real life, product placement. If you watch certain youTubers they'll be like "oh I'm sponsored by Netflix" or "I'm sponsored by you know, whatsapp or something". You're sponsored by whoever, like they're getting money off … like youtubers are getting money off that. It's product placement. Product placement has always been a thing. In movies, in tv and now again in youtube videos. And it's starting to become more and more, because they need to make… because youtubers are starting to lose a lot of money on ads so they need to start doing product placement to y'know …do stuff. Like y'know like tv stars and all back in the day? They're the new tv stars … we still have tv stars but youtubers they're the new … it's a new frontier.

84 **Ok.**

85 For everything.

86 **Ok.**

87 Like, even advertising. And like, product placement.

88 **And so what's your opinion towards that kind of advertising and how do you feel towards it?**

89 Well I mean, y'know, it's great because like y'know not many kids watch TV these days. You have to get it out some way. But when like y'know it's constant, it gets a bit annoying. It's like … is like … it's like getting annoyed with a TV ad cause everyone gets annoyed at TV ads. Because you're just like I want to watch my show I don't want to be seeing y'know, feckin' whatever they're advertising. So like, I don't mind it but at the same time it's an annoyance. It's an annoyance but an annoyance that you don't mind. Cause you know even though it's benefitting like the big corporations, they can also be benefitting a YouTuber who needs some money.

90 **Ok, and so how would you know that it's advertising?**

91 Ehhhm within the video, or like an actual ad?

92 **Well both.**

93 Well for ad … it's like "buy now" or blah blah blah, it'll just
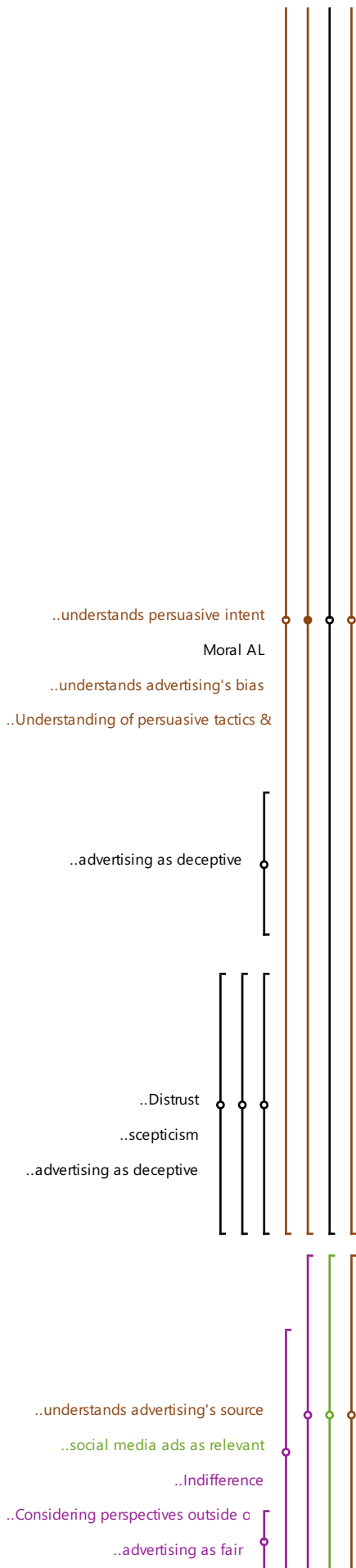
be like y'know. Even now though some ads are very obscure. Like I think a lot of them do very obscure ads to you know get in your head like "I want to shop there", like for example there's an apple ad like for like, apple products where in some sort of y'know American country … the Frankenstein monster is in it for some reason and he's going down to this village, and he starts singing a song … and he's plugging lightbulbs into his pulse …. And you're like, what's this an ad for? And at the end, it's an apple ad …. And you're just like, what does this have to do with it? I think they do weird … ads are always weird so they'll get your attention. Like there's a lot of y'know, double entendres and ehhhhm y'know …. Double meanings in ads …. so you're like "ha! I remember that ad, I'm going to get that now".

94 **Yeah.**

95 Especially, like nowadays you'll have ads for things like they'll either be like y'know ehhhh some sort of reference to something in it or like it'lll … there's a lot of double meanings in advertisements now. And it makes them more memorable. It can be a bad idea like that Frankenstein one cause that's just crazy or one of the ads sainsburys did for Christmas a few years ago where it ehhhhm told the story of what happened during world war 1…. Where ehhhm for Christmas day the German and English soldiers stopped fighting for Christmas. And like you could say it's honouring … it is honouring those soldiers in a good way and then like also … Sainsbury's are also making money out of it. So like y'know people are like "oh look they're honouring our … the people who fought for us, y'know? Let's go to Sainsbury's because they're honouring those". It can be good, but it can also be bad. Because companies always have like double … double motives. There's never one clear motives with companies, it's always y'know … they'll always have your interests at heart, but thye'll always have their interests at heart more so because they need to make money.

96 **So you think they try to kind of play on people a bit?**

97 Oh, always … that's what advertisers … like it's like y'know, conmen when advertisers …. It's centuries old.

98 **Mmhhmm. Ehhm, so who acts as an advertiser on social media then do you think?**

99 Ehhhhhm … on social media it'll be the big companies basically … the big companies will like y'know, pay Facebook … "here can we use this for space", or YouTube "hey can we have this advertising space". And they'll do it … it's like basically any big company that just wants anything … so like car companies, beer companies, ehhhm occasionally like y'know movie trailers. But like you don't really mind, if it's a movie you want to see you don't mind

Margin annotations (left):

..understands persuasive intent

Moral AL

..understands advertising's bias

..Understanding of persuasive tactics &

..advertising as deceptive

..Distrust

..scepticism

..advertising as deceptive

..understands advertising's source

..social media ads as relevant

..Indifference

..Considering perspectives outside o

..advertising as fair

Margin codes (left column):

..advertising as fair
..understands advertising's source
..social media ads as relevant
..Indifference
..Considering perspectives outside one'
..Utility
..positivity towards owned media
..Owned media as catalogue
..Active response to advertising
..Understanding of platforms used to ta
..Understanding of persuasive ta
..Weighing up - contradictory bu
..Utility
..positivity towards owned media
..Utility
..opting in to owned media
..Utility
..Owned media as subtle advertising

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that like. But like … y… it's various … it's just like … big companies who have a lot of money and can pay for that sort of thing. Because they're going to get money off it. Somehow.

100 Yeah, ok. So why would you decide to like or follow a brand page on social media?

101 Right ehhhm … so I think, it kinda depends on what I'm into so like if I see like H&M on Instagram because I buy most of my clothes at H&M cause like y'know I like the clothes from there, so I'll follow them on Instagram to see what they have. Or Forever 21 or like Bershka or something. Or like any even online stores cause like y'know cause like they are advertisements, yes. But they keep you up to date on what they have in stock. So if let's say you see something that's really nice you can just go in and buy it then instead of y'know going in, you not knowing if it's there or not and just like … it can like … I'm not like … it can be a bad thing but it's also a good thing to see what they have.

102 Yeah,

103 It's like a catalogue. It's like … it's like, again. It's like something we had back … it's like something that was … like when catalogues were huge. Now it's just all online.

104 Ok. So ehhm do you like following pages like that then?

105 I do. Ehhm sometimes, like not always, but y'know I'll see a really nice pair of shoes and I'm like "oh my god they're so nice" like y'know and that … like … like y'know. At the same time that makes me want to buy them and that's playing into what they want. But like I'm like I see a nice pair of shoes and that's after making me happier. I see a really nice outfit and I'm like that's after making me happy.

106 Ok, so it would be mostly like fashion and clothes stores –

107 Clothes stores and stuff like which I follow, and occasionally … sometimes I'll follow like ehhhm ….. Actually no, yeah. It is mostly like for … like advertisements stuff it is mostly just like fashion places I follow.

108 Ok. And can you think just off the top of your head of an example of a post that you enjoyed from one of them?

109 Oh …there's so many … I can't, ehhhm … honestly to be honest I'm not going to lie like they are all kind of the same.

110 Ok, yeah.

111 I'll enjoy most of them but if I see stuff I don't like then I'll be like "I don't like that", or like y'know … or if I see something I really like I'll be like "oh my god" it's just like there's so many nice clothes and I'm just like, I just can't put my finger on one.

112 Ok ... so do you think that kind of thing can be
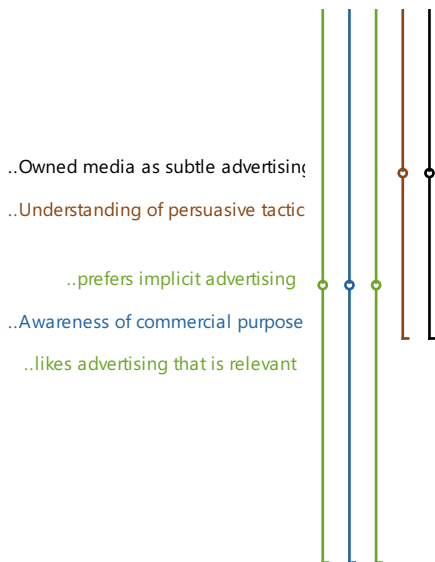
considered as advertising?

113   Oh, yes. Definitely. Because like they're like it's disguising itself as a fashion blog but like you're going to buy it and they're going to make money off it. Like you're following them and potentially seeing something… let's say this thing costs a lot of money, they're going to make that money.

114   **Ok.**

115   So like yeah it is … I would say it is a form of advertising. But I wouldn't mind it as much as lets say the pop up ads and stuff but like it's whatever you're into like I wouldn't mind fashion ads but like a bunch of people probably wouldn't mind like … but like I wouldn't care for Heineken ads or feckin' Hyundai ads or something. Because like I have no interest in that.
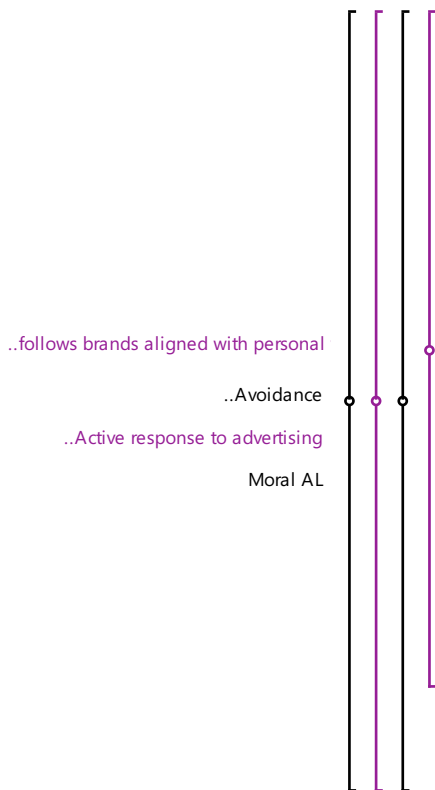
116   **Yeah, it's not relevant to you. Yeah … ehhhhm so are there any brands or companies that you would avoid following on social media?**

117   Ehhhhm … ohhh … ehhhm … specifically any of them that have ties to either covering up things like paedophilia, ehhhh sexual assault of anyone … like y'know I wouldn't follow something on let's say y'know … it can ruin a lot of things for ya aswell because it's kind of hard to explain but basically any company that promotes something hateful, I just … I won't associate myself with that company or I won't buy from that company because they're associated – like I would stop going to places … like there's this place called the clockwork door and I stopped going there because I found out the manager .. like has some very hateful values so like I stopped going there and it's the same online. If I found out someone said something or did something really bad I would unfollow them. It's like anyone who … has a platform but promotes hate then just…. No.

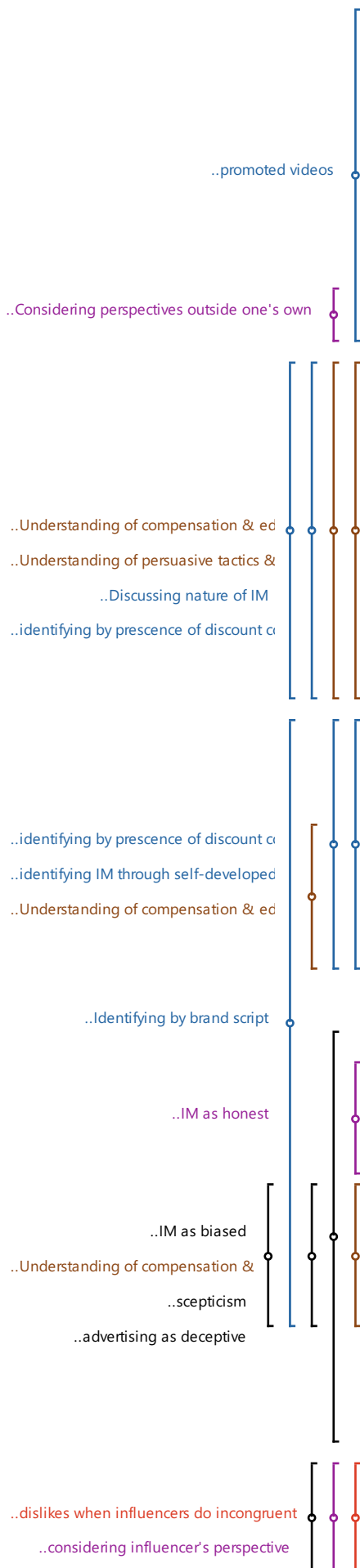118   **Ok. And like based on their social media activity?**

119   Yeah.

120   **Ok, fair enough. And so what about, do posts from brands appear on your newsfeed even if you don't follow that brand?**
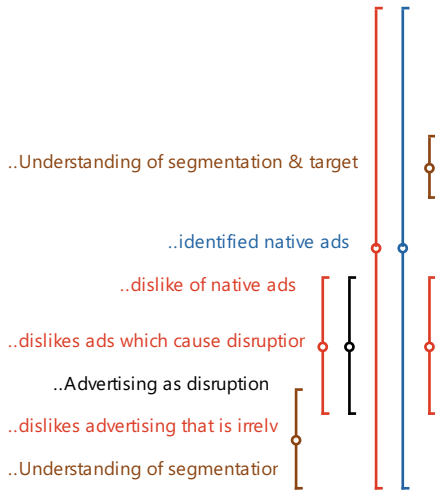
121   Yes. That's what a lot of them … a lot of them would pay for to show up randomly on someone's feed.

122   **Ok, and how do you react to that?**

123   I'm just like … I want to see me friends photos, I don't want to see y'know, fairy liquid or whatever. Like it doesn't happen too often but it does happen, and it's like "I don't follow this, why is it on my feed?" But like you just know it's because they're after paying Facebook and they're like "here we'll just put that there".

Margin codes:
- ..Owned media as subtle advertising
- ..Understanding of persuasive tactic
- ..prefers implicit advertising
- ..Awareness of commercial purpose
- ..likes advertising that is relevant
- ..follows brands aligned with personal
- ..Avoidance
- ..Active response to advertising
- Moral AL
- ..Understanding of segmentation & target
- ..identified native ads
- ..dislike of native ads
- ..dislikes ads which cause disruption
- ..Advertising as disruption
- ..dislikes advertising that is irrelv
- ..Understanding of segmentation

..promoted videos

..Considering perspectives outside one's own

..Understanding of compensation & ed
..Understanding of persuasive tactics &
..Discussing nature of IM
..identifying by presence of discount c

..identifying by presence of discount c
..identifying IM through self-developed
..Understanding of compensation & ed

..Identifying by brand script

..IM as honest

..IM as biased
..Understanding of compensation &
..scepticism
..advertising as deceptive

..dislikes when influencers do incongruent
..considering influencer's perspective

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124 **Ok, yeah yeah. And so do ads on social media always come from a brand or company do you think?**

125 Ehhhm, no. Actually a lot .. like recently … like sometimes actually even youtubers are starting to pay for ads and stuff.

126 **Ok.**

127 Ehhhhm a lot of it like cause y'know it gets up their revenue and stuff. Ehhm it's not always brands, I mean as I said it can be movies, TV shows, ehhm even sometimes political and sports and stuff. It's not always brands, but it's always like people up there who are trying to get ahead using money.

128 **So do you think people get paid to post about brands then?**

129 Yes, definitely. Product placement … like let's say you have a deal with … no .. let's say Lucozade, or a deal with … like … Netflix or something. Here's what they do, they usually give the youtuber they are promoting a discount code which their fans can use, but then the fan is more … if the fan likes it they are going to go back and they're going to pay more money. That isn't with the discount. So, yeah the youtubers would get … youtubers, whoever, they'd get money out of that (throat gets caught) sorry.

130 **You're ok. Do you think you always recognise when this happens?**

131 Ehhhhm … well yeah like you can definitely recognise because if they're saying oh y'know we're being supported by blah blah blah like it … cause like they say it. They say it themselves, "we're being supported by blah blah blah go buy blah blah blah". Like you can tell, you can definitely always tell.

132 **Ok, and it's by what they say?**

133 Yeah, like even then like if they're advertising something … there are times when they won't be advertising something and there's times when they'll be honest about products and like I think its good when like they're actually honest about products they have been given and if they aren't good. Because you'll see a bunch of you know people who do make up tutorials and a product will actually be crap but like they're being sponsored so they can't really say anything otherwise they'll lose sponsorship and that loses them money.
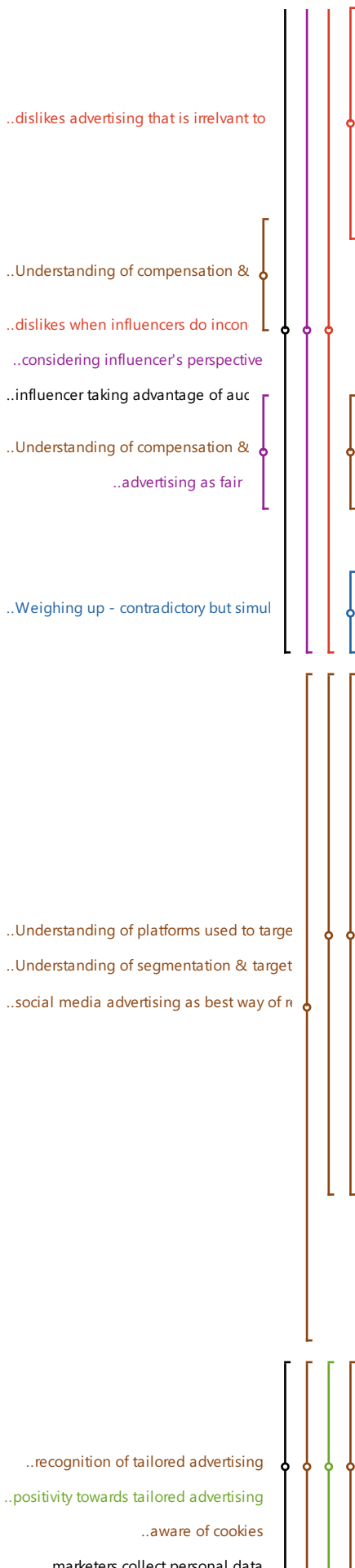
134 **Ok.**

135 So yeahhh … like you definitely know, You always know. In my opinion.

136 **So then, does that mean you'll have a different reaction when you're listening to them talking about a sponsored**

..dislikes advertising that is irrelvant to

..Understanding of compensation &

..dislikes when influencers do incon

..considering influencer's perspective

..influencer taking advantage of aud

..Understanding of compensation &

..advertising as fair

..Weighing up - contradictory but simul

137 Yeah, so sometimes it would be … like let's say you're a channel who's into … who's like, y'know promotes comic books … no, who reads comic books and stuff and then through the middle you give a promotion for protein or something … Like, it's cause like … alright I'm not saying, because there are people who like y'know take protein shakes and all that would read comic books but like that's not … you know that's not your demographic. But it's just making them money cause they're like … you can just … they're just like "oh here, I'm sponsored by blah blah blah" …

138 Ok.

139 You know what? You know I can't blame youtubers because they need to make money. Like some of them don't have like other job … like that's their life that's' their livelihood and they need that to make money.

140 Ok.

141 So like I can you know … you can excuse it because like they need to make money so like it's not a bad thing for them, but it can be for us sometimes. But not always.

142 Ok. Ehhhm so why do you think then that marketers or brands use social media?

..Understanding of platforms used to targe

..Understanding of segmentation & target

..social media advertising as best way of re

143 As I said because like television … it's the new frontier. Because you always have new frontiers … like you know at one time books were the new frontier or magazines or comic books were the new frontier … but now like you know, television is you know the last .. like is that a frontier? But like … like … the internet, it is the new frontier. We still haven't like begun to understand half of it's capabilities. Like we've come a long way with it … it's something we're still exploring and finding new things about everyday and like everyones going on it like literally the majority of people like in the western world are on social media and that's a way to get out there and promote what they're advertising. And it's more likely nowadays that they'll buy it if they see it on social media than if they see it on TV because they don't watch TV anymore.

144 Ok so it's how … that would be your main exposure to ads then?
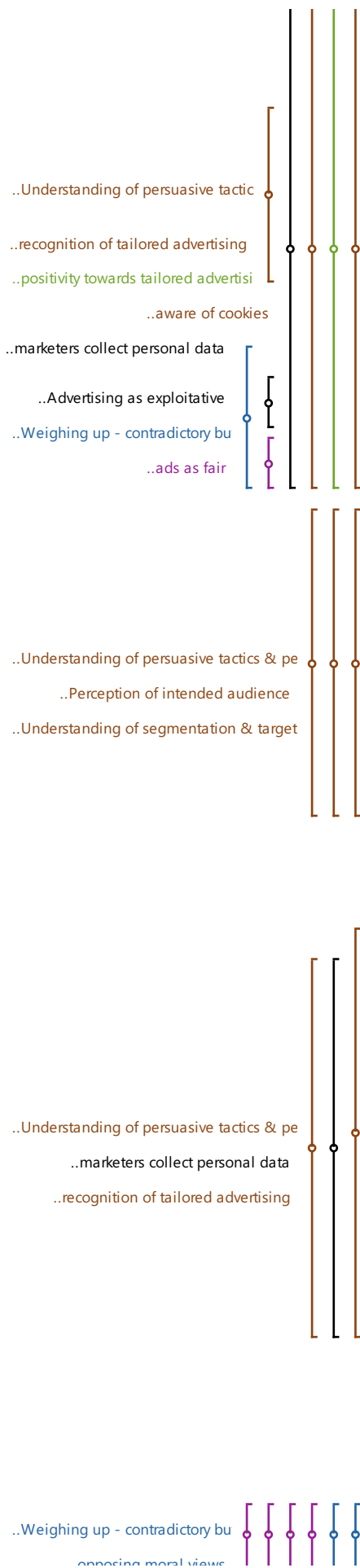
145 Yes. Definitely, in my .. in my lifetime … in my life, yes. Definitely.

146 Ok, and have you ever experienced an ad that you have felt was tailored specifically to you?

..recognition of tailored advertising

..positivity towards tailored advertising

..aware of cookies

marketers collect personal data

147 Yeah, cause here's what happens is … here's what happens a lot of the time let's say on Facebook, ehhm you'll like some pages and they're like hmmm this person liked these pages,

..Understanding of persuasive tactic

..recognition of tailored advertising

..positivity towards tailored advertisi

..aware of cookies

..marketers collect personal data

..Advertising as exploitative

..Weighing up - contradictory bu

..ads as fair

148 **Ok.**

149 Ehhhm basically … it's data collecting like, it's like y'know I hate to be the whole paranoid "everyone's watching you" but it is, it's data collection. That's what social media is at the end of the day, it is data collection. And they're collecting your data on what you like, so if I like something like if I like a bunch of things they're like "hmm this thing's related, let's recommend this person to get this product which will make said x company money".

150 **Ok. And so how would you react to it then?**

151 I mean, it's something I like … if it's something I like I won't mind. But if I know they're just using data on me to just get money out of me you know it is a bit annoying. But like they're giving they're showing me something I like so I don't mind as much.

152 **Ok, so have you ever felt that marketers are trying to target you then?**

..Understanding of persuasive tactics & pe

..Perception of intended audience

..Understanding of segmentation & target

153 Yep. Well I mean target just target me in what I'm into … as I said, what I like they'll be like "hmm". Like focus groups, focus groups are used to y'know like y'know see what the general consensus is for what people like so like you know like "oh this demographic of people like such and such", so like …. It's hard to explain, they just like … from like … the information that they have collected that's how they know what to market towards and what to go towards.

154 **Ok, so ehhhm like when would you feel targeted? Like what happens and then you think "oh that's them targeting me or like my demographic"?**

I'm going to use a very simple example. Let's say that I like … like let's say I like all of the star wars facebook pages or all of like the fashion facebook pages and then it recommends someone who's related to that. Or like a product that's related to that. So let's say I like y'know all the star wars .. all the star wars pages and then they recommend to me "oh new movie is out, go see it" or "new product is out, go buy it".

..Understanding of persuasive tactics & pe

..marketers collect personal data

..recognition of tailored advertising

155 **Ok.**

156 So like it can be very simple but it can always be very intricate and complicated at times aswell when it's like you know it looks at everything you like and tries to work it out through all of that.
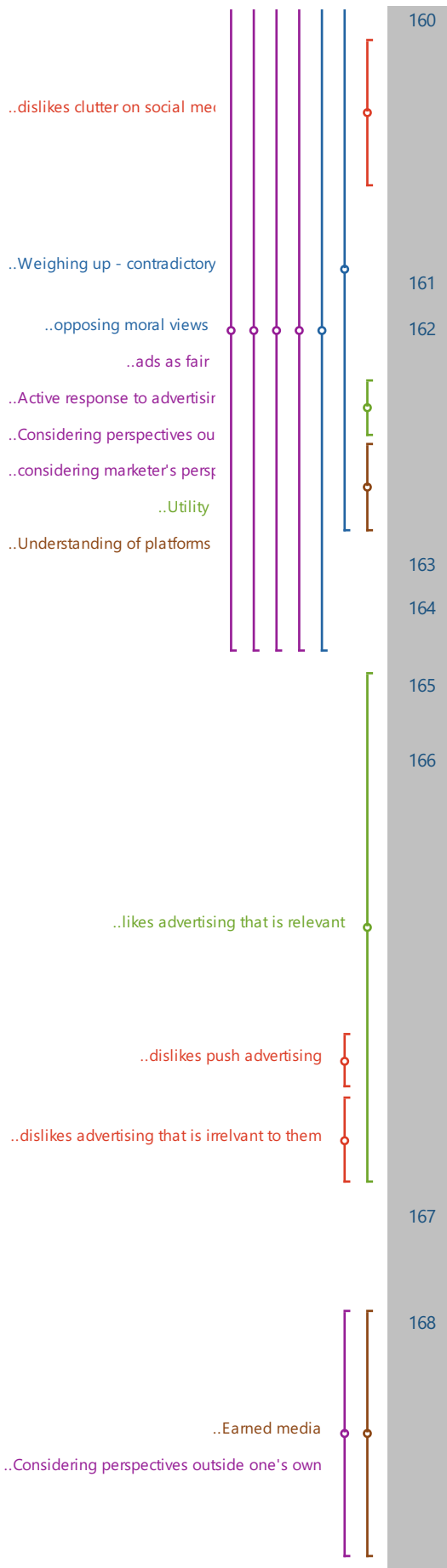
157 **Mhhmm. So in like, is it like pop up ads that kind of thing?**

158 Pop-up ads sometimes, sometimes ads to the side, sometimes just like as you're scrolling through or ads on a video.

..Weighing up - contradictory bu

opposing moral views

159 **Ok. Ehhm so then in general then how do you react to**

160 The way I … like, as I've said I don't think it's either a good thing or a bad thing. It's just there. It's like you know it's always going to be an annoyance like the way ads are on telly, it's always going to be like an annoyance or I just want to get I just want to watch whatever I just want to do whatever. But ehhm yeah it's kind of I don't mind it … the thing is I don't really mind it like they have to make money, people have to make money.

161 **Yeah.**

162 Like big corporations I know they can be evil and stuff but they do have to make money and like this is a part of how they make money. And like if they're making money off me I know it's not great but maybe I'll buy something that I like. But like as I've said it's like .. it's internet, new frontier, a whole new just door for advertisements like the way television was.

163 **So you just kind of have to put up with it?**

164 Yeah you just kind of … because it's not going to go away any time soon.

165 **Ok, yeah. So is there any ads then that you enjoy on social media?**

166 Ehhm yeah like if I see a trailer for a movie or like … only really movie trailers. Because it's like when you go to … actually yeah! It's like when you go to the cinema you know like you're watching you're like … you know you're there, you've like 10 minutes of ads for like AIB and post office and shopping centres, but then like you know you have a fun time watching the trailers because "oh my god that's coming out", it's kind of like that. You only really enjoy what like in my opinion I only really enjoy watching trailers for like pop-up ads that I know that I don't … that are, I'm forced to watch before a video because like you know, I can get enjoyment out of it. But like I wouldn't enjoy watching an ad for like a car or fifa or something because that's not what I'm interested in.

167 **Ok, yeah. That's fair enough. So if a friend posts on Instagram, we'll say, about a brand, how would you react?**

168 Again, if they're posting about a brand it's either a brand they like or they're somehow going to make money off it you know it's your friend, you gotta support your friend. Your friend needs money that how I feel … like some of my friends will promote fashion … like fashion websites and stuff and have like discount codes … y'know like it's for my fr…. Like I wouldn't mind it because it's my friend. Its someone I know like.

169 **And so do you think that your reaction to that would**
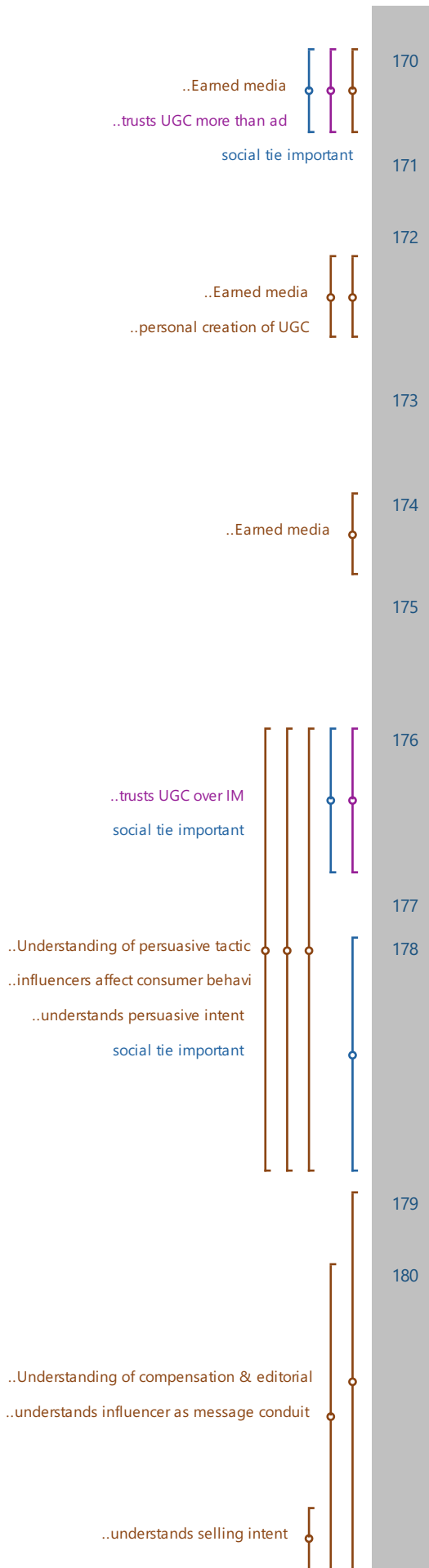
..Earned media
..trusts UGC more than ad
social tie important

170 Yes definitely, because you don't have that emotional connection to the brand that you would to your friend. Cause like you know your friend, you don't know the company.

171 **Ok, so have you ever posted on social media about a brand or a product?**

..Earned media
..personal creation of UGC

172 Not … really. No, no I haven't. Like I've never promoted anything like that. I'll lets say promote like a TV show or something but that's just like saying "oh just go watch this it's really good I think you'll enjoy it", I'm not trying to you know ….

173 **Yeah. But even … without being paid to promote or anything, have you ever just put anything up about a brand or?**

..Earned media

174 Ehhhm …. Heres …. Ehhhm … maybe once or twice. Not that I can recall. Maybe once or twice? But I can't … don't think .. I can't recall it.

175 **Ok, yeah. No problem. So if you recognise that a post has been paid for … do you think that you would react differently to that post as opposed to a post from a friend that wasn't paid for?**

..trusts UGC over IM
social tie important

176 Definitely, then again I don't know the influencer. In my opinion it's about being you know I know my friend, oh my friend recommends this, I trust my friend. I'm going to buy this product. This influencer … I mean I might still buy it. But less likely because I don't know that person.

177 **Ok.**

..Understanding of persuasive tactic
..influencers affect consumer behavi
..understands persuasive intent
social tie important

178 Which is why companies will use spokespersons and all cause like you know a spokesperson, like they'll use like a celebrity or something because we like celebrities we sometimes relate to celebrities we love celebrities … so like when we see a celebrity advertising we're like "oh my god it's that celebrity I'm going to go out and buy this now because they use that". It depends on … the attachment you have with the person who's advertising.

179 **Ok, so do you think you always recognise if it's been paid for?**

..Understanding of compensation & editorial
..understands influencer as message conduit

..understands selling intent

180 Yeah. Ehhhhhm especially on YouTube, well like obviously it's always paid for on YouTube cause like they're a legal ad icon … but like, most … you can just notice it's just subtle things like … if it's product placement it's obvious because like you know that's a movie that's going out … like you know the company … like if you don't get permission the companies sue you, but like nowadays the companies just like "here, use our product and like … we'll pay you to use our product basically". And then … but they'll get more

..Understanding of compensation & editor

..understands influencer as message conduit

..understands selling intent

..Active response to advertising

..Likes active role afforded by SM adver

..prefers social media ads over TV

..dislikes being passive viewer of ads

..Likes active role afforded by SM adver

that they seen.

181 **Ok, and so do you think you react differently to ads online versus ads you see on TV?**

182 Ehhhm ads online … ads that are online are easier to get rid of, they're easier to skip. Whereas ads on TV, you can't really skip them. Then again that's pushing people more towards watching stuff on the internet cause it's easier to skip the ads. You can't skip the ads on TV. Unless you're watching on BBC or something, but that's paid for by the British people. So that's why there's no ads on there. But if you're watching like let's say ehhhm ITV or something or TV3, you're watching that and like … you'll see an ad and for something and you're like "I just want to skip this, I don't want to watch this". I would take ads on social media over ads on ehhhm TV any day.

183 **Ok, fair enough. Ehhhm so we'll have a look at some social media posts now just to get your reaction. Take your time and have a look at this for a few minutes. So what do you think about that, or what's your reaction?**

184

..identified paid partnership

..IM claims designed to influence consumer b

185 Well … I mean y'know it's obviously, it's being marketed towards people who like to wear this sort of thing. Definitely … (mumbles while reading) yeah like "wearing ripped jeans and repaired black jeans" … yeah and … tagged! Something's tagged in it so like, I think … yeah! Paid partnership with legend of London!

186 **Ok.**

Sorry, I'm just reading that now.

Yeah take your time.

Ehhhm no it's just like when I see it, it's obvious advertising. It says it …

Ok.

It says he has a partnership. But even from the photo, like that's obviously been taken by a professional photographer, to promote something. Like that's not someone just taking it to … now it could be but it's more than likely, cause he's sitting on … he's sitting on … it looks like he's sitting on the roof of Stephen's Green … shopping centre, ehhm he's sitting on the roof of Stephen's Green shopping centre. And just he got … you know, yer man … you're not allowed up there so I think what happened was they paid ehhhm they paid whoever to use the roof so they can take pictures of him for the brand.

Ok, yeah fair enough. Do you follow, what about this person?

Roz? Yeah, yeah I know Roz.

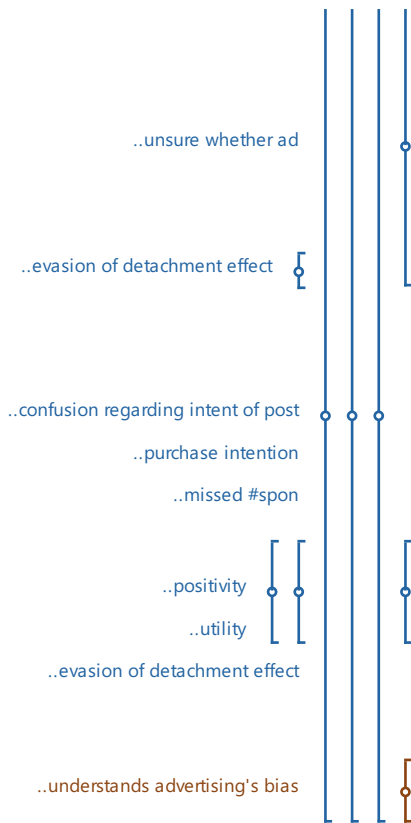**Have a look at this then.**
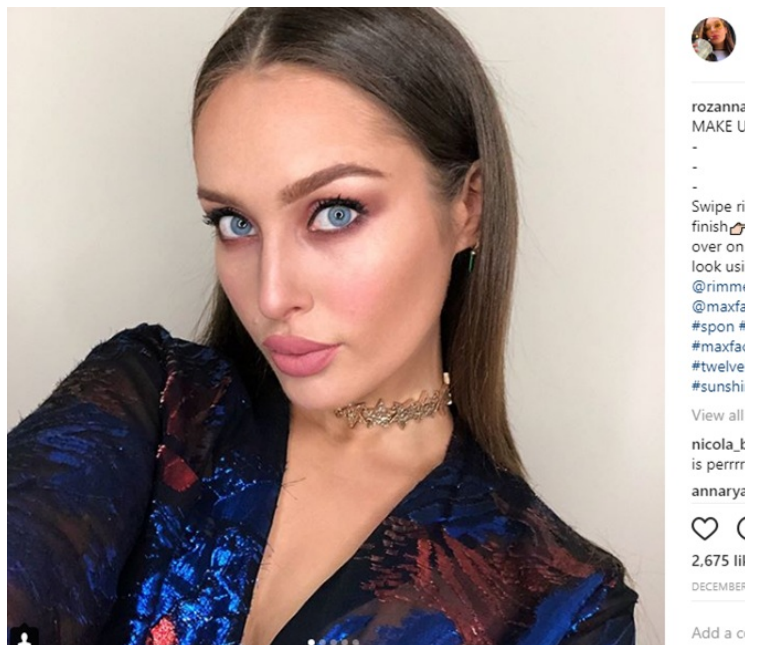
Again, ehhhm this is a different type of promotion. Again, this time she doesn't have partnership but she's promoting Rimmel London … Ehhm I think this … but when I see this one it's more so a promotion of that … so it's not really, I don't know if it's a sponsorship or not but you can see she has the tags there, tagging let's say the products she would have used so I would say she … and then also there's the hashtags aswell, so there's a … she probably is getting paid

Left margin annotations (lines 191):
..identified IM by how professional conten
..identified paid partnership
..IM claims designed to influence consumer b

Left margin annotations (line 196):
..unsure whether ad
..confusion regarding intent of post
..purchase intention
..missed #spon

18/21

partnership.

197 **Ok.**

198 And it says it's a partnership … whereas this is a bit less … it's still probably … she's probably … they're … her and the product company are still probably making money off some sort of deal. But I dunno … I don't think it's as big … this is, then again this is something that would catch my eye

199 **Ok.**

200 Cause you know it' s make up. And like stuff like that. Whereas the first one wouldn't catch my eye.

201 **Ok, and so how would you react to this then? If that came up on your Instagram feed?**

202 I'd actually look at it, whereas if I seen the first one I'd just scroll, Like if I seen this you know I would look at it and I would like it and I might comment, but if I seen the post you showed me before I would probably just scroll down.

203 **And would you trust like, that recommendation?**

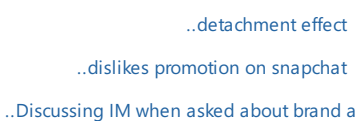**204** Maybe. I mean she looks good but then again, like … yeah. You just, you don't know.

205 **Yeah, ok …. Ehhhm so then have a look at this.**

206

207 Ahhhh . I don't really, I don't really like promotion on snapchat. I hate going through someone's story and seeing promotion which is one reason why I don't follow celebrities … so "the next few snaps are in partnership with comreg" so that's going to be him talking about … like him talking about the brand saying blah blah blah it's great and stuff, y'know you're on snapchat y'know you want to see what your friends are up to you don't want to see what like some person's using. Like you know … well sometimes you might, But like I wouldn't. I don't like seeing that kind of

Margin annotations (left side):
..unsure whether ad
..evasion of detachment effect
..confusion regarding intent of post
..purchase intention
..missed #spon
..positivity
..utility
..evasion of detachment effect
..understands advertising's bias
..detachment effect
..dislikes promotion on snapchat
..Discussing IM when asked about brand a

thing on snapchat cause I'm just like "uggghhhh" … I'll like, see if I seen "the next few snaps are in partnership with comreg" … just go out of it.

208 **Tap through?**

209 I would just get out of it … wouldn't …

210 **Wouldn't watch?**

211 Wouldn't give it the time of day.

212 **Yeah, fair enough. Ehhhm and so last one then I'll just show you one more.**

213

Terrie 🌐💫
18h ago from Camera Roll

I loooove these 😭 (swipe up for affiliated link)

ASOS

214 Now I might sound like a hypocrite, but if I seen these I probably would swipe up.

215 **Ok.**

216 Cause they look, like … maybe not those in particular, but I saw a pair of shoes that were really nice cause I love shoes and I seen that one that was really nice, I would swipe up to them like "where can I get these where can I get these where can I get these".

217 **Ok.**

218 So like yeah no … like the first post I looked at wouldn't interest me, but like shoes would (laugh).

219 **Ok, and do you think has that been … is that a form of**

220 Ehhhm .,.. I mean looking at the picture, maybe? Or it's just she wants people … I don't see … I don't really know what to say about this, I just know that like y'know if like I seen that I probably would swipe up.

221 **Ok yeah, that's fair enough. Thanks a million Alice,**