CREEPY MARKETING: THREE DIMENSIONS OF PERCEIVED EXCESSIVE ONLINE PRIVACY VIOLATION

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In this explorative paper we develop three dimensions of a new construct, Creepy Marketing (hereafter CM). First we discuss the impact of online personalized marketing on consumers. Based on this discussion a qualitative study examines both annoying marketing and creepy marketing from a consumer's perceptive. Results distinguish annoying marketing, defined primarily as tactics, from CM, defined predominately as feelings. Based on the study, CM consists of three dimensions: invasion of privacy, stalking behavior and violation of social norms. Each of these dimensions is discussed and directions for future research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

For more than fifty years, social scientists have studied the concept of personal space in the corporeal world. Studies on violations of this personal space include both public and private settings. These settings vary widely from 1) public settings where one would assume reduced personal space such as crowded subway cars (Evans & Wener, 2007) to 2) public spaces where one expects no violation of personal space such as men's urinals (Middelmist, Knowles, & Matter, 1978) and 3) private spaces where one assumes additional personal space such as an ATM (Kaya and Erkip, 1999).

Personal space, an area that individuals maintain around themselves (Hayduk, 1978), consists of a culturally accepted normative distance and a known predictable behavior (Evans and Wener, 2007; Burgoon, 1978). Both the distance property and known predictability of that property help to regulate privacy (Evans & Wener, 2007). The violation of expected behavior (Burgoon, 1978) or an involuntary invasion of personal space elevates physiological stress (Middlemist, Knowles, & Matter, 1976) and generates discomfort (Hayduk, 1978). If an invasion of personal space takes place, retreat and establishment of a new personal space (Felipe & Sommer, 1966) occurs. As a strategy, retreat reestablishes privacy for individuals.

The social sciences provide much explanation of violations of personal space in the corporeal world however a paucity of research on violations of virtual space exists. The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of virtual space, which is the space individuals consider to be their own virtual environment. Our study begins with a discussion of more familiar corporeal or non-virtual invasion of personal space. Next, we discuss online personalized marketing, the impact of this type of marketing on consumers and then conduct a qualitative study to identify types of marketing that pierces this veil of online virtual space based on perceptions of what Internet users consider creepy marketing (hereafter CM). The results of this study are then discussed in a broader sense offering a multi-dimensional interpretation of CM. We conclude with suggestions for future research as well as implications for firms.

PERSONAL SPACE VERSUS VIRTUAL SPACE

To illustrate the relative differences in personal versus virtual space violation, consider the following situation. It's a weekend afternoon and you decide to go shopping for a new jacket. You enter a store and casually browse a few items before selecting a jacket and try it on.

You then return it to the rack and leave the store. You move on to a few other stores but aren't satisfied with the options and return home. The next day as you enter your favorite bagel shop you notice someone just inside the door; he calls out your name. You turn and notice he is holding a jacket, pinned to it is a partially completed order slip with your name. In his other hand, circled on a map, is your current location. It is the same jacket you had tried on the day before. How did he know you looked at that jacket? How did he know it was you? Why does he have your location circled? For most, this situation would at a minimum be annoying and more likely, result in a rather unsettling feeling. However, online tools allow marketers to virtually engage in the behavior described above.

The situation described above might even feel like stalking which is "conduct directed at individuals that involves repeated physical proximity, unwanted communication, threats, fear, or a combination of these events" (Tjaden, 1997; p. 1). One of the conditions of stalking requires the communication to be non-consensual (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) where "more than one overt act of unwanted pursuit of the 'victim' is perceived as being harassing" (Meloy & Gothard, 1995; p. 259).

To warrant classification as stalking, invasion of space and privacy need not be overtly threatening. Pathe and Mullen (1997) describe stalking as behaviors inflicted on others in the form of unwanted intrusions and communications. In fact, they need not be corporeal in nature but do violate an individual's sense of social norms. Social norms exist in both the corporeal and virtual worlds. Further, social norms regulating real world behavior seem to parallel those in virtual environments including expectations of personal virtual space (Preece, 2004; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012). In an online environment such as Facebook, personal space extends to users' news feeds and walls with norm violations including unacceptable posting habits on said feeds and walls (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012).

Burgoon (1978) introduced Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) to explain why individuals react to negative violations of personal space that are based on the expected distance of the violator as well as the personal relationship. A key finding of EVT is that the perceived valence of the violation will drive subsequent reaction. McLaughlin and Vitak (2012) extend EVT to the virtual world and find negative violations from friends result in confrontation while such violations from non-friends results in posts being ignored, in a best-case scenario. However, in every case, violations of etiquette, such as stalking like behavior and unwelcome communication are always negative valance. This has potentially damaging implications for marketers employing personal information laden advertising.

As illustrated in our earlier scenario, the use of GPS technology as well as advances in behavioral tracking software entices marketers who can more easily identify, track and intercept our activities as we consume digital information and interact in our online lives. Though much of behavioral marketing seems benign, there are instances in which marketing can create an unsettling feeling. For example, consider the following as reported in Hill (2011); a woman in California receives an email from an English soccer hooligan, purporting to be an acquaintance. He notes he is on the run from the law and he was on the way to see her. She had no idea either who he was nor how he knew facts about her. Over the course of his trek across the US, she receives updates on his antics-including an email from a hotel manager with a bill for damages he had caused. She was terrified. On the 5th day she received notice it was a prank, initiated when she agreed to a personality test that had been sent to her by a friend, aka the prankster. It turns out to be an elaborate ad campaign for the Toyota Matrix, the automobile the soccer hooligan used to cross the country.

Consider the coping mechanism used when personal space is violated. Online consumers cannot retreat when faced with personalized unsolicited advertising, potentially leading to a sense of helplessness and stress. Individuals may simply elect to cease interaction with the website; an option that for some would be difficult when the offense occurs on social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Online marketing practices employ tools and

techniques that would be somewhat impossible in the non-virtual world.

PERSONALIZED MARKETING

Personalization in marketing is not a new concept. With its origins in segmentation, marketers have long used information such as demographics, psychographics, and geographic locations to develop and offer products to satisfy customer needs (i.e., Smith, 1956). Increases in technology accompanied by decreases in costs have enabled firms to reduce broad segments to markets of one (i.e., Perkowitz & Oren, 2000). These efforts can range from broad personalization offerings such as a firm promoting makeup using ethnic cues (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001) to very narrow one to one communications such as personalized custom web site landing pages to prospective college students.

In terms of online personalization, recent studies have indicated that this medium offers a unique opportunity for organizations to implement high degrees of near instantaneous personalization (Ho & Tam, 2005; Zhang & Wedel, 2009). Unlike offline personalized marketing which can introduce delays in delivery (e.g., direct mail), interruption characteristics (e.g., telemarketing), or lack of customer knowledge (e.g., retail staff), online personalized marketing uses real time information and behavior to reach the consumer at the time in which they are engaged in need satisfying activities. Personalization in this context refers to the ability to change online content as the user is experiencing it.

Information for personalization, needed from consumers, can be either voluntarily or involuntarily provided. Individuals voluntarily provide information (i.e., name and address) through order processing and creating user accounts. The willingness of customers to provide information is related to the trust an individual has with the firm (Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002), the perceived benefit (Akçura & Srinivasan, 2005) and perceived control over further dissemination (Phelps, Nowak, & Ferrell, 2000).

It is commonly believed that over time consumers will benefit from personalization

due to the increased ability of a firm to know their preferences and to make recommendations uniquely suitable to them (Kramer, Spolter-Weisfeld, & Thakker, 2007). However others believe it represents a paradox for individuals as their privacy is potentially invaded and they lose control over the use of their information (Christiansen, 2011; Milne, Rohm, & Bahl, 2009).

The paradox becomes apparent due to an organizations obtaining, *or using*, information involuntarily (from the consumer's perspective). A firm can utilize tools such as cookies and web bugs to track behavior and then use that information to change their offerings based on behavior. Consumers can identify those companies tracking their online surfing behavior using a browser add-on called Collusion. After visiting just two websites (Fox News and The Weather Channel) Collusion generated more than thirty-five 3rd party sites that were notified of our surfing destinations with several sharing information between each other and other firms to which we had not even visited. More sophisticated software allows the combination of not just online behavior but multiple data sources online and offline to make product recommendations as illustrated in the below comment.

> *"I was looking at home warranty companies on the Internet, but did not fill in any forms with my information. Two days later, in the regular, US snail mail, I get an ad mailed to me from a home warranty company. Coincidence?"* Michele (theweek.com)

This form of personalization, based on behavior profiling, occurs in real time as individuals surf the Internet. The end game is the movement of site visitors through the purchase cycle. However there is also the belief that as this personalization becomes perceived as excessive, consumers will cope through avoidance and negative attitudes (Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008). We believe that this second form of information acquisition and use is more likely to lead to instances in which individuals feel that CM has occurred.

QUALITATIVE STUDY

A student sample was utilized to discover thoughts and feelings regarding both creepy and annoying marketing tactics. College students are appropriate for this type of study as they represent a homogenous population and they frequently interact with sites in which they provide personal information that may be used for marketing communications (i.e., Facebook.com). Students in an introductory marketing course in a large public university located in the southern United States were offered an opportunity to earn course credit by responding to questions regarding annoying and creepy marketing. Of the 276 students, 273 agreed to participate in the study. Subjects were asked six open-ended questions; three for creepy marketing, three for annoying marketing. Respondents were asked to separately define; provide examples and note how annoying marketing and creepy marketing make them feel.

The number of usable responses varied by question and ranged from 153 (for examples of creepy marketing) to 266 (for how annoying marketing might make one feel). The responses provided show that while the two types of marketing may overlap in the minds of some consumers, there are distinct differences between the two in terms of definitions, examples, and feelings. Of the six questions we focus on the definitions that were provided by respondents and use the examples and feelings as ancillary support for the development of dimensions of creepy marketing. Our focus on the definitions allows us to understand what subjects believe these constructs represent.

Two judges sorted the responses regarding the definitions of annoying and creepy marketing to uncover major themes. In a process similar to one used by Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990), responses were read, reread, and then grouped into categories. First, one judge used open coding to create categories of responses by grouping similar responses. These categories were then combined, when appropriate, with other categories sharing similar characteristics. These categories were then provided to the

TABLE 1: Categorization of Verbatim Responses			
Q1a: Annoying Marketing Def. (n=287*)	**Included Subcategories**	**Illustrative Quotes**	**Percentage**
Aggressive tactics		*"Marketing that keeps trying to influence a customer to buy a certain product even when they already turned the product down"*	41%
Repetition		*"When companies use the same commercials over and over"*	23%
Obnoxious Tactics			15%
	Garish/loud ads	*"Any marketing that is loud, persistent, or vulgar, or things that are spelled incorrectly"*	*8%*
	Irritating	*"Marketing that is irritating to any of the 5 senses of a target customer"*	*4%*
	Distracting	*"Ads before youtube videos, Pandora, etc. Any ad that keeps you from doing what you are trying to do"*	*1%*
	Low quality ads	*"Marketing that does not meet today's standards"*	*~1%*
Unsolicited		*"When you get excessive commercials/ phone calls about a product or service that you are not interested in"*	9%
Irrelevant Content			7.3%
	Nonsensical	*"Ads that seem to have no plan"*	*4%*
	Uninformative	*"Marketing that tells nothing about the product. It just tries to be funny or flashy to sell me something"*	*2%*
	Product Focused	*"Only concentrating on selling the product, not caring about the customer"*	*1%*
Tactics Which Cause Avoidance		*"Bugging a customer to the point that they want nothing to do with your product"*	5%

 * Some respondents provided complex definitions which were broken into distinct elements.

TABLE 1: *(Continued)*			
Q1b: Creepy Marketing Def. (n=204)	**Included Subcategories**	**Illustrative Quotes**	**Percentage**
Invasive Tactics			41%
	Using/ Gathering Personal Information	*"Marketing that knows your interests or things about you that you did not provide. For example, they suggest items that you would be interested in based off of other purchases"*	*27.5%*
	Invasion of personal space	*"Using methods that may be too personal or constant"*	*8%*
	Tracking	*"Cookie tracking on a computer is sometimes kind of creepy when you start getting ads for things you have been looking at"*	*5%*
Consumer Discomfort			32%
	Consumer emotion discomfort	*"An approach to marketing that makes the consumer feel uneasy and leaves them questioning the motives of the company advertising the product"*	*24.5%*
	Consumer emotion fear/ uncertainty	*"Marketing that doesn't make you feel safe like someone is watching you"*	*4%*
	Use of fear appeals	*"Selling products in a way that it scares the customer into not buying it or using a scare tactic to get the customer to use the product"*	*4%*
Violates social norms			14%
	Inappropriate examples	*"Marketing or advertising with seductive girls or guys talking about the products in a seductive way"*	*5%*
	Unusual Content	*"Usually happens when advertisers are willing to touch on subjects that are socially considered out-of-bounds or off-limits"*	*8%*
	Content feelings	*"Marketing that speaks to a person's inner life, thoughts, and feelings"*	*~1%*
Out of the Ordinary Tactics (creates weird feeling)		*"Marketing that uses techniques that we think are odd or unusual to get our attention"*	13%

second judge, who sorted each response into one of the established categories. Minor disagreements in coding were resolved by discussion between the judges. Both the inter-rater reliability and Perreault and Leigh's (1989) Index (I_r) were calculated and both exceeded .80, supporting the consistency of the coding process.

DEFINITIONS

The respondent-provided definitions of both creepy and annoying marketing were separated into twenty-four distinct categories. These categories were then combined by common themes when possible and resulted in 11 abstract definitional categories. Four primary categories of definitions emerged for creepy marketing while six categories emerged for annoying marketing. The primary definitional categories for both annoying and creepy marketing are noted in Table 1 and are

described below. Examples of both corporeal and virtual creepy and annoying tactics are discussed to show how non-virtual examples often parallel virtual marketing examples.

ANNOYING MARKETING

Category 1: Aggressive tactics

A large percentage of respondents chose to define annoying marketing in terms of the level of aggression or persistence they perceived to be present in marketers' strategies. Aggressive tactics include persistent selling measures after a consumer has refused a product or service, pressuring the customer to make a purchase, or using excessive promotions. This category also includes instances in which a consumer feels overwhelmed by marketing efforts. For example, respondents defined annoying marketing as "overkill," "over the top," "pushy", and "in your face."

Category 2: Repetition

Annoying marketing may be synonymous with repetition in the minds of some respondents. The second largest definitional category for annoying ads centered on the reappearance of the same promotional tools or repeated selling efforts by a single firm. For example, annoying marketing is defined as "when companies use the same commercials over and over," but also as "when telemarketers constantly call from the same company," and "getting asked to buy the same product multiple times." Online examples include the same pop up ads or banner ads repeating from page to page.

Category 3: Obnoxious

The timing and design of marketing efforts can also contribute to perceptions of annoying marketing. Many respondents note that obnoxious marketing efforts are the definition of annoying marketing. These efforts that are annoying to respondents include garish, loud, or low quality ads "Annoying marketing is any marketing that is loud, persistent, or vulgar," or "cheaply made advertisements". For example, many online ads for insurance rely on gimmicks such as animated gifs of girls dancing in bikinis to gain attention; all the while annoying those who they target. This type of marketing efforts can also be included in a definition of annoying marketing. Several respondents note that annoying marketing is distracting marketing and that this can include "…ads before YouTube videos, Pandora ads, etc…anything that keeps you from what you are doing." Ultimately, it seems that these marketing efforts can also be irritating to the consumer, as many respondents stated that the definition of annoying marketing is "marketing that is irksome," or "marketing that is irritating to any of the five senses of a consumer."

Category 4: Unsolicited

Another category that emerged in the definitions of annoying marketing was concerned with unsolicited promotional efforts. In the corporeal world this includes customers receiving emails, telephone calls, or even promotional items from an organization when they have not initiated contact or requested information from that organization. For example, annoying marketing may be "unsolicited emails, telephone calls, surveys, etc," "giving customers unwanted promotional items," or " when you get see excessive commercials or receive excessive phone calls about a product or service that you are not interested in." In the virtual world, this includes cookies based ads that simply mine the cookies placed by companies such as double-click to expose consumers to ads for products related to search terms or other webpages visited previously. As an example, one of the current study's authors visited the ASPCA webpage. Until cookies were cleared, ads for the ASPCA, World Wildlife Fund and Pet Rescue (an online game by Zynga) appeared, often three or more ads on the same page until cookies were cleared.

Category 5: Irrelevant Content

Another emergent category for the definition of annoying marketing involves the content of marketing communications. Some respondents noted that annoying marketing includes communications that contain irrelevant, nonsensical, or unfocused content. For example, annoying marketing is identified as having no plan or appearing to not be well thought out. This type of marketing can also be perceived as including communications that are uninformative. As one respondent notes, "Annoying marketing is marketing that tells nothing about the product. It just tries to be flashy or funny to sell the customer something." As previously mentioned, animated gifs with scantily clad females to sell insurance or headlines promising a "weird way" to achieve some benefit.

While uninformative and irrelevant communications may be annoying, communication that includes only product related content was also perceived to be annoying marketing. For example, respondents state that annoying marketing "… is marketing that concentrates only on selling the product and doesn't care about the customer." So it seems that annoying marketing can also be defined as marketing efforts that either focus exclusively on the product or exclusively on entertaining the consumer.

Category 6: Causes Avoidance

The final prevalent category of reported definitions for annoying marketing includes definitions regarding the effect of marketing efforts on consumer behaviors. Respondents stated that annoying marketing can be defined as marketing that drives the consumer away, causes them to become uninterested in a product or service, or even drives the customer to desire a competitors' product or service. "Marketing that drives away the customer" and "bugging a customer to the point that they want nothing to do with your product" are examples of definitions in this category.

CREEPY MARKETING

Category 1: Invasive Tactics

The largest emergent category of definitions for creepy marketing includes invasive tactics used by marketers, or at least tactics that are perceived by the customer to be invasive. The majority of these tactics include gathering or using personal information from the customer. Other tactics mentioned by respondents include the invasion of personal space by marketers and perceived stalking or tracking practices using by marketers.

Many respondents cite the use and gathering of personal information as being the salient trait of creepy marketing. It seems that this utilization of personal information results in marketing efforts that are perceived to be "too personal." For example, respondents reported creepy marketing is defined as "gathering too much personal information," "marketing that knows you so well that it is creepy" and "marketing that knows your interests or other information about yourself that you did not provide." This type of marketing is particularly effective online, given the ability to gather and aggregate personal information from multiple online sources.

Other definitions in this category include the perceived invasion of one's "personal space" or "comfort zone" by the marketer as well as stalking and tracking behaviors perpetrated by the marketer. For example, several respondents noted that creepy marketing could be defined as being stalked by a salesperson and who won't leave you alone. When discussing personal space with students, it is evident that a form of violation of virtual personal space exists. For example, tracking activities can be conducted digitally as well as in person. Some respondents stated very specifically that creepy marketing could be defined as online tracking activities. Examples include "cookie tracking on a computer is creepy when you start getting ads for items that you have been looking at" and "ads that keep track of your browsing history."

Category 2: Causing Consumer Discomfort

Another large category of definitions for creepy marketing include defining creepy marketing as the discomfort that consumers may feel as a result of some marketing strategies. Respondents note that creepy marketing may make the consumer feel fearful, uncertain, or uncomfortable. This includes the use of fear appeals by marketers. For example, creepy marketing is defined as "selling products in a way that it scares that customer into not buying it or using a scare tactic to get the customer to use the product" and "anything that tries to appeal to fear or distress." Tactics such as these may cause the customer to feel uncertain or uncomfortable. Many respondents defined creepy marketing in these terms. For example, "creepy marketing is an approach to marketing that makes the consumer feel uneasy and leaves them questioning the motives of the company advertising the product." One such example involves a firewall security firm. This firm identifies the user by IP address, and provides personal information all the while offering a firewall to stop other companies from doing the same.

Category 3: Violates social norms

Content of marketing communications, which violate social norms, may also contribute to the definition of creepy marketing. Respondents state that creepy marketing can be defined as marketing that uses inappropriate examples, content, or salespeople, violates social norms, or deals with content matter that may be perceived as being personal, such as depression. Unnecessary sexuality is mentioned in many instances in which respondents state that creepy marketing can be defined by the use of

inappropriate examples, content, or salespeople. This includes such definitions as "creepy marketing is marketing or advertising with seductive men or women talking about products in a seductive manner" and " creepy marketing is using sexuality when it is unnecessary… adding sexual tension is not needed to sell a hamburger" or apparently insurance.

Respondents state that creepy marketing "usually happens when advertisers are willing to touch on subjects that are socially considered out-of-bounds or off-limits." Creepy marketing may also occur when marketers "cross a line" or mention subjects that are "taboo." This can include topics such as depression. One respondent states that creepy marketing is "marketing that speaks to a person's inner life… their thoughts, or feelings."

Category 4: Out of the Ordinary Tactics

The final category of definitions for creepy marketing includes the use of marketing tactics that respondent perceived to be abnormal. There were very few specific examples in this category. It seems that there is some indescribable quality to some marketing efforts that strikes consumers as being "weird" or "unusual." As one respondent noted, "creepy marketing is when you can sense that something is not normal with the marketer" and gives examples of salespeople who act in an unusual manner and of promotions, both online and real world, that seem too good to be true. Several other respondents in this category attempted to explain what constitutes "weird" tactics. For example, one respondent notes that the use of unrelated salespeople can be weird, stating, "I find it creepy when companies designate a single random person to become their spokesperson and they make commercials with them in weird scenarios, like Flo in the Progressive commercials." However, many others simply stated that creepy marketing is "marketing that is odd and weird" or "marketing that uses unordinary techniques." One example cited as odd given its placement is one for erectile dysfunction appearing on a news feed for Fox News. The FEMALE reporting it lived alone and had never searched that term.

DISCUSSION

The perceptions of what respondents defined as annoying and creepy marketing offers some interesting results. First we will briefly discuss the annoying marketing results coupled with previous research examining these perceptions; then we will differentiate this term with creepy marketing and provide what we feel are the three dimensions of CM.
Annoying Marketing

The findings for annoying marketing predominately fall into the first three categories: aggressive tactics, repetition, and obnoxious, representing 79% of responses. Research regarding aggressive tactics is seemingly captured by hard selling techniques (e.g., Chu, Gerstner, & Hess, 1995) and bait and switch actions (e.g., Wilkie, Mela, & Gundlach, 1998). Advertising repetition has been seen to have negative consequences for both known and unknown brands (Campbell, Keller, Mick, & Hoyer, 2003). Lastly, obnoxious tactics have been examined in both traditional and digital marketing (e.g., Chang & Morimoto, 2011). Taken together, the components of annoying marketing focus on the tactics employed by the marketer and represent a long history of research in marketing.

Creepy Marketing

Based on our analysis of the definitions of CM provided by respondents, we formed the component categories outlined in Table 1. Unlike annoying marketing, in which the tactics employed by marketers was the focus of the definition, for CM it appears that the feelings associated with the tactics are more prominently included as part of identifying the concept. The categories noted in Table 1 for CM fall predominately into three dimensions representing 87% of responses: invasive actions, consumer discomfort and violates social norms. These areas are closely associated with corporeal research dimensions composed of invasion of privacy, stalking behavior and violations of social norms. It is these three dimensions that we feel compose the definition of CM.

Invasion of Privacy

Of the three dimensions, invasion of privacy represents the most extensively researched of these dimensions in marketing. For example, researchers have investigated the development of online privacy concerns (Ashworth & Free, 2006), dimensions of privacy concern (Sheehan & Hoy, 2000), as well as how privacy concerns influence the willingness to provide information (Nam, Song, Lee & Park, 2006; Phelps et al., 2000) to build relationships online (Awad & Krishnan, 2006; Franzak, Pitta, & Fritsche, 2001) and the resultant tensions between advertisers use of information and consumer concern (Akcura & Srinivasan, 2005; Rapp, Hill, Gaines, & Wilson, 2009). Our respondents reported the use of personal information and privacy invasion as part of their understanding of CM.
Stalking

First, it is not the authors' intention to minimize the traditional conceptualization of stalking which occurs between individuals in a societal context, rather our discussion is grounded in the belief that a firm can behave in a manner that can be perceived as stalking by consumers. As such, we rely on the extant individual based literature to inform our discussion. However, in the legislative, academic and practitioner arenas stalking has proved difficult to define due to the nature of the actions associated with it (Fox, Nobles, & Fisher, 2011). Fox et al. (2011, p.77), in their review of the stalking literature note that typical definitions of stalking include behaviors that are "… repetitive, intrusive, unwanted, and frightening, threatening or harassing." They also suggest that stalking is likely a multidimensional construct and that it may still occur when a subset of these behaviors are present. Our respondents noted similar behaviors which were not necessarily received positively such as: making contact with them (through advertisements) after they left a web site-even after several days, receiving items in the mail that were associated with a visited website- but were not requested and utilizing information which they did not disclose.

The consequences of stalking behavior on their victims cannot be ignored. Path and Mullen (1997), in their study of more distressed and aware victims, noted the impact of stalking included increased anxiety, avoidance of locations and changes in behavior including job relocation or ceasing employment, moving home and eating disorders.

Violation of Social Norms

Social norms provide guidance as to what should or ought to be done in a given situation. In this discussion, social norms refer to the use of information as one expects it to be used. This is analogous to Burgoon (1978) and violations of personal space. Online, this has proven to be an issue with minors (e.g., Bryce & Klang, 2009) and has resulted in the FTC (2012) development and strengthening of the Child Online Privacy Protection Rule. With regard to personal information, consumers do recognize the implicit tradeoff that is necessary to complete or engage in meaningful experience (Utz & Kramer, 2009). It is when information is used in a manner that is inconsistent with expectations that issues arise. In a study of relationship marketing efforts, it was found that what marketers felt was the development of customer intimacy, consumers considered intrusion (O'Malley, Patterson, & Evans, 1997). Granted that technology has made tremendous strides in collecting and integrating information offline (e.g., Lekakos, 2009) and online (Kachhi & Link, 2009), however a growing question has become *should they* (Baek & Morimoto, 2012)? Marketers have begun to recognize that there are limits to this integration (Godfrey, Seiders, & Voss, 2011) and as this level of communication expectations is breached negative responses can result (Alreck & Settle, 2007; White, Zahay, Thorbjornsen, & Shavitt, 2008).

IMPLICATIONS OF CM AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Behavioral profiling has progressed to the point in which data integration from multiple stored sources combined with real time information on behavior and location allows marketers an unprecedented ability to offer highly customized and personalized products and services. However, based on anecdotal evidence, our qualitative study and theoretical support- there are limits in which marketers can effectively and comfortably use this

information before consumers perceive the attempt to personalize their experience as going too far.

We find creepy marketing to be a perceptual construct composed of three dimensions: invasion of privacy, stalking behavior and violation of social norms. Based on our discussion future research regarding CM should be undertaken in a number of areas. First the development of a scale to assess each of the three components of CM is needed. Increases in CM are likely to be associated with greater feelings of uneasiness, anxiety and avoidance of the medium. In addition to development of the scale and associations, the potential impact of CM on focal brands may prove a worthwhile investigation. Does CM impact brands that are promoted? Does it lead to negative WOM? Alreck and Settle (2007) would suggest that it would not, however their study looked at macro knowledge, such as browsing time on specific websites and dollar totals of purchases, as opposed to an intimate single web surfing experience.

For firms, one of the biggest concerns is that CM is a moving target for each customer segment. What will seem unacceptable today may be regarded as business as usual tomorrow. However that does not eliminate the firm's need to be sensitive to the limits in which consumers wish their information to be used. As an extreme example of the feeling that consumers may feel when visiting a site that has met the CM threshold, the authors suggest the reader visit www.takethislollipos.com (Berkowitz, 2011; Note: site does not retain data). On the other side, consumers are not powerless and can take active control of what information is being shared with whom (i.e., see www.privacyrights.org for steps). However, much of the stored information is beyond the reach and control of end consumers (Hong & Thong, 2013).

In this paper we focused on corporeal behaviors and showed how they are often analogous to online activities that contribute to the perception of a creepy marketing event. Our reasoning is based on three aspects of the Internet that allow for consumers to perceive creepy marketing. First, the Internet has grown to represent a substantial proportion of

consumer activity with 28% of those online shopping for a product or service (Pew Internet, 2010) accounting for 7% of retail trade or $80 billion (US Census, 2015). Second, behavior online is easily tracked within and between web sites (FTC, 2012). Lastly, the continual improvement in supercomputing capabilities as well as software program development allows for the near instantaneous creation of offerings that are tailored to individual from multiple sources based on their actual behavior in the very near past as well as over time. Creepy marketing is a construct that helps to explain how individuals feel as a result of marketing interactions gone wrong.

LIMITATIONS

A key limitation of this study lies in the sample. We used a convenience sample of college-aged individuals. A more expansive sample encompassing different age groups such as parents of young children may have provided a 3rd party perspective of what creepy marketing is to them in their protective role as parents. In addition to age groups, other demographic characteristics such as household life cycle, gender, geographic location and education may all play a role in consumer perceptions of creepiness. For our study, the richness of the respondents' definitions of what creepy marketing is to them allays much of these potential biases and provides future opportunities for further refinement to this exploratory study. Also limiting our study is the issue of reliability, validity assessment, and generalizability; inherent in all qualitative studies. As such, future quantitative studies are recommended to examine reliability, validity and generalizability of creepy marketing.

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