The influence of direct mail marketing on buyer purchasing decisions: A qualitative analysis of perceptions by age group.

James Simpson
Helen Mortimore
Plymouth Business School, University of Plymouth, UK.

Abstract
With a continued suggestion of online replacing offline, this study has uncovered, through qualitative methods, a variety of benefits, perceptions and implications of direct mail on the overall intention to purchase. It identifies three key areas in which direct mail can impact the decision to purchase, as well as providing an analysis of the effect of age on the uncovered factors. It also provides insight into the situations where it can be best applied. Finally, it draws a conclusion on the overall findings of this research, which support the continued use of direct mail as a future advertising method.

Keywords
Offline, Marketing, Direct Mail, Purchase Decision.

Introduction & Aims of Research
With the rise of the Internet and growth of the online consumer, Internet advertisement has been an increasing source of information for consumers (Tsao and Sibley, 2004), with online spend at a record £91bn in 2013 (Rigby, 2013). Marketing overall can be defined as “The process by which companies create value in order to obtain greater value from the consumer in return” (Kotler, 2010), as such it plays a crucial part in the success of an organization. Moreover, with a decrease in direct marketing spend between 2008-2011 (Ofcom, 2012) and an increase in online spend, the need for comparison of offline vs. online is clear (Edgecliffe-Johnson, 2012). With increased adoption of the Internet as a purchasing platform and the lack of current literature on the affect of Direct Mail on the purchase decision, the main objectives of this study were to answer the following key questions:

• Can direct mail marketing still influence the buyers purchasing decision in the 21st century?
• Establish how widely spread direct mail marketing is currently being used?
• Distinguish the perceived advantages and disadvantages of offline marketing (Direct Mail) from a consumer perspective
• Analyze if Age effects the adoption of Direct Mail as an advertising Medium?
• Understanding how has the Internet impacted the perceived benefits of Direct Mail?

Each of the above objectives has been analyzed through a qualitative based approach, using interviews and focus groups as the main data collection methods. This study looks for depth of understanding as opposed to generalizable data, following an interpretivist approach, however this study provides some basic quantification through the manually coding of texts and themes.

Literature review
Various models have looked to provide a structure to marketing, most notably the popularization of McCarthy’s (1964) “Four P’s Model” by Phillip Kotler (1967). There model widely accepted as the tool kit for marketers...
that includes, Product, price, place and promotion, with an 3 additional P’s added (People, Physical Evidence and Processes) to accommodate for services (Booms & Bitner, 1981). This study will focus on the promotional aspect of the marketing mix, due to its strong influence on the purchase decision of consumers. Kotler (1994) advocates 4 main promotional tools, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and public relations. Naik & Peters (2009) add greater depth presenting, direct marketing, print media and radio, in their classification. This study focuses on direct marketing, as it’s the format at greatest risk from online (Dutta-Bergmann, 2004).

Various academics providing examples of each, Kotler & Armstrong (1998) put forward catalogue-marketing, kiosk marketing, marketing by mail and direct TV advertising as the main communication tools of direct marketing. Naik and Peters (2009) provide examples of Television Advertisement as Promotional Channels and Sponsorship. Allen (1997) list direct mail as catalogues and informative material, but state it must be addressed for it to be classified as direct mail in Kotler and Armstrong (1998). Print media including magazines, flyers and posters as there main advertising formats (Kotler, 1998).

With total offline advertising spend contributing £7.6 Billion to the UK economy in 2013 and with digital advertising increasing in uptake (PWC, 2014), There is a strong indication that Offline Marketing is having a decreasing effect in the Marketing Mix. As such, the purpose of this study was to focus on direct marketing as a future advertising tool. Direct marketing defined as “Any form of one-to-one communication with potential customers. With the ultimate objective of effecting the sale of a particular good or service (Adapted from Allen, 1997:10), which indicates the structure for this study, that is to understand if direct mail can still effect the sale. Allen (1997) identifies the components of the direct marketing as direct mail, direct response marketing, telemarketing, mail order and direct selling. Berry (2001) further dissects each tool distinguishing Direct Mail as “Personally addressed advertising, delivered through the post” (Berry, 2001 Pg. 7). Berry’s distinction is one that will be carried through this research project, as it differentiates Direct Mail from “Junk Mail” – defined by Zhang (2003) as any mail that is ‘Unsolicited’ and ‘Unwanted’, in both online and offline formats. Moreover, Berry (2001) advocates the high usage of direct mail, providing a strong argument for its continued use, accounting for 16% of total direct marketing expenditure (DMA, 2012).

**Benefits of Offline Marketing/Purchase**

With high usage, academia would suggest there are numerous benefits to purchasing products offline or in home. Gillette (1970) examined the perceived convenience of in store and in home purchasing, finding In-Home as the perceived more convenient method of purchase, Berkowitz et al (1979) strengthens this trend further in their investigation of in home grocery shoppers, finding the main motivating factor behind in home purchase is convenience. Darian (1987), Reynolds (1974) and Gillette (1970) contradict the above, all highlighting that no higher purchases were made at home, which emphasizes the need for further research of the benefit of convenience (Darian, 1987). Another benefit identified by Rosenberg & Hirschman (1980) and Darian (1987) is a greater product assortment, as catalogues create a greater selection in comparison to in store formats. In contrast Solomon & Kim (1994) note the inability to examine products as a potential limitation to television/catalogue purchasing. Moschis & Moore (1982) construct a quantitative study, identifying improved brand perceptions and increased intent to purchase as the main benefits of television advertising, however it lacks the depth needed to understand perceptions fully, whilst Kaufman-Scarborough & Lindquist (2002) advocate comfort and convenience, as the main motives to purchase at home.

**Direct Mail**

Research into the benefits of direct mail have been limited over the past decade, instead a greater focus on the online benefits is evident across academia. With the rise of the online consumer, it has been widely touted that the benefits of Offline Marketing far outweigh its costs (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Berry (2001) broadly outlines the advantages of offline but provides little indication of these advantages in practice.

Lariscy & Tinkham (1996) research into Direct Mail found a number of benefits in the context of political campaigns 1) Direct mail increased the percentage of votes amongst the non- incumients; 2) Direct mail created greater targeting of consumers to grant them more competitive offerings. To counter the above, Akaah (1995) research provides a contradictory view of Direct Mail, stating it as “Junk Mail” and invades consumer privacy,
in their study on consumer attitudes, therefore a split amongst academia exists. Finally, Briggs & Borin’s (2005), case specific Ford F-150 launch campaign provides evidence that magazine advertisement creates significant return on investment in the case of Ford. Bergemann (2010) later agree with these findings, stating Direct Mail allows for greater customer targeting. More recently Santana (2013) identifies that consumers remember more information from Print media in comparison to online media. The above literature has exposed various advantages to offline direct methods of advertising, however with much of the research conducted prior to the Internet it opens the opportunity for up to date research of the perceived benefits, forming the structure for one of the research objectives - Understanding how has the Internet impacted the perceived benefits of Direct Mail?

**Online Marketing**

Literature surrounding online marketing is relatively new to the world of academia, as the Internet and e-commerce have risen most notably in the past decade. Most broadly E-Marketing can be defined as: “The use of electronic data and applications for planning and executing the conception, distribution and pricing of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals” (Strauss and Frost, 2001: 454), this proposes a much broader scope to online marketing than just promotion and looks to incorporate all 4 elements of the promotional mix (Kotler, 1967). Shah (2001) narrows the breadth of E-Marketing coining who the term “Internet Marketing”, establishing a direct link between the Internet and its impact on the marketing function. Jones (2005) provides clarity to Internet marketing structure, suggesting four tools, social media, website advertisement, search engines and email marketing. Social Media sites have seen increased usage, Twitter with 500Million users (Twitter, 2015) and Facebook 1.23 Billion users worldwide (Guardian, 2014). In the context of advertisement spend, UK Digital Ad spend grew 15% year on year to £6.3Billion in 2013. With mobile spending now contributing £1 in every £6 of spend (PWC, 2014).

**Benefits of Online-Marketing**

A strong argument is that organizations substitute offline methods (Direct Mail; Print Media; Direct Calling) with the use of online methods (Social Media; Websites; Email) (Klein and Ford, 2003). Most recent studies focus on a comparison of alternatives, with strong suggestions that online will replace offline (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Kiang (2000) research into the benefits of online marketing approach was conducted at a time when the Internet will still in its infancy, academia presenting three advantages where the Internet can benefit an organization - Communication, Transaction and Distribution. Communication advantages are highlighted as improved interactivity between marketer and consumer and stronger relationship with customer (Peterson Et Al, 1997). Transaction benefits include improved visibility and a substantial reach with one single campaign. Furthermore, online allows for easier customization and flexibility (Long, 1997). Distribution benefits including, fewer intermediaries needed to distribute the same content online. E.G no requirement for a printers or logistics firm to distribute catalogues, resulting in lower costs (Edwards, 1998). Later research by Pinheiro (2013) adds the further benefits to an organization as increasing knowledge, easier measurement of effectiveness and is a user-friendly tool. Bayo-Moriones (2007) identifies the advantages from a consumer perspective as product diversity, competitive pricing and convenience as the main drivers for information technology.

**Direct Marketing as a Future Marketing Medium**

Since the rise of the Internet there has been an increased literature in comparing offline and online marketing. Jones et al (2005) takes a psychological approach to research, contrasting the printed page to the computer screen, focusing on memory as opposed to intent to purchase, which puts forward the theme that paper based advertisement is more effective for long term memory, however it lacks incorporation of the purchase decision in the research. Danaher (2011) work focuses more on perceptions in his literature Comparing perceptions of marketing communication channels*, include a basis of opinion on the differential between various marketing tools. Direct marketing scoring second highest on the basis of purchase intention, providing strong evidence towards direct marketing as a future medium. For this study, this evidence would suggest hat even in the wake of the Internet, consumers are still actively adopting direct marketing as there preferred medium. However,
being conducted in Australia, this research has limited applications to the UK consumer, as culture is a huge determinant in consumer choice (Yakup, 2011). Danaher (2011) work will form the basis for this study, but will uncover more clarity to direct mailing as a marketing tool.

Leeflang Et Al (2000) counters the above, arguing that direct mail does not have a place in the future, their research highlighting a considerable right distribution skew, indicating a considerable proportion of the population having no intention to purchase through the mail. However, later research from Leeflang Et Al (2013) counters their previous opinion to identify a direct mail-prone consumer, establishing a link between socio-economic group and preferences of marketing communications. Through a quantitative testing of hypothesis they find 1) Younger people are more likely to be direct mail prone and 2) Younger individuals are more likely to purchase through direct mail, which contradicts the view of Barnes & Peters (1982) and Greco (2011) that highlight 60-74 as the main users of direct mail. The limitation of the research is the location of the sample, being a Dutch study; its applications are limited to the UK population. Moreover, Leeflang Et Al (2000; 2013) fail to define age categories, only using the subjective terms ‘Young’ and ‘Old’. Therefore, based on the limitations and trends of previous research, the objective will be to obtain depth and understanding of the UK consumer.

**The Buying Process**

As Kotler (2010) puts forward in his definition of marketing “The process by which companies create value in order to obtain greater value from the consumer in return”, it can be suggested that marketing is a ‘process’ which the consumer follows. Overall the decision making process, can be defined as a broad organized set of structures that reflect the basic process of decision making from certain viewpoints and within certain contexts (Walters, 1972; 42 Cited In Erasmus, 2001; 84). Various models being constructed to arrive at a generalized process for the decision making process (Erasmus et al, 2001).

The buying process is an area of research that has continually been of interest to researchers. The most widely used models of consumer behaviour evolved during the 1960’s and 70’s, as academics started to research theory as opposed to marketers (Erasmus et al, 2001), due to the lack of consumer theory around this time. Howard (1969) was first to propose a theory of consumer purchase decision, with their model of consumer purchase theory (Howard, 1989; Du Plesis et al, 1991). Further models from Howard & Sheth (1969), Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1968) and Andreason (1965) form the basis of literature today. The work of Simon (1959) must also be noted, his three-stage model setting the foundations for newer research. Although explanations of the buying process may vary, five main stages to the process are accepted across all models (Mitchell and Boustani, 1994; Lee, 2005).

More recently, Kotler et al (1990) proposed the black box model, a theory that identifies a range of cultural, social, personal and psychological characteristics that affect the decision to purchase. Each of the models advocate the idea that stimuli or factors affect the decision to purchase, this literature review will focus on two of the most predominant and developed models since the work of Simon (1959), the Theory of Buyer Behaviour (Howard & Sheth’s, 1969) and Model of Consumer Decision (Engel-Blackwell-Miniard, 1990).

**Theory of Buyer Behaviour**

Howard & Sheth (1969) proposed a 4-stage model to the consumer decision process. Inputs, perceptual constructs, learning constructs and outputs, their model being the first to propose an effect of Stimuli on the decision to purchase. Inputs are the first stage at which stimuli affect the consumer, categorising three forms of input stimuli:

- **Symbolic Stimuli:** Are the verbal and non-verbal characteristics of the product the consumer intends to purchase.
- **Significative Stimuli:** Are the physical characteristics of the product and information provided on the product, by marketers.
- **Social Stimuli:** Influences that come from the individual’s social environment, such as information from friends and family.
Each stimulus having an impact on the way consumers decide to purchase (Batra, 2009). Sheth (1975; 44) later emphasises the importance of inputs on the decision making process, citing “The availability of information” as a primary factor in the decision making process. With information playing a crucial part in the purchase decision process, it is of particular interest for marketers looking to increase product uptake. As such, identification of the affect of information via direct mail will be a key objective of this research project. With this model contributing concepts on how marketers can influence the decision.

Constructs are separated into two forms, perceptual and learning constructs, perceptual constructs are the factors which deal with the psychological constructs affecting the consumer whilst contemplating their decision, based on the inputs provided. Learning constructs include information about competing brands, preferences and buying intentions (Sheth, 1975). The final stage of output, involves the actual purchase of the intended item, after evaluation of all alternatives based on the inputs provided, Sheth (1969). The incorporation of social, psychological and marketing influences is commented as a benefit of this model (Bray, 2008; Loudon & Della-Bitta 1993). Although this model provides the concept that marketing effects the decision, it fails to identify the what, how and when marketing has an impact. A limitation this research aims to improve, identifying the ‘how’ and ‘what’ influences purchase. Further critique by Newman (1972) questions the validity of the model, due to its lack of empirical data, instead using scientific methods to test hypothesis (Haines 1970, Bray 2008 & Hunt 1972). Horton (1984) counters the above argument, suggesting the model is comprehensive model, as a result of empirical research.

**Consumer Decision Model**

Engel-Blackwell-Miniard first proposed their theory of Consumer Decision in (1990) in their book titled consumer behaviour. Their model as with the Theory Of Buyer Behaviour (1990) worked on a fundamental stage structure, adding a fifth stage “post evaluation” stage to complete the Consumer Decision Model. The post evaluation stage plays a crucial role for marketers, as it’s at this point where consumers evaluate the received information for future purchases (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). Further to the post information evaluation, marketers can also effect the decision through “Stimuli” during the early evaluation stages (Lindholm, 2008).


Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (1990) differentiate the internal sources information as past experiences, word of mouth and memory, in comparison external sources of information can come from various sources, including leaflets, mail, online and other information sources. Marketers have little immediate influence on the pre-existing past internal information, due to this already being present in the consumers mind set, the way in which they can influence the purchase decision is through the 4P’s marketing mix (Product, Price, Place and Promotion). Promotion can be defined as the activities that an organisation performs in order to connect and transfer information with potential and actual customers (Kotler, 2002). With advertisement expenditure approximately £21.5billion in 2012 (Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates Ltd, 2013), it is key for organisations to fully understand the perceptions of each.

Amongst academics there is an increasing argument that the above models provide a generalised view of the process (Erasmus et al, 2001). Hoyer (1984) and Di Astous et al (1989) proposed that the models of Sheth (1969) and Engel (1968) ignore the influence of purchase dimensions such as the importance of purchase, suggesting the greater the importance of the purchase, the more complex the decision process (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999). Cox et al (1983) and Erasmus et al (2001) advocate Hoyer’s (1984) concept of to idealise, in that they suggest consumers follow exact processes, Cox and Erasmus counter this ideology suggesting numerous other factors influence the decision. Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) and John & Whitney (1982) suggest that consumer models could be simplified much further. Arguing that the average consumer passes through the decision process far quicker than suggested, providing an overcomplicated version of the process (Erasmus et al, 2001).
How Marketing (Promotion) Effects the Purchase Decision

Howard & Sheth (1969) & Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (1990) both agree that information plays a crucial part in the consumer decision process, classifying information as ‘Stimuli. However these models lack explanation on how the Marketer can directly effect the purchase decision. Lariscy et al (1995) work on these limitations, finding) Increased direct mail distribution enhances the decision to vote 2) Using multimedia campaign outperforms that of a single media campaign. Kijewski et al (1993) research contradicts this view finding 1) ‘direct impact of offering information on buying intention was negative’, however they are first to note the validity issues in their research. Their variables “Offering Information” and “Company Reputation” not clearly defined from the offset. Later studies by Weng et al (2013) research broadly evidences that consumer buyer behaviour is impacted by various promotional activities, but fails to identify which advertisement technique is preferred. Therefore, further research is needed to distinguish the influence marketing can have on the consumer in an age of increased Internet usage.

Perceptions of Direct Mail

Research on perceptions and attitudes towards promotional methods have increased in momentum, as academics begin to discover the impact of perceptions on motive to purchase (Lutz, 1985). Various studies have attempted to measure the perceptions of attitudes amongst students (Sandage & Leckenby, 1980; Meuhling, 1987) comparing them on a cross-cultural basis (Mehta, 1995). Akhter & Durvasula (1991) typically identify two types of perceptions to direct mail, favourable and unfavourable. This rather broad classification of perceptions is too general to benefit marketing professionals. Early work by Korgaonkar (1984) found in his study of older individuals that consumer perceived in home shopping to be more convenient, furthermore identifying the price conscious consumer as a higher user of direct mail. Finally Akaah et al (1995) suggests that any perception of direct mail is dependent on the shopping orientation of the consumer. For example, consumers that dislike receiving mail are more likely to perceive Direct Mail as “Junk Mail” (Pg. 217). This project adopts an interpretivist stance, building on the limitations of depth in previous studies. Finally, analysing various perceived benefits of promotional methods will contribute highly to organisations, a key objective of this study.

How Can Perceptions Affect The Decision To Purchase?

Perceptions are areas that have been researched across a variety of industries. Shukla (2012) investigated the “The influence of value perceptions on luxury purchase intentions” with an analysis of consumers from four countries (USA, UK, India and Malaysia). Identifying a positive correlation between favourable perceptions and the intent to purchase, however finding distinct differences amongst nationalities. This view counters the view of Hofstede et al (1999) who suggests that perceptions are homogenous across nations and populations. From an advertising perspective, Wells et al (2011) analysis of website perceptions on perceived quality further found that favourable perceptions, improved the perceived quality of products. Chen et al (1998) research has the greatest application to this study, finding that improved perceptions increased the intent to purchase amongst individuals. Moreover, that promotion acceptance is improved when perceptions are favourable. As such, it can be deducted that improved perceptions of marketing techniques will 1) improve the acceptance of that advertisement and 2) Increase the intent to purchase.

Effect of Age on Media Preferences

Earlier studies of in home shopping preference have regularly shown that younger consumers have a greater preference for purchases in home or directly (Greco and Fields, 2011). Gillet (1976) identifies no relationship between age, transportation method or presence of young children, in his study of in home shoppers. Settle et al (1994), later discovering similar results in there survey of consumer perceptions, significantly, “The total image ratings for the other four mail/ phone order shopping media did not differ although the profiles did vary slightly”. Darian (1987) study of in home shopper contradicts the above patterns finding 1) “those over 65 years are less likely to shop via direct mail than those under 50” and 2) “Younger individuals are more likely to shop at home”. Older studies have focused on primarily on the purchase behavior of women (Darian 1987; Cunningham 1973 and Gillet 1973), as such a limiting factor in their overall application to the population. Another limiting assumption of this research is its Age, as the Internet wasn’t a factor that could effect purchase decision during the 1980’s.
A more recent study Bachman Et Al (2010) research looked at the effects of age on media consumption within a political voting environment. This study highlights a clear distinction between the preferences of offline media for older participants in comparison to their younger individuals. Proposing preference for offline advertising increases with age. These findings forming the basis of Hypothesis 1 of intended research – “As age increases favourable perceptions for Direct Mail will increase”. This literature is limited in its applications to predict Direct Mail it uses newspaper and television as the two media formats, although provides some suggestion towards offline vs. online preferences. To increase its applicability, a wider range of media sources such as direct mail, posters, catalogues and leaflets would have to be considered to fully understand the correlation identified by Bachman Et Al (2010). Holt Et Al (2013) research achieves this to an extent, establishing relationships amongst news media, by incorporating the effects of social media within a political participation environment. Underlining a direct correlation between age and media platform, with social media becoming an increasing. As age increased the need for offline media increased, social media usage decreasing in older age groups. The strong inconsistency amongst academia provided the justification for the analysis of age in this study.

Justification for Study
From the reviewed literature, there are clear benefits of Offline marketing and in particular Direct Mail. However, research has been limited over the past 10 years Berry (2001), Akaar (1995) and Lariscy Et Al (1996) providing to be the most significant studies in the past 20 years. In comparison numerous more recent studies (Pinheiro, 2013; Bayo-Moriones, 2007; Kiang 2000) have been conducted on the perceived benefits of Online Communication methods. This lack of modern research opens the opportunity for further research for the effects of Direct Marketing in the 21st century. Moreover, from analyzing literature it would suggest marketing could influence the buying decision, but lacks the discovery of “How” an objective this research will determine.

Research Methodology
Research has been defined as a “Systematic Investigation, designed to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge” (Burns, 1997; Mackenzie, 2006). The process of research involves intellectualising an identified problem, setting the research question, collecting data and analysing the collected data (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). Denzin and Lincoln, (1994) identify a 5-stage process when selecting the method of research design. To start the researcher must identify whether a quantitative or qualitative approach is applicable to research objectives. Second is to identify the research paradigm, with research paradigm shaping the intent and expectations of the research (Mackenzie, 2006). Third is to link the chosen paradigm to the research, through construction of the research methodology. Guba and Lincoln’s (1989, 2005) categorize paradigms as the “views that reflect the researchers assumptions about reality and methodology”. The final two stages involving selection of data collection method and choice of analysis method, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) 5-stage process providing the structure for this section.

Research Philosophy
Various suggestions for a definition of paradigm have been proposed. Kuhn (1996) terms the concept as ‘an entire constellation of, values, techniques and beliefs ’ (Kuhn, 1996, p.175). In contrast Guba (1990, p. 17) termed the concept as ‘World Views’ that are ‘A basic set of beliefs that guide research action’ later adding ontologically and epistemologically consideration in there definition (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105). Overall, it can be suggesting that different philosophical assumptions lead to different research and methodological design (Mertens, 2012). Amongst social sciences three general ‘World Views” or “Philosophical approaches” exist Povisitist, Constructivist/Interpretivist and Pragmatist (Creswell, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (2000) distinguishing each of the above paradigms on the basis of three central questions (ontological, epistemological and methodological), with every paradigm based upon its own ontological and epistemological ideals (Scotland, 2012). Broadly Mack (2010) defines a positivist approach as the scientific paradigm (Pg.6), with the purpose of
statistically representing generalized findings. The Interpretivist approach also referred to as ‘Anti Positivist’ due to it being developed in reaction to the positivist approach (Mack, 2010).

**Ontology**

Ontology can be defined as the study of being (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Ontological positions are based on what formulates reality, Scotland (2012) defining it as the “What Is” of the research paradigm.

The positivist ontology argues reality as being “out in the world” to be discovered using constructive methodologies (Bassey, 1995 & Tuli, 2010). A positivist perspective of ontology therefore is that of realism (Scotland, 2012). Positivists consequently argue that reality is not expressed by our senses, but by factual statements (Mutch, 2005). As such, the world exists by quantifiable fact and researchers can use a quantitative approach to discover it (Cohen, et al, 2007). Creswell (2003; 14) suggesting experiments and surveys questionnaires and structured interviews, as the methods to obtain generalizable data from the population (Babble, 1990).

The Interpretivist ontology counters the view that reality is simple enough to observe through accepted rules, irrespective of human interaction (Tuli, 2010 & Saunders, et al 2012). An interpretivists approach argues relativism, the view that reality is individual and differs across populations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Opposing positivists, in that reality is constructed by our senses, claiming without perceptions the world would be meaningless (Scotland, 2012). Reality is thus a human construct (Mutch, 2005). The role of an interpretivist researcher is consequently “Understanding and demystifying social reality through understanding” Cohen et al (2007, p. 19). This suggests that reality varies on an individual level, with qualitative methods providing the depth needed to understand separable differences (Tuli, 2010). A pragmatist approach would argue the researcher is free from the forced choice of post positivism and constructivism as a chosen research paradigm (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 27 & Feilzer, 2010), researchers aren’t prisoners of a particular method (Robson, 1993, p. 291). With pragmatism offering an alternative ‘World View’ to positivism and interpretivism, focusing on finding the ‘truth’, whether that requires a Qualitative or Quantitative approach (Dewey, 1925).

**Epistemology**

Epistemology as defined by Crotty (1998, Pg. 3-10) is the study of ‘What know and how we know it’. An interpretivist epistemological therefore advocates that reality is relative (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) and knowledge is socially constructed and perceived (Berger and Luckman, 1967, p. 3). Their research aims for less rigidity, through the adoption of flexible research structures (Carson et al., 2001), to fully reconcile the perceptions of reality. Therefore, the objective of an interpretivist researcher is to capture report and interpret data to identify relevant perceptions, views and attitudes of the population (Neuman, 2000 & Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). In comparison, positivist’s dispute there is a single objective reality that exists in society for a researcher to discover, leaning towards more rigid structures, in order to statistically generalize a single reality (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012).

**Methodological Assumptions**

Methodological assumptions shape the way the researcher goes about finding out what is known (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108). Within social sciences there are strong arguments for both Quantitative and Qualitative tools. Quantitative data collection methods form the basis of positivist research paradigm (Travers, 2001), obtaining quantifiable data to test hypothesis. Qualitative research is usually inductive, in that allows researchers to gain broader, less specific generalisations of the population, instead understanding is deeply described (Cohen et al., 2007; Farzanfar, 2005) supporting an Interpretivist approach, however it can be used to test a hypothesis in a positivist paradigm of inquiry (Babbie, 2001).
Research Approach

This research will undertake an interpretivist approach, as this is what shapes reality (Robson, 2002). As this research looks to understand the attitudes, ideas, motives and purchase intentions, a qualitative research approach best suit ing the objectives of this research (Kitzinger, 1995).

An interpretive methodology aims to gain new understanding from an individual’s perspective, through investigation of interactions, perceptions and experiences amongst individuals, as well as the historical context that people occupy (Robson, 2002; Creswell, 2009, p. 8; Tuli, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand ‘new’ and ‘undiscovered’ perceptions. In contrast the positivist approach argues that it is ‘Reality’ is already pre determined and therefore cannot be shaped. In addition, Bryman (2012) favours the use of qualitative methods in an interpretivist approach, as it gains a more conclusive understanding of individual’s behaviour, rejecting a quantitative approach due to its failure to provide explanations to human behaviour. Moreover, a preference for qualitative methods is made when examining real life contexts and where claimed and actual attitudes vary (Belk, et al 2005; Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2005; Sykes, 1990). Sample size also differs between approaches, the positivist approach employing larger samples sizes in order to achieve generalizability (Gray, 2014), interpretivists adopting smaller sample sizes, to achieve more in-depth data (Gerring, 2007).

The split between positivist and Interpretivist approaches in the field of consumer research has been of strong debate. Hunt (1991) explored the idea that Positivist approaches are favoured in the field of consumer research, concluding that no favoured approach dominated the field. Shankar & Patterson (2001) advocating Hunt’s (1991) research, stating, “The dominant position within consumer research has been, and still is, occupied by positivism and its variants” (Pg. 482). They propose an emerging trend towards a more diverse mix of paradigms in the future. Chung & Alagaratnam (2001) acknowledging Shanker & Patterson’s (2001) work and studying the patterns of paradigms in Marketing Research, explaining the reason for a scarcity of qualitative marketing research due to the ‘lack of managerial applications’ (Calder, 1977).

This research follows Bryman (2012), as it aims to explain how direct marketing can influence the purchase decision. Qualitative research typically generates more descriptive data, useful in obtaining more individual and in depth data regarding people’s opinions on a particular subject (Dey, 1993). Due to the lack of opinions based research on direct marketing in the 21st century are relatively unknown, a qualitative approach will generate the depth needed to establish current opinions (Kitzinger, 2005). Focus groups and Semi-Structured Interviews will be the tools used for data collection.

Methodology

Focus groups originate as a research method with Bogardus (1925) who adopted them as a research method in his work with the social sciences. A primary objective of focus groups is “Obtaining a range of perspectives on the same topic, in participants own words” Litosseliti (2003:18). Kitzinger (2005) a well-established academic within the research world suggests focus groups provide the tools to examine individuals ‘experiences, points of view and concerns (Liamputtong 2011). Zeithaml (1988) study of ‘Consumer Perceptions’ provides a strong argument for the use of focus groups as a method to identify perceptions.

Various academic moderators have suggested optimum focus group sizes from 5-6 (Green & Hart, 1999), 6-8 (Krueger, 1998), 6-12 (Lindoff, 2002) and Brown (1999) suggesting homogeneity is a factor effecting focus group size. The aim was to achieve twelve participants; however eight was achieved due to contributors removing themselves from the research  See Table 1).

A moderated approach was adopted within the focus group, the main purpose of the moderator being to keep discussions on track and provide lively discussions (American Statistical Association, 1998), and the researcher acting as the moderator in this study.

Focus Group One | Focus Group Two
---|---
Participant Number | 9 | 11
Age Range | 25-34 | 35-45
Location | Cornwall Council Offices | Wadebridge School
Duration | 55Minutes | 61 Minutes
Recorded | ✓ | ✓
Moderated | ✓ | ✓

*Table 1: Focus Group Structure*

**Qualitative Research – Interviews**

Further to focus groups, semi-structured interviews were used to access different aspects of peoples opinion (Michell, 1999), interviews also provide the participants with freedom to express their viewpoint, as well as providing the interviewer with comparable qualitative data (Bernard, 1988). Moreover, participants were asked a set of pre-constructed questions to provoke more common themes, allowing for basic quantifiable of data (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Boyce and Neale (2006:248) suggest that in an interview guide there should be no more than 15 main questions to guide the interview. Probing and prompting skills helping the researcher to clarify what participants say and get more details on specific issues thus eliciting the richest data (Lofland, 1971) and reduce the chance of participants moving off the designated research topic (Morgan, 1988).

Hoepfl (1997) and Patton (1990) identify 3 interview formats 1) informal interviews 2) semi-structured interviews 3) structured formal interviews. A semi-structured format was used opposed to a structured interview, due to its increased flexibility, allowing the researcher to gain more elaborate information (Gill, 2009). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the research objective to be met, with perceptions generally much deeper than data collection in a quantitative based approach.

Interviews took place based on the individual requirements, with the time and location of interview being most suitable for each participant (Gill, 2008). A digital recorder was used to ensure no information was missed and later used for transcription. Interview length ranged dependent on the responsiveness of each individual, no strict time scale was ensuring full depth of response (See Table 2).

**Selecting Participants**

Participants for interviews were selected using purposive sampling, selecting participants on the basis of the requirements for the research project (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Participants where random in most aspects apart from age, familiarity amongst individuals was minimised to reduce the influence from acquaintances (Barnett, 2002). Due to early struggles in coordinating individuals from various locations to participate in a focus group, a snowballing approach was used to focus group sampling. In Snowball sampling participants are recruited and then asked to help with the recruit individuals who would be interested in participating (Ellis, 1993), selecting key advocates of the study to convince any potential doubters to partake.
Ethical Considerations
Streubert and Carpenter (1993:33), highlight a set of three main ethical considerations that must be considered when following a qualitative approach. The first consideration is autonomy, which is the right for participants to voluntary participate or remove themselves from the study (Mathison, 1998). Participants in this study where informed, involvement in the study was completely voluntary and omission from the study could be taken at any point during the interview/focus group. Secondly, Struebert and Carpenter (1999) highlight the importance of continued information with participants due to the changing nature of qualitative research. Prior to focus groups and interviews commenced a full briefing and signed consent was obtained from participants, informing them of the objectives and how involvement contributed to the study. Additionally, the aims and objectives of the study were presented verbally to the individuals and further clarifications were made when necessary. Struebert and Carpenter (1999) note principles of beneficence and justice as two final considerations, arguing complete anonymity is impossible within qualitative research. Confidentiality was insured through the following procedures 1) No personal information was obtained from participants; details omitted from the transcription process and referred to as ‘Interviewee 1’ etc. 2) Interview recordings were only used for the purpose of transcription and this data was treated accordingly in line with Plymouth University procedures. 3) After transcription and analysis recordings where then deleted. Moreover, a full debriefing followed interviews and focus groups, where questions or queries could be answered.

Analysis Method
Transcription is the process of translating of sound/image into a text format (Duranti, 2007). Transcription in its nature is has to be selective due to the impossibility of recording all features of talk and interactions from recordings (Davidson, 2009). Och’s (1979) proposes, “A more useful transcript is a selective one” (Pg. 44). Both interviews and focused groups were transcribed and analysis of each transcribe took a grounded theory coding approach. The process of coding involves identifying themes through “reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258 and Federay Et Al, 2006). Coding as a mechanism is used to reduce the quantity of data (Huberman and Miles, 1994) and understand the meaning of the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, codes can do much more than just fragment and retrieve elements of research text (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Data was first transcribed into a word format from recordings and then processed using Nvivo software. Bryman and Bell (2007) identify Coffey and Atkinson (1996) three levels of coding namely basic, awareness and analytical codes; Crabtree and Miller (1999) recommend ‘template’ approach to coding (Federay Et Al, 2006) and Boyatzis (1998) this process involves identifying important moments and coding it prior to interpretation. This research used a mixture of Crabtree and Miller (1999), Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Boyatzis, (1998), using created a coding structure. The template of codes allowed for a clearer analysis of the identified code (Fereday et al, 2006). To gain greater recognition from positivist supporters coding undertook basic quantification, as with the work of Hardy (2001) and Bryman and Bell (2011) simplistic code counting will be applied to the observed codes, using frequency occurred in population as the main statistical identifier.

Findings & Discussion
The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the key findings in each section, then present a discussion that relates the findings of this research to literature.

How Is Direct Marketing Defined & Used?
We can first gain an understanding of the perceptions of Direct Mail, by analysing how Direct Mail is defined. Understanding how people define direct marketing gives an early indication of consumer perceptions.

I5: “direct marketing is the process of providing targeted information to me, through the Mail and Email”

FC2: “Direct Marketing is directed advertising technique to encourage purchase”.
In their definitions of direct marketing (I5 & FC2), participants commonly referred to the concepts of ‘targeting’ and ‘purchase’, in addition to the high frequency of respondents highlighting the key themes of “purchase” and “targeted” provides two main suggestions. Firstly, the identification of “Purchase” as a main theme across definitions provides an indication that consumers view direct mail as a medium that does affect purchase. Secondly, “Targeted” as Lariscy et al (1996) note is a key advantage of direct mail, suggesting that the Internet has not impacted the benefits of direct mail.

What Attracts You To Marketing?

As well as understanding the factors that influence the decision to purchase, further value is placed on understanding the features that attract individuals to a marketing medium. The surprising result of this discussion is the importance of preconceptions in a consumer’s uptake of a certain advertising medium. Amongst respondents both the preconceptions of brand and the opinion of marketing tools highlighted occurred most often.

*FG1*: “brand image has the biggest effect for me... if I receive marketing t from Apple, I immediately favour that marketing”

*FG2*: “How marketing is administer is important, Junk Emails and Spam Flyers do not attract me”

From the above (FG1 & FG2) and further responses it can be noted that “Preconceptions” of brand and marketing tools play a role in the overall attraction to marketing. As Kotler (2010) identifies a positive view of the marketing mix will increase the overall intent to purchase, this research would suggest that if favourable perceptions of direct mail exist, the sale of the promoted product increase. In light of the discovery of the importance of preconceptions in the purchase decision, the following chapters will seek to uncover perceptions of Direct Mail are favourable.

Perceived Advantages of Direct Mail

Trust

One of key findings of this study is the identification of the “Trust” element in the purchase decision and how direct mail contributes to this, being a new benefit previously not identified by academia. A main objective of this research was to identify “How direct marketing can influence the decision to purchase in the 21st century” the proceeding discussion provides depth of evidence towards this. To identify the influence of the purchase decision, perceived benefits would first need to be identified, Chen et al (1998) highlights the impact of positive perceptions on increased adoption of advertising mediums. Within the sample “Trust” was identified the second highest perceived benefits of direct mail, identifying an average frequency of 50% amongst all participants, 40% amongst 25-34 year olds and 59% in 35-45 age category (See Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminder</td>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information Rich</td>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Information Rich</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3 – “Comparison of Perceived Advantages Of Direct Mail”*

Furthermore, the importance of trust is not limited to interviewees in 35-45 age ranges as highlighted above. Interviewee numbers four in the 25-35-age range highlighting a lack of confidence online.
“Products mis-advertised through fraudulent websites fail to live up to expectations, therefore a brand I can trust improves the repeat purchase of that brand”

The use of “Fraudulent” and “Mis-Advertised” indicates a possible negative prior experience with the Internet as a purchase platform. This trend is uncovered further when a variety of sub-questions where used in order to provoke depth in response, “Do you trust direct mail?” and if so “Why Do You Trust Direct Mail?” where used to uncover greater depth. Of the responses, again Interviewee three and eight provided the most valuable responses.

“The Internet is becoming in-secure, which increasingly encourages me to purchase through more offline other formats”

“Content on paper is physical and costly to distribute, being less likely to be dishonest. Online people create scams and defraud with greater ease”

Across both respondents a clear worry of “insecurity”, “fraud” and “scamming” is evident across both sample sets. Signifying a lack of unity towards agreeing with the work of Pinheiro (2014) who highlights “Security” as a key benefit of online purchasing. However, in the respondents who did not highlight “Trust as a perceived advantage (I2, I5, I7, I10), the sub-question “Do you not trust Direct Mail? Was generated to know the reasons why. The most valuable response was from Interviewee 10:

“I trust Direct Mail, but I do not receive enough of it to value it as an advertising format anymore”

This implies that even for individuals who did not directly identify “Trust” as a perceived benefit, the attribute is still a part of their overall perceptions of Direct Mail. Moreover, this early indicator provides strong evidence in answering the main objective of this research “Can direct mail marketing still influence the buyers purchasing decision in the 21st century?” providing early signals that direct mail is perceived in a favourable manner by both age groups. Amongst focus group participation, 35-45’s coincided with that of interviewees also citing “Trust” in their perceptions of Direct Mail.

“Direct Mail is trustworthy in the way it is distributed and my previous experiences of it. I haven’t purchased a product or be mislead through direct mail campaigns”

The responses above showing clear correlation to responses found in prior interviews, further impacting the overall importance of trust in this age group. Conversely, participants in Focus Group 1 (25-35) did not highlight “Trust” to a great extent, occurring only 5 times through the duration of the Focus Group. Therefore the depth of trend has smaller implications for the suggested age range.

Convenience

With increased online usage there has been greater suggestion that online services will replace the need for offline (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). This suggestion strongly backed due to the high number of benefits online offers including; Interactivity (Kiang, 2000 & Peterson et al 1997), Convenience (Bayo-Moriones, 2007), Customization and flexibility (Long, 1997). As such, due to the high number of benefits and increased usage it is clear why there are increasing numbers of advocates of Dutta-Bergman’s (2004) work. Findings from this research would tend to disagree with the above suggestion and present new insight into consumer opinions. As table 1 underlines

“Being directly posted on me it saves the need to search for information, I do not have to search online or visit the store”
FG2: “As it arrives on my doorstep, it reduces the need for me to search, improving the overall convenience”

Moreover this lack of agreement with previous literature is further strengthened by later responses by the respondents cited above. When questioned directly “What are the benefits of online advertising?” a scarcity in the “Convenience” code adds greater depth to the above-mentioned themes. Of the respondents who did not highlight convenience as a benefit of online, 45% of 25-35 instead highlighted convenience as an offline benefit and 35% in 35-45 age groups, with some respondents openly stating which side they take.

The implication of the above findings add greater clarity in answering the research object “Can direct mail marketing still influence the buyers purchasing decision in the 21st century?” Within two scenarios, both sample sets (25-35 & 35-45) advocating clear advantages over that of the online alternatives. That would critically demonstrate a place for Direct Mail in the 21st century.

**Reminding Effect**

One additional highlight of this research is the recognition from the sample of the “Reminder” effect that direct mail offers. Although not recognised in a high frequency <5% amongst 25-34 year olds, the high presence the reminder theme amongst 35-45 year olds is of greater interest.

FG2: “As direct mail is a physical advertising format as opposed to on screen it is continuously reminding me of that product/service. As I keep picking that up piece of mail up and re reading it”

FG2: “When I receive mail or advertisement, it is placed in the family basket of mail, as such other family members have the opportunity to view it at there convenience, moreover it allows me to re-read the information at a later date”

The interesting points to draw from the responses above, firstly is the idea that advertisement is viewed more than once, the concept of “Re-reading” is evident in both the above, a concept originally coined by Bergemann (2010). Response No.2 gives greater value to overall research project, as it presents an effect previously not identified. The idea that “Others have the opportunity to view”, is a suggestion previously un-identified in literature, but is an extremely strong potential benefit to marketers. Due to the increased reach a singular marketing campaign can have, improving the availability of information and overall the likelihood of purchase (Howard & Sheth, 1969).

**What Effects The Decision To Purchase?**

By understanding what effects purchase, it will clearly identify the factors in which marketing can contribute towards. As such, it will assist in answering the question if Direct Mail can exist despite the rise of the Internet. Responses to the questions “What attracts you to marketing?” and “What puts you off from marketing?” where mixed and highly varied. Individuals aged 25-34 provoked responses focus around the central idea of content, the themes of “Colour”, “Images”, “Convenience”, “Information” and “Trust” occurring at the highest frequency. In comparison 35-45 concentrated on the process itself suggesting ‘Honesty’, ‘Convenience’, ‘Information’, ‘Trust’ and ‘Opinions’ as the main marketing influences contributing to the purchase decision.

The two main points to draw from this is the following 1) importance of trust increases with age and 2) The greater an acceptance of advertisement, the increased level of purchase. Implications to management are the advantages direct mail can offer at a time when trust in online advertisement is tarnished. With it generally accepted that Internet usage is rising at consumer and organisational level, this study however would indicate a lack of confidence in online, and consequently causing organisations to revaluate the distribution of online and offline spend, in order to create a trustworthy brand.
How Can Direct Mail Effect the Purchase Decision

Improve Trust

It has been highlighted that the way in which marketing perceived is directly linked to the uptake of that product (Kotler, 2010). Trust, convenience and reminder were increasing factors effecting purchase across both age groups, with an average frequency of above 20% across the sample (Table 4). This reveals “Trust”, “Convenience” and “Reminding Effect” as the largest influencers in the decision to purchase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Stimuli</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Stimuli</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Past Experience</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Past Experience</td>
<td>&gt;5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personalisation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 - Stimuli Affecting Purchase

The above findings would highlight the impact of trust is far more important than previously considered in the works of Howard & Sheth (1969) and Engel-Blackwell-Miniard (1990) who did not directly feature trust as a stimuli. As Interviewee 3, 7 and focus group 1 suggests, the level of trust they placed in a brand directly correlates to the volume and frequency of purchase.

I3: “Trusting a brand increases the amount I purchase from that company, as I know exactly what I am going to receive”

I7: “The assurance I have of a products quality, honesty and reliability the increased likelihood I will purchase from the organisation again”

FG1: “I have to be confident in the method of purchase before I commit to that process”

This theme has the potential to impact purchase situations that demand high levels of trust and honesty. As respondents clearly indicate inklings towards situations that require trust and honesty. To contribute further depth of understanding, the question “In what situations can Direct Mail work best in?” was put forward in later discussions to uncover in what situations consumers viewed direct mail would have its greatest effect, provoking the following responses:

FC2: “Direct Mail exhibits trust, therefore I would see Direct Mail in situations where trust is essential – Banking, Health Care and Insurance”

FC2: “When purchasing a car, stereo or television I have always found that Direct Mail is suited best to these situations”

Responses would suggest that direct mail has a strong case for applications in the above-mentioned sectors. Moreover, the views of I8 and I3 (Pg. 18), who highlight the disadvantages of Online/The Internet as “Insecure” and “Full of scams”, strengthens the case for Direct Mail as a future advertising, but also purchase medium. However, a much deeper analysis in the purchase environment would be needed to prove/disprove the identified themes.

Offer Convenience

Convenience occurred at an average frequency of 62.5% across both age groups, which would suggest individuals have limited spare time. As such if time constraints exist within an individuals lifestyle, it has the potential to lower the effectiveness of television and radio as advertising formats, due to increased usage needed.
to gain exposure to these formats (Wilby, 2001). The way in which age differs the way in which they consider convenience across age was of particular interest in this study.

II: “The convenience of being able to purchase on the move through the Internet has become of increasing importance when looking to buy a product” & FC1: “time is always limited, any factor improving the overall speed and convenience of purchase is seen favourable, E.g. Mobile & Contactless”

I9: “Having somewhere local view, feel and purchase the product” & FC2: “The comfort of viewing catalogues at home, on the train or during my break gives me more time to justify purchase”

The above responses specify a clear dissimilarity between conveniences across age, what is important to note is the citing of online and offline between age groups. I1 and FC1 point out primarily online methods of advertising an purchase, citing “Mobile”, “The Internet” and “Contactless” in comparison to I9 and FC2 who cite offline methods “Catalogues” and “Local Stores”. This provides a sign that as age increases the preference for offline formats of advertising and sales are favoured. However Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 7 contradicted this above trend.

I2: “Any offering that can be directly placed in my hand, improves the overall convenience of purchase and will benefit me” And I7: “A process that lowers the time I have to spend searching and offers me the best price”

FC2: “Direct mail is a physical advertising format in comparison to on screen, it continuously reminds me of that product/service, as I keep re reading it”

Each contradicting the previous suggestions by I1, I9, FC1 and FC2, creating a basis for further study as the perceptions and preferences amongst age are inconclusive and require greater examination. In addition to the main discovery of “Trust” and “Convenience” as the main influences effecting purchase, reminding effect also has a direct influence on the intent to buy.

**Increase Consumer Knowledge**

In literature two main sets of academics have sought to discover the process of the decision to purchase, as well as a variety of factors influencing this decision. Howard & Sheth (1969) providing “Stimuli” as a classification for the various pieces information influences. As FC2 implies a huge benefit to consumers is the concept that you can pick up and re read the content, furthermore the focus on “Physicality” in the definition is an area that could be of interest in further research. As the models of buyer behaviour imply consumers evaluate a information at a variety of levels (See Figure 1), the results of this study therefore suggest that consumers will evaluate the information more than once, consequently a greater exposure to information can greatly improve the decision to purchase, due to it improving the knowledge consumer has of that product (Engel-Blackwell-Miniard, 1990). However, it must be noted that frequency of the “Reminding” code was limited, an overall indicator of its strength in prompting purchase.

Trust, convenience and reminding are the main “Stimuli” affecting the overall intention to purchase and Direct Mail exhibits these as the main benefits from a consumer perspective (Table 1), it offers strong evidence to answering the research objective “Can direct mail marketing still influence the buyers purchasing decision in the 21st century” in that it contributes the qualities consumers look for.

**Direct Mail In The Future**

This research has clearly identified that Direct Mail will still have an effect in years to come, supporting the work of Dannaher (2011). When directly asked “Do you see a place in the future for Direct Mail?” response amongst both groups was positive (Table 5). Providing a new direction to the research area since the work of Leeflang et al (2013) who advocate limited Direct Mail in the future. With the overall objective of
understanding perceptions, this investigation went further by providing some suggestion to the situations in which Direct Mail would have its biggest effect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 – Will Direct Mail exist in the future – Age Comparison

The implications to managers is that is provides suggestion to the situations in which a Direct Mail approach would be best suited namely, high information and personal products. With Internet and Mobile Banking continually increasing (McKinsey, 2013) and online spend increasing five fold in 2014 (Daneshkhu, 2014), indicates a strong movement online. This study counters this view, indicating that Direct Mail should not be ignored as a future advertising medium. Furthermore, the strong perceived benefits of Direct Mail in comparison to the lack of online benefits, provides a compelling argument for Direct Mail as a future medium. As discussed above, one final point that provides a strong argument for the continued preference of Direct Mail is evidenced by the results in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Offline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 – Advertising Preference – Age Comparison

When individuals were given a the choice between social media and direct mail after lengthy discussions of both, age groups showed a preference for direct mail, with the code “Offline” being used, with frequency’s greater than 50% (See Table 6). However, these suggestions must be taken in light of the limitations of the research, namely sample size and research validity.

Discussion

In addition to the highlighted it is important to note this study’s perceptions in relation to previous academia (Table 3). Berry (2001) is one of the main researchers on this area, highlights personal, selective, flexible and discreet as the main perceived benefits of direct mail. This study has clearly identified personal as a main benefit of direct mail, with a high frequency amongst respondents (See Figure 3.0). Moreover, the importance of it in the purchase decision strengthens its applications in the 21st century. However, it can be argued that much of what Berry (2001) highlights as advantageous is from an organizational perspective; therefore it provides some explanation to the lack of agreement with Berry’s work. Earlier research by Lariscy et al (1996) highlighted greater targeting and more competitive offerings, this study would provide support for the perceived benefit of “Targeted” due to its high occurrence in early definitions. The absence of “More competitive offerings” can be partially explained by the scenarios in which research was conducted. Lariscy et al (1996) analyzing consumer’s actual purchase in much greater depth.

The areas in which this research agrees most directly to literature, is with the work of Korgaonkar (1984) and Santana (2013). “Convenience” as highlighted by Korgaonkar (1984) was one of the highest identified benefits of this study (See Table 1), furthermore as a strong attribute affecting purchase, it indicates that direct mail can still have a huge effect in the purchase decision, supporting the work of Gillette (1970) and Berkowitz et al (1979). Furthermore the scarcity of “Convenience” as a perceived benefit of online advertisement reinforces the suggestion of direct mail as a future advertising medium. Of more recent studies, Santana (2013) pinpoints “Reminding effect” as the main advantage of direct mail. Findings from this research strongly back his work. As with convenience, the reminding effect was a main theme of this research. More importantly, the strong presence of “Information” as a stimuli-effecting purchase bolsters the argument for future direct mail advertisement.
Furthermore, the observed importance of “Trust” as a perceived benefit has a great impact on the overall decision to purchase. As Cheng et al (1998) and Shukla (2012) note, perceived benefits correlate to the overall decision to purchase. As with convenience, direct mail is viewed as trustworthy and is a stimulus that the consumer looks for, its applications as marketing tool in the 21st are strengthened to a greater extent. Finally, the importance of the “Reminding effect” agrees with the prior work of Bergemann (2010), but adds greater depth to his work by proposing a new knock on affect previously not highlighted. In relation to the low number of unique benefits online can offer, it would indicate the long-term success of Direct Mail.

**Effect of Age**

Of the various studies that have been conducted over the past thirty years, there has been little consensus on the effect of age on both the intent to purchase and its impact on perceptions. From the literature conducted this research would counter the findings of Darian (1987) who states as age increases the preference for direct mail decreases. Direct mail instead being viewed as favorable and having a place in the future (See figure 122). Advocating the previous findings of Gillet (1976) and Settle et al (1994) who find little difference between age and the adoption of a certain advertising format, instead suggesting both ages favor direct mail. The importance of this is in relation findings in relation to the Eurostat (2010) statistics which highlight increased Internet usage amongst younger individuals, suggesting a preference for online formats (Dutta-Bergmann, 2004). As such, with such an indication, it provides a strong argument for management to reconsider the appropriate methods to target younger consumers.

**Conclusions / Recommendations**

Since the work of early work of Gillette (1970), Reynolds (1974) and Darian (1987) various academics have looked to discover the perceived benefits of offline advertisement, but few have examined offline effectiveness in a marketplace flooded with online marketing tools (Social media, emails and Google ads). Moreover, with a greater focus amongst current literature for online, the central objective of this research was to identify the current and future influence of direct mail in the purchase decision; it has been successful in achieving this, supporting the use of direct mail as a future advertising medium.

Findings have shown across a range of variables that Direct mail is still a highly influential method of advertising. Most notably, the identification of convenience, trust and the reminding effect are further strengthened by their correlation with the stimuli that effect purchase (Information, trust, convenience and price). Additionally, the clearly consensus amongst respondents for direct mail existing in the future, but also the situations in which direct mail will have its greatest influence (Banking and High trust situations). Furthermore, based on the identification of benefits of direct mail this study can conclude that the Internet has no detrimental impact on the perceptions of direct mail, but instead created further advantages (Personalised). In regards to age, this study has offered suggestion that age has a limited impact on the perceived advantages of direct mail, supporting the general trend found amongst previous studies (Gillette, 1976).

The significance of this study is that it clearly contributes to a new direction in future studies, opposing the trend that online will replace offline (Dutta-Bergmann, 2004). With numerous perceived benefits that match consumers wants, our findings would strongly suggest a reconsideration of spend, with a greater focus on direct marketing to reach a range of age groups. Moreover, the strong perceived benefits despite increased Internet usage, cements its place as a contributing factor in the purchase decision for years to come.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Although this research has been successful in identifying a range of important implications for managers, it has two limitations that can be addressed in future research. Depth of perceptions and attitudes have been the focus of this study, but lacks the depth in sample size, future research should focus on gaining further depth of understanding amongst the population, a wider use of qualitative methods would establish greater knowledge of the wider perceptions of UK consumers, as location is an unexamined factor in the purchase decision. Age is
another variable that hasn’t been fully examined, only comparing the attitudes of two age sets, other groups (18-25 & 65+) also have an importance for marketers, due to the perceived high and low Internet usage.

Additionally, this study does not test if what people claim, follows through to actual purchase, therefore a gap exists in research to test purchase patterns based on their perceptions of direct mail, requiring substantial investment to establish enough data to gain validity.

**Delimitations of Research & Limitations**

The research has not focus on the following Direct Marketing techniques 1) Television Advertisement, 2) Radio, primarily to narrow the focus of the research to allow for a more in-depth review of Direct Mail as an advertising medium. Moreover, Dutta-Bergmann (2004) amongst other academics cites direct mail one as the advertising most at threat. Additionally, Radio and Television cannot directly be replaced by Internet alternatives; as such these marketing mediums will be excluded in this research. As Radio and Television will still have a presence, even in the wake of increased Internet usage.

**Limitations of Research**

This research has several limitations, as a qualitative based study, this research aimed to gain depth to understanding as opposed to generalizability. Sample size was therefore small in comparison to a quantitative based study, which positivists would argue limits its validity and credibility. Sample size remained small because of time constraints imposed by other assessments during the same period. If time constraints didn’t exist then research would take a more triangulated approach, Mathison (1988) suggests triangulation improves the validity of research. Additionally only accounting for two age ranges, a wider analysis of age must be assessed to fully understand the population, a wider analysis of age would have contributed to more to marketers and organisations. Finally, throughout this study there has been a strong indication from the sample that Direct Marketing is still a favourable marketing method, but at no point has this been tested within a purchasing scenario. As such proposals have been made of how these limitations can be incorporated into future studies.

**References**


Berkeley, California: Institute of Business and Economic Research.


Michell, L (1999) ‘Combining focus groups and interviews: telling how it is;telling how it feels’ in Barbour, R & Kitzinger, J (1999).


Travers, M (2001) Qualitative Research Through Case Studies Introducing Qualitative Methods, Sage Publications (CA).


