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Cross-Contextual Examination of Older Adults' Privacy Concerns, Behaviors, and Vulnerabilities

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As Life Moves Online, an Older Generation Faces a Digital Divide

Uncomfortable with tech, many are struggling to use modern tools to keep up with friends and family in the pandemic.

TECH

Here's how online scammers prey on older Americans, and what they should know to fight back

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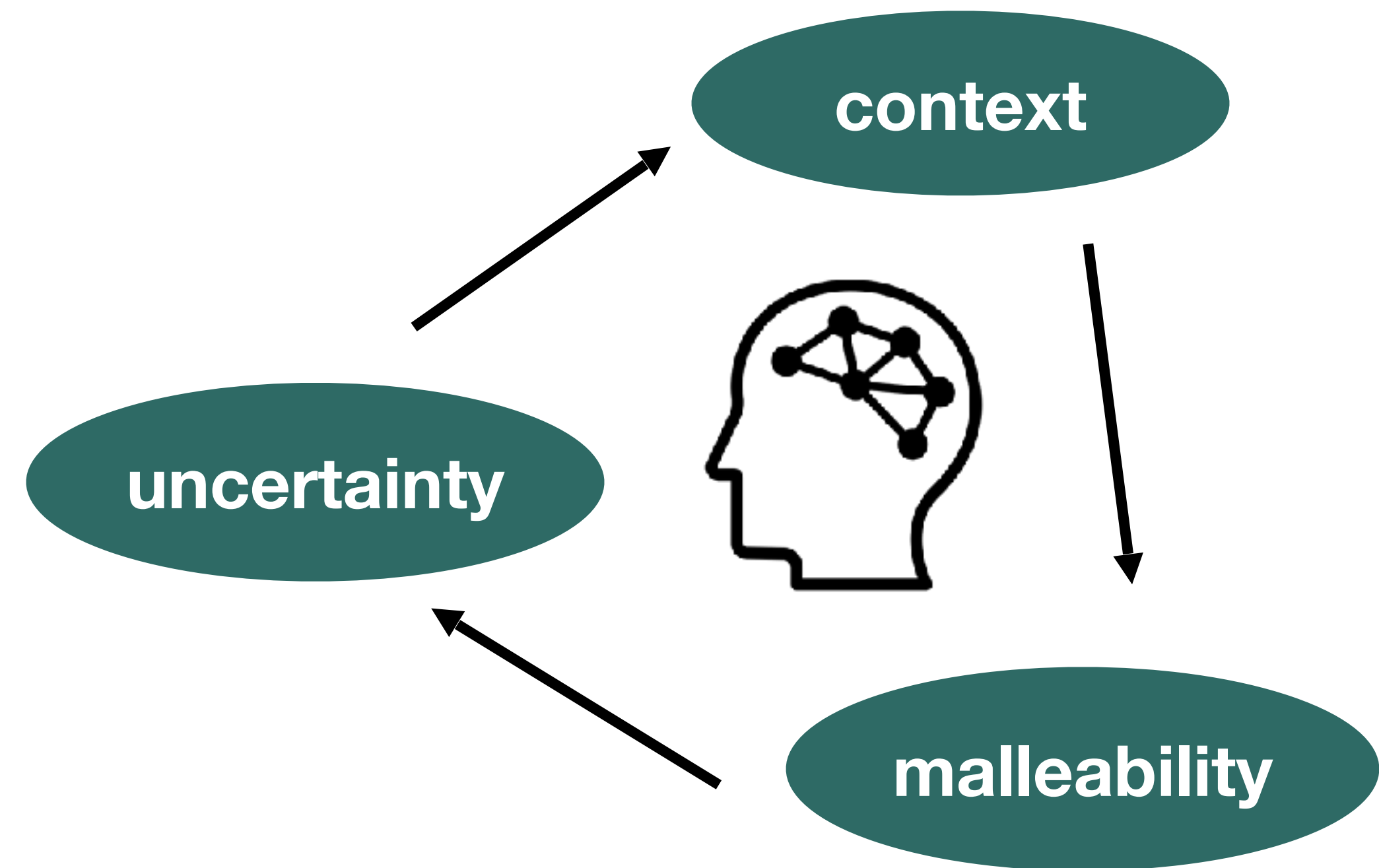
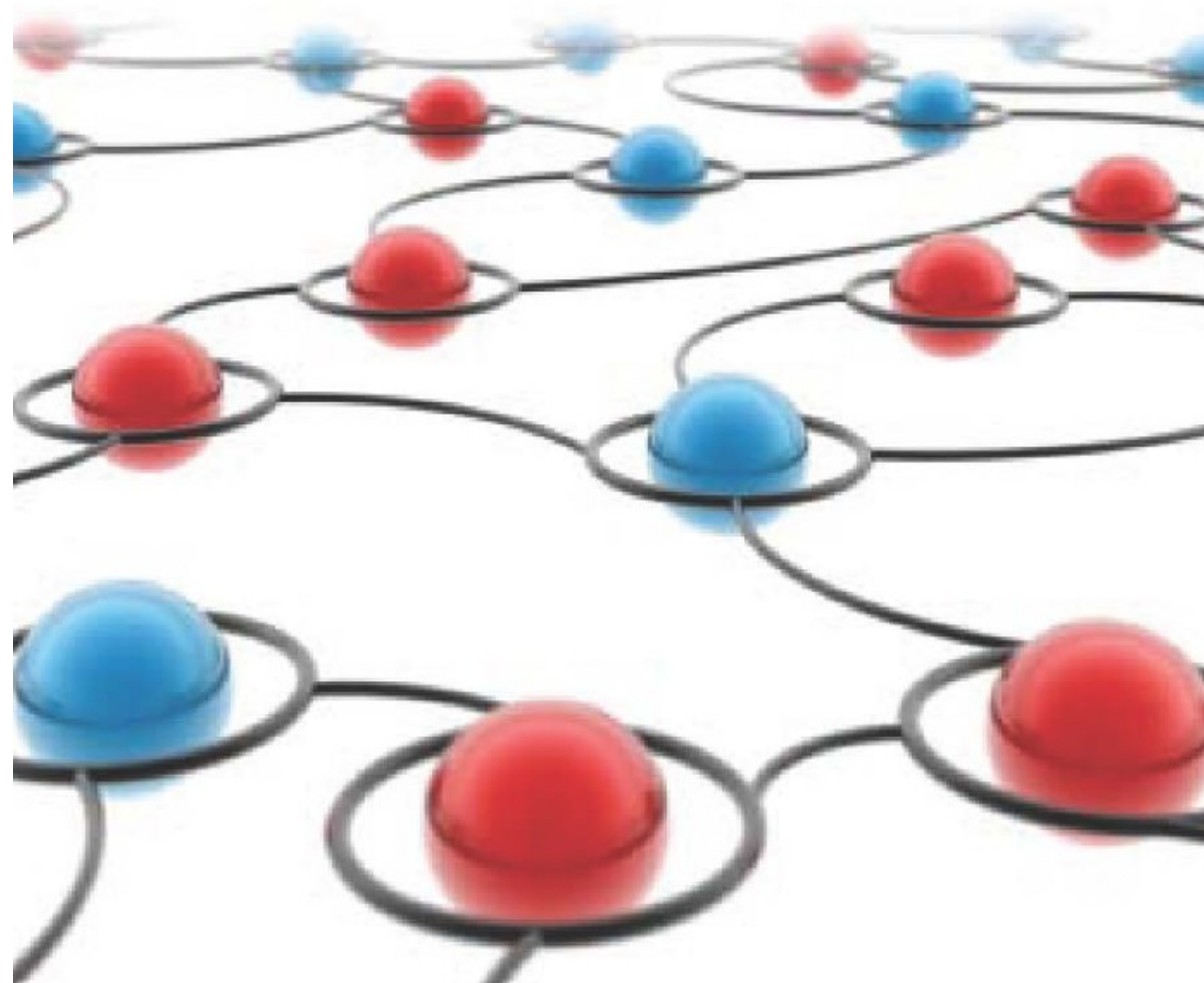
Research questions

How do older adults **themselves** view their privacy vulnerability?

PRIVACY IN CONTEXT

Technology, Policy, and the Integrity of Social Life

HELEN NISSENBAUM



(Acquisti et al., 2015)

Research questions

How do older adults themselves view their privacy vulnerability?

What are older adults' privacy concern, behavior, and vulnerability across contexts?

Method

Interviewed 43 older adults in the US
(65-89 years old) in Summer 2021

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Recruitment: diversifying channels

three local senior centers

snowball sampling



**Michigan Center for Urban African
American Aging Research**

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(65-89 years old) in Summer 2021

Recruitment: diversifying channels

Five scenarios



account and
device sharing



cybercrime



healthcare



online advertising



social media

Finding: cybercrime concerns across contexts

scam

phishing

fraud

identity theft

fraudulent charges

Finding: cybercrime concerns across contexts



cybercrime

“We had our computer locked up by a software company. They sold us a software package for \$150 that would guarantee that we would not have our system locked up.”

Finding: cybercrime concerns across contexts



cybercrime

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social media

“One day I got 1,000 friend requests [on Messenger], but I accepted them all onto my page. Then I realized I’m getting all these telephone calls [from] people trying to swagger me.”

Finding: vulnerability perceptions vary by context

Cybercrime stands out: most participants thought they were more vulnerable than younger generations.

“believe everything that they see”
“native with respect to technology”

“more susceptible to scammers working on our emotions, like the grandparent scam”

“seniors are lonely and just want somebody to talk to”

Finding: vulnerability perceptions vary by context

Perception in other contexts: age does not matter compared to other factors.

digital literacy

education

health condition

information disclosure

prior negative experience

tech use

...

“Somebody with less education might be distracted by these ads, whatever their age is. Have you learned to research? Have you learned critical thinking?”

Finding: vulnerability perceptions vary by context

Perception in other contexts: age does not matter compared to other factors.

digital literacy

education

health condition

information disclosure

prior negative experience

tech use

...

“I do have medical issues, I’m in and out of the patient portal more than a lot of people. I think the more you use a system, the higher the risk of being compromised.”

Other cross-contextual findings

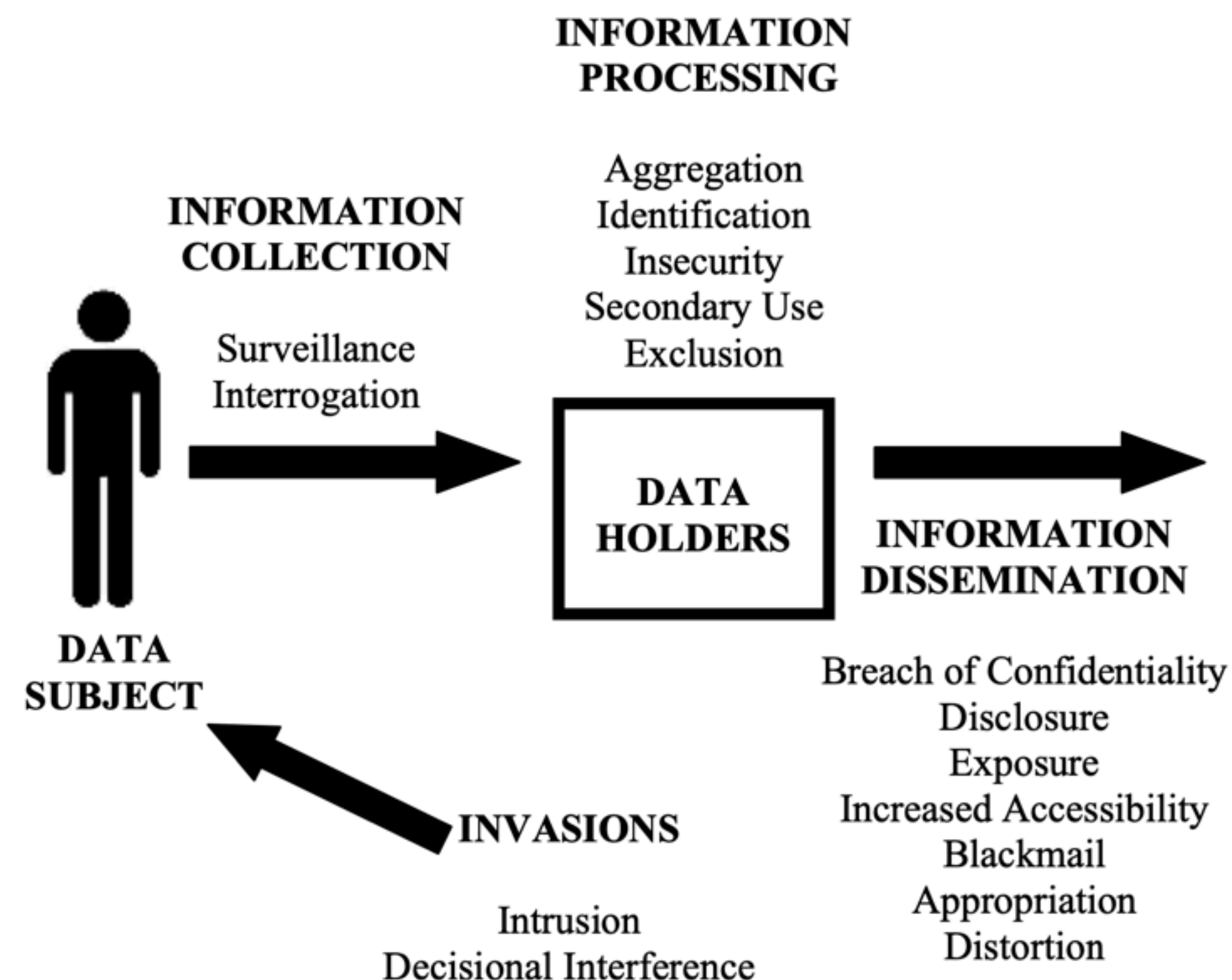
Protective behaviors:
a mix of active and passive
mitigation strategies



Other cross-contextual findings

Protective behaviors:
a mix of active and passive
mitigation strategies

Concerns and behaviors:
center around information
collection, but not beyond



(Solove, 2006)

Rethink privacy vulnerability and aging

Older adults are a highly heterogeneous group

Savvy older adults serve as community guardians and influencers

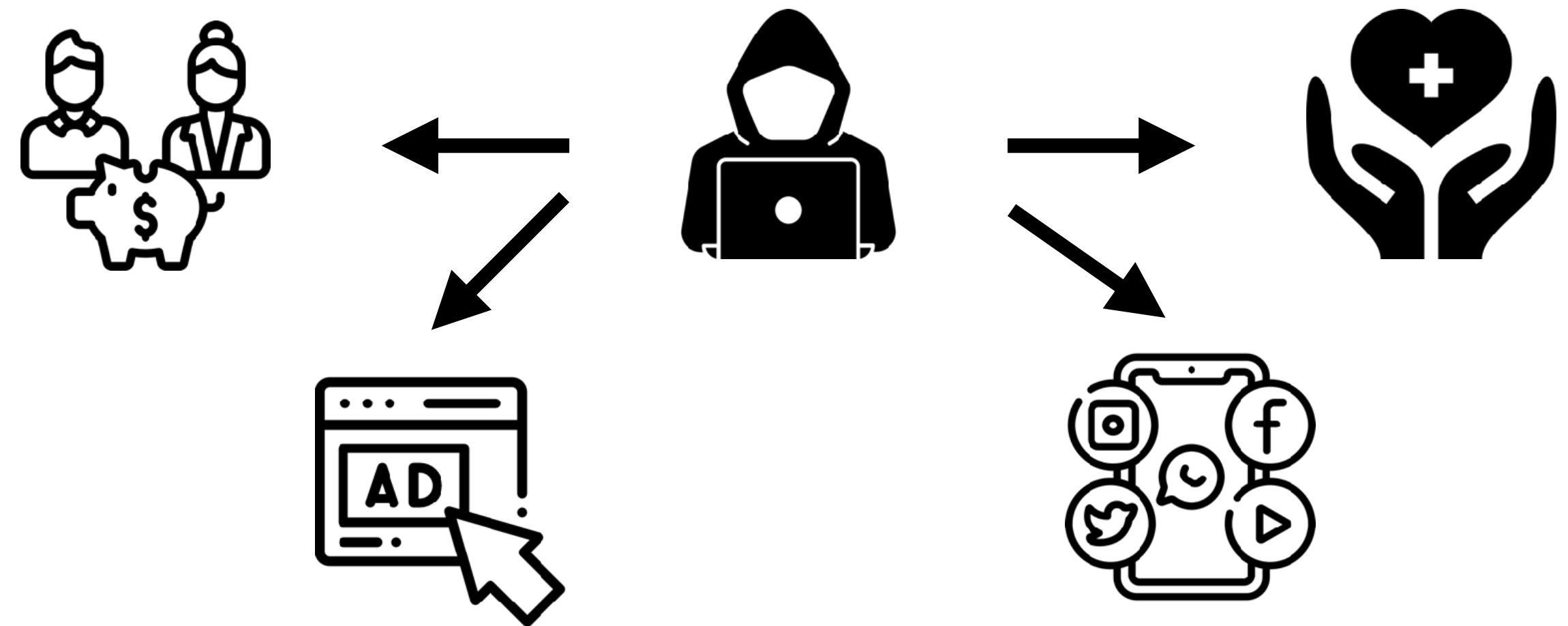
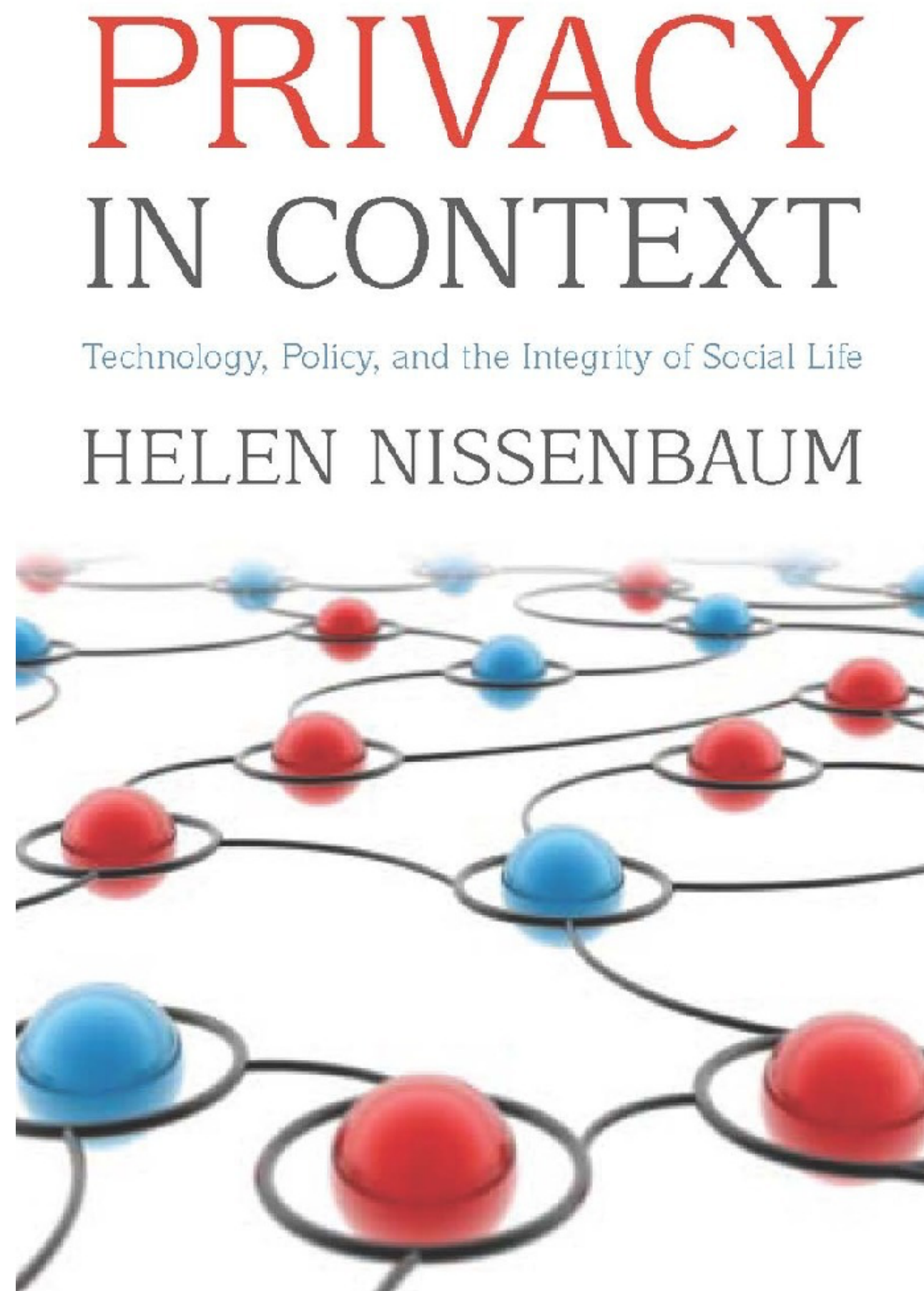
Other factors influence vulnerability, often independent of age

vulnerability framing
can be disempowering

E.g., emotional distress and stigmatisation after being scammed (Bailey et al., 2021)

strength-focused
interventions and education

Contextual effects of privacy concerns



differentiate privacy concerns at the **population**, **context**, and **individual** levels

Community-based research with older adults

Partner with senior centers for recruitment and get staff members' feedback on the research

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Online self-defense workshops informed by research findings

Topics to prioritize: passwords, privacy settings, utility of protection services

Mirror participants' languages: disregard security vs. privacy; use 'hackers' liberally

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The “slow science” nature of such research, challenges regarding scaling up, and the need for structural incentives

Takeaways

Interview study with 43 older adults in the U.S. on their privacy concerns, behaviors, and vulnerabilities

Cross-contextual insights: cybercrime concerns emerge across contexts; vulnerability perception depends on the context

Reflections on the vulnerability framing and the community-based approach

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