

Impact of Socialization Agents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability with the Moderating Effect of Outlet Density (With reference to Franchised Fast-food industry in Sri Lanka)

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Abstract

Teenagers are fallen into the susceptible consumer category, because of their higher exposure to franchised fast food. According to the corpus of research, socializing agents significantly influence adolescents' nutritional understanding and purchase decisions.

Additionally, the body of existing research indicates that the density of fast-food restaurants affects how much fast food is consumed. Thus, the purpose of this research is to test whether fast food outlet density moderates the association between Agents of Socialization and Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers. Using a stratified random sample technique, 900 adolescents enrolled in Sri Lankan national government schools were asked to complete a survey based questionnaire in order to gather primary data. Findings supported to accept the first five hypotheses revealing that Friends, Parents, TV commercials, Social Media promotions and Fast food retailers positively influence on Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers. Additionally, hypothesis six was partially validated, demonstrating that the number of stores in the neighborhood significantly moderates the influence of retailers and peer pressure on the vulnerability of teenage consumers. Finally, findings of the study provide good ramifications for both policy makers and researchers who want to look into the buying patterns of adolescents.

Keywords: *Socialization agents, Adolescent consumer Vulnerability, Outlet density*

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Adolescents are generally more interested in eating junk food than they are in eating handmade food (Padeniya et al., 2019; Harari & Eyal, 2019; Somasiri & Chandralal, 2018). Consequently, younger consumers are increasingly consuming fast food (Chowdhury et al., 2018; Majabadhi et al., 2016). In addition to its flavor, adolescents enjoy fast food for social reasons (Yekbun & Piumi, 2021; Saranya et al., 2016).

According to Weerasekara et al. (2018), rice and curry are the two primary foods consumed by Sri Lankans. Sri Lankan traditional meals were around for a while before people started eating foreign fast food (Weerasekara et al., 2018; Priyanath & Dasanayaka, 2022).

However, as people's dietary and lifestyle habits change, young consumers' exposure to franchised fast-food is higher at present than in the past (Nirmanani et al., 2017; Majabadhi et al., 2016; Harari & Eyal, 2019). Furthermore, when it comes to the consequences of eating fast food, socialization agents influence people's food-related knowledge, preferences, and buying decisions (Padeniya et al., 2019; Scully et al., 2012).

Accordingly, it is obvious that the fast-food intake of teenage consumers is influenced by Friends, Parents, TV Commercials, Social Promotions and food retailers (Harari & Eyal, 2019; Truman & Elliott, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019). Although, young consumers are considered a susceptible customer group, the field lacks enough studies to make conclusion about the type of vulnerability (Padeniya et al., 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019). Furthermore, the impact of socialization agents on adolescents consumption in Sri Lanka cannot be determined based just on desired research findings (Padeniya et al., 2019).

Furthermore, studies to date have demonstrated that Outlet Density

significantly affects adolescents' susceptibility to consuming fast food (Kamiller et al., 2017; Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2015). Accordingly, current researchers have underlined how important it is to look at the moderating effect of outlet density in future research (Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2015).

Research Objectives and Questions

Investigating the moderating effect of fast-food outlet density on the association between socialization agents and adolescent consumer vulnerability is the goal of this study.

In order to accomplish this goal, the study concentrated on how the density of fast-food restaurants functions as a moderator in the relationship between adolescent consumer vulnerability and the five dimensions of socialization agents—peers, parents, TV commercials, the internet, and retailers. The following study questions were developed in accordance with the aforementioned goal.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

1. How do socialization agents affect the vulnerability of teenage consumers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast food sector?
2. In the franchised fast food sector in Sri Lanka, which socialization agent has the most impact on the vulnerability of teenage consumers?
3. In the franchised fast food sector in Sri Lanka, does the density of the population modify the association between socialization agents and adolescent consumer vulnerability?

Significance of the Study



Therefore, the current study contributes in three ways to our understanding of consumer vulnerability. First, changes of consumption behavior due to changes in age are not adequately discussed within the existing body of research studies. Second, a topic that hasn't received much attention in the literature to far, the study looks at how the combined impacts of five socialization factors affect teenage consumer susceptibility. Thirdly, as suggested by the experts, the study looks at how outlet density affects teenage customers' susceptibility (Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2015).

Literature Review

Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Consumer Vulnerability can be identified as the degree of powerlessness when making consumption decisions (Baker et al, 2005). According to recent study findings, the majority of the studies on consumer vulnerability that are currently available concentrate on customer demographics; Income (Nishadi et al., 2024c; Lacoba et al., 2020; Nishadi, 2020; Fox & Hoy, 2019; McCoy et al., 2017; Canhotoa & Dibb, 2016; Ranjith et al., 2015). Accordingly, existing researchers highlight the importance concentrating more on young consumers than old consumers, when doing researches (Kennedy et al., 2019; Niankara et al., 2020; Batat & Tanner, 2019; Mason et al., 2013).

Socialization Agents

The concept of consumer socialization and adolescent research are intimately intertwined (Batat & Tanner, 2019). Further, necessary research findings are insufficient to ascertain how vulnerable teenagers are to various socialization agents (Batat & Tanner, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019).

So, future researches are needed to analyze the impact of

The existing literature highlights the importance of studying how the Internet (Batat & Jfner, 2019; Barber, 2013), social media (Niankara et al., 2020; Kennedy et al.,

2019; Somasiri & Chandralal, 2018), and retailers (Thyne et al., 2019; Grier & Davis, 2013) affect the vulnerability of adolescents as consumers. It also highlights the importance of TV advertising, parents, and peers as traditional socialization agents (Ubayachandra & Eldeniya, 2017; Jain & Sharma, 2016; Lenka & Vandana, 2015; Barber, 2013; Abbas et al., 2013).

Moderating role of Outlet Density

As per the existing research studies, number of outlets available in the area influence the amount of fast-food consumed by customers. (Libuy et al. 2024; Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Kwate & Loh, 2016; Cobb et al., 2015). According to Erpecum et al. (2022), it was found that young consumers eat more fast-food when they are given more alternative options to get fast-food.

Additionally, it was demonstrated that the likelihood of consuming more fast food—that is, more than one dish per week—rose significantly with FFO density and decreased dramatically with increasing distance to the closest FFO for distances longer than five kilometers (Brien et al., 2023; Kwate & Loh, 2016; Bernsdorf et al., 2017).

There is less evidence about the moderating effect of fast food outlet density on the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, despite the hypothesis that outlet density may have a greater impact on adolescents' fast-food consumption (Libuy et al. 2024; Erpecum, et al. 2022; Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2015).

Franchised Fast-Food Industry

Despite the fact that rice and curry are the staple foods of Sri Lanka, franchised fast food restaurants have emerged there as a result of the swift expansion of globalization (Jayawickrama et al., 2020). The five major participants in the Sri Lankan market are Pizza Hut, KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, and Dominos, among other incubators in the franchised fast-food sector (Dissabandara & Dissanayaka, 2020). Therefore, the

phenomena is founded on Sri Lanka's five franchised fast-food businesses.

Therefore, the five biggest MNCs operating in the Sri Lankan market were determined by the current analysis to be McDonald's, Pizza Hut, KFC, Burge King, and Dominos. Essentially, the selection of those five franchised fast-food companies was based on

the number of operators in a district. In this case, a district was selected using the rule that at least three distinct franchised fast-food restaurants should be located in a specific area. In order to collect data for the study, seven districts were chosen based on the two previously mentioned criteria, as indicated in Table 01.

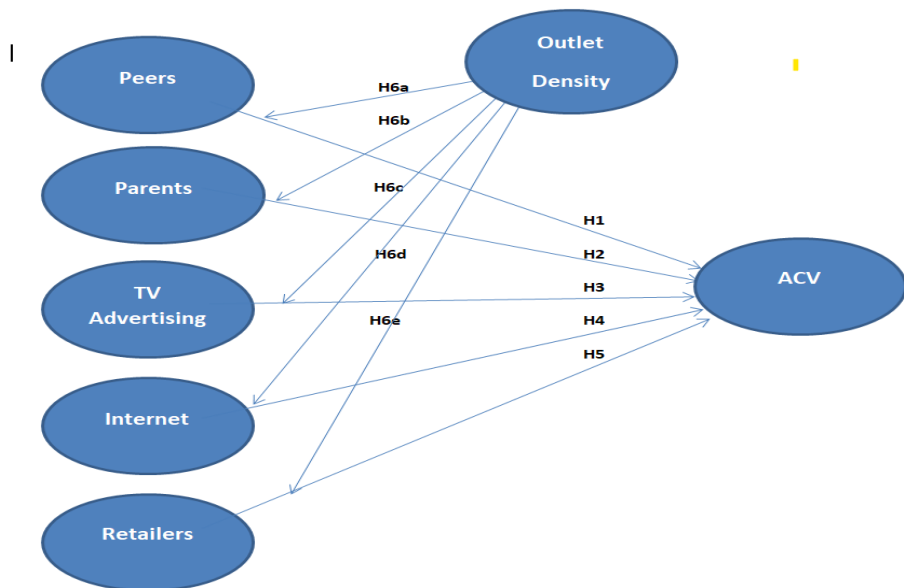
Table 01: Distribution of Franchised Fast-food outlets

Selected City	No: of Franchised fast-food outlets	Outlets located <1 Km from the Selected national schools	Outlets 1-5 Km from the selected national schools	Outlets located more than 5 km from the selected national schools
Colombo	103	80	21	02
Kandy	10	07	02	01
Gampaha	26	19	06	01
Kaluthara	10	06	03	01
Galle	07	05	02	---
Matara	03	02	01	---
Jaffna	03	02	01	---
Anuradhapura	03	01	02	---

Source: Survey data, 2022

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the existing literature, the conceptual framework of the above study can be explained as follows.



As shown in the conceptual framework, Hypothesis 01, 02, 03, 04 and 05 were developed to measure the impact of each of the Agent of Socialization on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. Further, Hypothesis 06 was developed to measure the moderating role of Outlet Density on the direct relationship between each of the Agent of Socialization on Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers.

Peer Influence on Adolescent Consumers' Vulnerability

At present, Friends' influence on Young Consumer consumption of fast-food is higher than in the past (Harari & Eyal, 2019). Adolescents instinctively modify their eating habits in response to peer behavior. (Nishadi et al., 2024d; Yazbeck & Fortin, 2011). According to Bruening et al. (2014), friends' behavior is linked to various types of beverages and fast-food restaurants, particularly when it comes to older teens' fast-food outings.

Stated differently, adolescents who observe their peers eating more fast food also have a tendency to eat more fast food themselves (Fortin & Yazbeck, 2011). According to existing Sri Lankan findings, friends' influence in social media has a significant

effect on young consumer eating pattern (Yekbun & Piumi, 2021; Piumali & Rathnayaka, 2017).

Nevertheless, the impact of peer pressure on teenage consumer susceptibility has not yet been examined in the body of extant research. Examining the influence of peers on fast food intake among adolescents in Sri Lanka was the aim of the study. This led to the following formulation of the study's initial hypothesis.

H1: Peer pressure has a favorable effect on the vulnerability of teenage consumers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food industry.

Parents' Impact on the Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers

Since they set the example for eating habits and make food-related decisions for the family at a young age, parents are usually the most significant socialization influences for children and adolescents (Harari & Eyal, 2019). Parents have been shown to be positive role models for nutritional health, and the impact of parents on their children's dietary preferences has been extensively studied (Harari & Eyal, 2019; Benton, 2004).

The role of parents seems to be more important when it comes to the elements that affect teenagers' health and well-being

(Nishadi et al, 2024b; Camacho et al., 2010; Newman, Harrison & Dashiff, 2008). Additionally, it was shown that future studies have to concentrate on how parents affect their teenagers' dietary preferences and their susceptibility as customers (Harari and Eyal, 2019; Saranya et al, 2016).

According to recent studies, parents are the main socialization facilitators in Sri Lanka since they have instilled in their children the habit of consuming products from birth (Nishadi et al, 2024a). As a result, the second hypothesis was developed by considering the previously mentioned information.

H2: Parents have a significant impact on the vulnerability of adolescent consumers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food sector.

TV Advertising influence on the Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers

Adolescents are especially vulnerable to the complex and conflicting messages that food advertising presents through its slender models (Eyal & Te'eni-Harari, 2016). Consumers may be misled by advertising, especially if it influences them to make unhealthy food choices (Effertz, 2013).

Advertising to children and teenagers is believed to spread misleading information

Internet's Effect on the Vulnerability of Adolescent Consumers

During their exposure to social media, adolescents are influenced by variety of marketing messages. In 2018, Kent et al. The manner that adolescents utilize media has changed significantly over the past generation (Milici & Harris, 2019); they watch less television (Friedman, 2017) and use social media more frequently (Kent et al., 2018). Additionally, research indicates that by 2018, people were spending a lot more time on online other related smart devices (Twienge, Martin, & Spitzberg, 2018).

Furthermore, young people utilize Instagram and other online social networks to share their knowledge regarding food marketing, according to Holmberg et al. (2016). Additionally, millions of teenagers follow

and distract children from possible health hazards, especially when it comes to unhealthy foods like candy, snacks, and fast food (Effertz et al, 2013). Compulsive overeating may result from environmental cues such as advertisements, menus, and fast food restaurants (Damari et al., 2016; Garber and Lustig, 2011). A lot of food ads use health claims and persuasive strategies to get kids to buy the items, even when most foods are low in nutrients (e.g., Vilaro, Barnett, Watson, Merten, & Mathews, 2017).

Most television programs have started to eat up adolescents' spare time in Asian nations (Mistry & Puthussery, 2015; Samanthi, 2010). Although adolescents are more skeptical of food-related advertising than younger children, they are nonetheless highly vulnerable to its impact (Brownell, Schwartz, Puhl, Henderson, & Harris, 2009; Harris & Fleming-Milici, 2019). The present study's third hypothesis was formed in light of the background mentioned above.

H3: TV Advertising has a significant impact on the vulnerability of adolescent consumers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food sector

food and sugar-filled beverage corporations on social media applications (Rummo et al, 2020).

Despite the theory that food marketing through new media may have a stronger impact on children, little is known about its consequences (Kelly et al, 2015). It is well known that food marketers use social media to reach young people, but no study has ever measured how much exposure kids get on these sites. The fourth hypothesis for the current investigation was determined by Kent et al. (2018) after a comprehensive evaluation of the previously listed literature.

H4: The Internet has a significant impact on the vulnerability of adolescent consumers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food sector.

Fast-food retailers' Pressure on Adolescent Consumers' Exposure

Adolescents consume more fast food due to its easy accessibility and easily opened packaging (Bohara et al., 2021). Adolescents' inability to make autonomous, self-assured decisions has a significant influence on how they deal with other market participants, particularly salespeople. Batat (2010). Advertising and in-store promotions are crucial elements of fast-food marketing when it comes to promotions (Perera & Nishadi, 2024; Grier et al, 2007). Fast food companies explicitly target children with their advertising initiatives (Nestle, 2002).

Hastings et al. (2003) claim that children's food preferences and the things they consistently ask their parents to buy them are influenced by fast food marketing. Teens' surroundings and the amount of time they spend with friends have an impact on how much fast food they eat at restaurants (Bruening et al, 2014). However, it was noted that future studies carried out in diverse contexts should look into how retail establishments effect consumer behavior because cultural differences can provide different results (Bruening et al, 2014). As a result, the following was the development of the investigation's fifth hypothesis.

H5: Retailers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food industry have a significant impact on the vulnerability of adolescent consumers.

Moderating effect of Outlet Density

A recent study found that the quantity of fast food restaurants in a city has a considerable impact on the amount of fast food consumed by families (Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Cobb et al., 2015; Nathalie et al. 2015). It turns out that those who live in an area with a lot of harmful fast food options may eat more quickly overall (Libuy et al. 2024; Erpecum, et al. 2022).

Furthermore, the likelihood of consuming more fast food—that is, more than one dish per week—rose considerably with FFO density and decreased significantly with

increasing distance to the closest FFO for distances higher than 4 km. Libuy et al. 2024; Erpecum et al. 2022). The idea that the density of fast food restaurants influences teen fast food intake is less supported by research, despite the validity of this theory (Bernsdorf et al., 2017; Nathalie et al., 2015; Cobb et al., 2015). Instead, the number of fast food restaurants may mitigate the relationship between socialization agents and the susceptibility of adolescent consumers.

H6: The relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability is moderated by Density of fast-food outlets.

Methodology

Design of Sampling and Data Gathering

Data was gathered from a sample of 1,000 respondents who were enrolled in government schools throughout seven districts using a pre-planned structured questionnaire. Data was gathered in each of the seven districts using stratified random sampling technique.

Additionally, a sample was selected from the list of times when students are exempted from the regular class schedule during relief periods. Out of the 965 questionnaires that were gathered, 55 were excluded because they had more than 10% missing responses (Hair et al, 2010). In the end, the researcher had 910 examples that could be used as a sample.

Based on the work of other researchers, stratified random sampling was utilized to choose the sample of adolescent consumers for the current study (Agresti, 1990; Gonick, 1993; Vogt, 2005).

Model Specification and Data Analysis

Since Smart Pls is the finest statistical software for testing a multidimensional with categorical moderator variable, it was used in the current investigation as a standard PLS-SEM program to evaluate both reflective and formative dimensions (Hair et al., 2016;

Henseler, 2016). Additionally, following the recommendations of reputable academics, multi-group analysis in smart-pls was used to

investigate the differences between three Density groups (Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020; Henseler, 2016; Ringle et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

Three parts make up the data analysis for this study: measurement model analysis, structural model analysis, and multi-group comparison.

Evaluation of the Framework for Measurement

The validity, reliability, and multi-collinearity of the measurement model were shown to be significantly impacted by the following data.

Reliability

The present study employed Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability to assess Reliability, with a threshold level of 0.700 as suggested by Waso and Faraj (2005).

Table 02: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho a)	Composite Reliability (rho c)	AVE
Parents Influence	0.985	0.988	0.987	0.907
Friends' Influence	0.984	0.985	0.986	0.888
Retailers' Influence	0.978	0.979	0.982	0.869
TV Commercials of fast-food	0.978	0.978	0.982	0.902
Social Media Promotions of fast-food	0.982	0.983	0.984	0.862
Fraudulent Message	0.978	0.979	0.989	0.979
Inability to Purchase	0.984	0.989	0.988	0.955
Replacement Policy	0.979	0.979	0.986	0.960
Marketing Pressure	0.975	0.975	0.981	0.929
Higher Dependency on promotion	0.980	0.980	0.983	0.908
Social Pressure	0.978	0.980	0.984	0.939
Lack of Product Knowledge	0.978	0.979	0.983	0.919

Source: Survey data, 2022

Table 02 shows that all of the Cronbach's alpha values for Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability are above the 0.7 threshold, ranging from 0.975 to 0.985. Additionally, the composite reliability statistics, which varied between 0.975 and 0.989, showed that the measurement tools used were sufficient for evaluating each particular dimension.

i. Convergent Validity

The average variance was

found to be greater for all dimensions except the extracted ACV (0.480), indicating that the dimensions measured items converged.

ii. Discriminant Validity

One of the most used techniques for figuring out discriminant validity is the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion.

The data in Table 03 clearly shows that discriminant validity is established because the square root of AVE values for each diagonal value is greater than its correlation with other constructs.

Table 03 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. DEPENDANCY ON PROMOTIO	0.953											
2. EMOTIONAL PRESSURE	0.171	0.964										
3. INABILITY TO DITINGHISH	0.171	0.179	0.989									
4. INABILITY TO PURCHASE	0.167	0.135	0.400	0.977								
5. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE	0.225	0.247	0.275	0.133	0.959							
6. ONLINE	0.249	0.179	0.075	-0.002	0.095	0.929						
7. PARENTS	0.050	0.090	-0.017	0.035	0.192	0.008	0.952					
8. PEER	0.257	0.264	0.039	0.047	0.200	0.291	0.148	0.943				
9. REPLACEMENT POLICY	0.177	0.287	0.261	0.233	0.162	0.167	0.057	0.169	0.980			
10. RETAILERS	0.225	0.279	0.078	0.153	0.115	0.182	0.027	0.247	0.221	0.932		
11. SOCIAL PRESSURE	0.234	0.356	0.175	0.163	0.192	0.163	-0.009	0.311	0.299	0.199	0.969	
12. TV ADVERTISING	0.450	0.057	0.060	-0.013	0.044	0.292	-0.052	0.179	0.060	0.096	0.072	0.950

Structural Model Assessment

The pathways suggested in the study framework are reflected in the structural model, which is assessed based on the importance of the paths, T values, and path coefficients (Latiff et al., 2020). Additionally, the loadings and weights of path coefficients for both reflective and formative evaluation models were used to evaluate performance (Garson, 2016). Table 04 below shows the path analysis of the current study.

Table 04: Path Coefficients and Hypotheses test results

Hypothesis		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Results
H1	Friends Influence -> Vulnerability	0.491	0.492	0.031	16.024	0.000	Supported
H2	Parents -> Vulnerability	0.142	0.142	0.027	5.369	0.000	Supported
H3	Television -> Vulnerability	0.113	0.112	0.031	3.626	0.000	Supported
H4	Internet -> Vulnerability	0.082	0.083	0.029	2.870	0.004	Supported
H5	Fast food retailers -> Vulnerability	0.126	0.128	0.030	4.206	0.000	Supported
H6 a	Density x Friends-> Vulnerability	0.058	0.056	0.025	2.048	0.041	Supported
H6 b	Density x Parents-> Vulnerability	0.051	0.049	0.040	1.270	0.204	Not Supported
H6 c	Density x TV Commercial -> Vulnerability	0.090	0.091	0.042	2.146	0.032	Supported
H6 d	Density x Internet -> Vulnerability	-0.040	-0.047	0.042	0.959	0.337	Not Supported
H6 e	Density x Retailers -> Vulnerability	0.091	0.092	0.044	1.983	0.046	Supported

As per the data in Table 04, all five socialization agents significantly affect Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, with T values larger than 1.96 and p values less than 0.05. The most important socialization factor that has the biggest effect on teenage consumption behavior is peer pressure ($t = 16.024$, $p = 0.000$). Second, with $t=5.369$ and $p=0.000$, parents—the main socializing agents—

have a considerable influence on changing teenagers' behavioral patterns. The third and most important factor is the pressure franchised fast-food chains put on consumers with their enticing marketing campaigns. The obtained t value of 4.206 and p value of 0.000 further corroborate the previous hypothesis.

Group Comparison of Outlet Density

Since multi-group analysis is the most effective method for measuring multidimensional models with categorical moderator variables, it was utilized in this work in SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015; Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020). Additionally, Table 05's data suggests that Outlet Density

significantly moderates the relationship between Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability and Two Socialization Agents, specifically Retailers and Peers. The statistics pertaining to Peers ($t=2.048$, $p=0.041$) and Retailers ($t=1.983$, $p=0.046$) respectively support this notion.

Table 05: Moderation Effect of Outlet Density – Multi-group Analysis

	Difference High Density Vs Low Density (P.value)	Difference High Density vs Middle Density (P.value)	Difference Low Density vs Middle Density (P.value)	1 tailed High Density vs Low Density (P.value)	1 tailed High Density vs Middle Density (P.value)	1 tailed Low Density vs Middle Density (P.value)	2 tailed High Density vs Low Density (P.value)	2 tailed High Density vs Middle Density (P.value)	2 tailed Low Density vs Middle Density (P.value)
Friends->Vulnerability	0.236	0.253	0.017	0.036	0.234	0.425	0.043	0.209	0.850
Parents->Vulnerability	0.170	0.075	-0.095	0.044	0.125	0.823	0.089	0.249	0.354
TV ->Vulnerability	0.102	0.223	0.121	0.142	0.000	0.107	0.284	0.000	0.215
Internet ->Vulnerability	-0.007	-0.039	-0.031	0.536	0.725	0.648	0.928	0.550	0.703
Retailer>Vulnerability	0.223	0.102	0.121	0.994	0.991	0.107	0.002	0.284	0.215

According to Table 05's statistics, the High Density and Low Density groups differ by 0.236 in terms of how peer pressure affects teenage consumer vulnerability. This suggests that peer pressure has a greater impact on adolescents who live in areas with

a high density of fast food restaurants than on those who live in areas with a low density. Additionally, the significant difference between the two groups mentioned above was demonstrated by the relevant P value (0.043), which is less than 0.05. Further, it can be seen that outlet density significantly

moderates the relationship between peer pressure and adolescent consumer vulnerability to H6a.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that outlet density considerably reduces the influence of retailers on the vulnerability of teenage consumers. Teenagers who live in areas with a high outlet density are therefore more susceptible to the influence of retailers than those who live in areas with a low density of franchised fast-food restaurants that accept H6e, as indicated by the positive value of 0.223 between the two groups.

Conclusion

Discussion

The objective of this research was to examine how socialization agents affect the vulnerability of adolescent consumers with the moderating effect of outlet density. The study used a deductive approach to assess the influence of five socialization agents on the vulnerability of adolescents as consumers: parents, peers, TV advertisements, the internet, and retailers at varying number of fast-food outlets available within the area. All five socializing agents have a positive effect on the susceptibility of teenage customers in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food industry, per the analytical findings generated by smart pls 4.0. Of the five agents, peer pressure had the greatest impact, with a t value more than 1.96 ($\beta = .461$, $t = 16.024$, $p = 0.000$). After that, parents have the second-highest impact on the results ($t=5.369$, $p = 0.000$). Thirdly, it was demonstrated that fast food restaurants have a considerable impact on teenage customers' vulnerability, with values ($t=4.206$, $p = 0.000$).

The fourth-highest impact is caused by fast food advertisements on television ($t=3.626$, $p=0.000$). The Internet's substantial influence as a socialization agent is significantly lower than that of the other four ($t = 2.870$, $p = 0.000$).

In addition to its direct effect, the density of franchised fast-food restaurants significantly

moderates the link between the influence of two socialization agents (retailers and peer pressure) on adolescent consumer vulnerability.

Practical Implications

The results of the study offer valuable information in the following areas. This study is the first of its type in Sri Lanka to examine the impact of socialization variables on the vulnerability of adolescents as consumers, addressing the need to concentrate on the underrepresented adolescent consumer group. Second, the study offers useful data suggesting that increased franchised fast food consumption is the cause of Sri Lanka's higher obesity and overweight rates. The study's findings also give the Sri Lankan government practical advice on how to address the country's escalating obesity problem.

Third, the current study's findings offer important new information about how to slow the fast-food chains' explosive growth and lower the amount of money being sent back to other nations. This will be a useful tactic to go over the nation's current, inadequate economic structure.

Fourth, parents in Sri Lanka will benefit from the findings since fast food exposure was found to be the second most important socialization factor impacting teenage customer vulnerability in the country's franchised fast food business. According to the findings of the study, it is clear that the parental position in the home has a significant impact on how susceptible teenagers are. Responsible parents should therefore determine the causes of their children's excessive fast food intake and take the appropriate steps to reduce it.

Limitations of the Study

As is the case with most social science research, the results of this study should be understood with some caveats. First, the effect of age transition on adolescent consumer vulnerability cannot be accurately inferred because the current study employed a cross-sectional methodology, in which

sample respondents were contacted only once.

The cross-sectional data collected at one point in time could not be accurate at another because the study sample consists of adolescents in three stages who will move on to the next stage in a shorter amount of time. Therefore, without taking into account the changes in consuming behavior that accompany pubertal changes, the results of this study report the degree of connection between the variables at a certain point in time. For example, an adolescent in the early stages of adolescence is heavily influenced by their parents, but the same response experiences more peer pressure in the late stages of adolescence. Thus, it is clear that longitudinal research is the most effective method for proving actual causation.

Second, the stratified random sample approach was used to gather study data from 1,000 teenagers enrolled in Sri Lankan government schools. The results of this study cannot be applied to Sri Lanka, where franchised fast-food restaurants are spread over all 25 districts, because the sample was selected from teenagers residing in seven districts. Third, the responses were collected during the school day, when teenagers are accustomed to their set class routine. Therefore, beyond the information provided in the questionnaire, there was no opportunity to obtain more data. Fourth, some respondents who belong to the early adolescent group provided brief responses because of the questionnaire's length (10 pages).

research is restricted to discussing a single outcome variable that is produced by socialization agents. Therefore, future research should concentrate on the other consumer impacts of the socialization effect, like materialism, impulsive buying, and pester power.

Directions for Future Researches

Future studies on this topic can build on their findings in several pertinent areas. The study must first be extended by using more intricate models that incorporate the government and schools as additional socialization actors in order to address the issue of adolescent socialization. Second, it would be more advantageous for future researchers to assess the model of the current study through a longitudinal inquiry in order to more accurately identify the causal relationships that are already established. Thirdly, this



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