



The Impact of Socialization Agents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability: Moderating Role of Living Area (With Reference to Franchised Fast-Food Industry in Sri Lanka)

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical period in the life cycle of a human being and the consumption of food in this stage is detrimental for growth and development. As per the existing findings, socialization agents play a role in impacting nutrition knowledge, preferences, and purchasing preferences associated with food. In comparison to other life stages, during adolescence, consumers are more interested in eating junk foods and most of the times they have no desire to eat homemade foods. Further, the current literature highlighted that increasing availability of fast-food has become a major reason for the consumption of fast-food among adolescents in Asian Countries. Within this backdrop, the present study strived to analyze the moderating role of Living Area on Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, due to inadequacy of existing studies relevant to the field. Primary data were collected from 910 Adolescents studying in national government schools in Sri Lanka based on stratified random sampling method through a 69-item self-administered questionnaire. Results indicated that the five socialization agents; Peers, Parents, TV advertisements, Internet and Retailers positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in Sri Lankan franchised fast-



food industry, proving the first five hypotheses. Further, hypotheses 6a was also accepted proving that Area of Living partially moderates the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

Keywords: *Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, Area of Living, Franchised Fast-Food Industry, Socialization Agents*

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence starting from age 10-19, is a critical period in the life cycle of human beings while adequate and healthy food determines the growth and development of young people in that stage (Medicine Net, 2021; Kazemi et al, 2016). Compared with other life stages, during adolescence, consumers are more interested in eating junk foods and most of the times they have no desire to eat homemade foods (Mohammadbeigi, et al, 2019; Damari et al, 2016).

Additionally, existing scholars suggested that socialization agents play a role in impacting nutrition knowledge, preferences, and purchasing preferences associated with food (Padeniya et al 2019; Scully et al., 2012). As such, adolescents' health perceptions and food choices are influenced by socialization agents including peers, parents, food advertisers, internet, retailers, schools and governments (Kennedy et al, 2019; Padeniya et al 2019; Truman and Elliott, 2019; Harari and Eyal, 2019; Somasiri & Chandralal, 2018; Chan et al, 2009).

Further, increasing availability of fast-food has become a major reason for the consumption of fast-food among adolescents in Asian Countries (Wu et al, 2021). According to the findings of Dun et al (2022), availability of fast-food restaurant has a positive direct relationship with consumption of franchised fast-food and availability.

When it comes to Sri Lankan context, the percentage of income spend on food is higher in Urban areas (nearly 60-75) compared with rural areas in Sri Lanka (25-30%) (Dawoodbhoy, 2018). In franchised fast-food industry, fast-food operators like



Pizza-hut, KFC, McDonalds, Burger King and Dominos are spread to everywhere even in rural areas within Sri Lanka (Gunasingha & Cooray, 2020). As such, the exposure of fast-food has been increased both in rural as well as urban areas within the country (Gunasingha & Cooray, 2020).

Although, it is hypothesized that Area of Living could have a greater impact on adolescents' fast-food consumption, there is less evidence on the moderating role of Living Area on the relationship between socialization agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability (Li et al, 2020; Wu et al, 2021; Dawoodbhoy, 2018; Jovanovic, 2016; Block 2015).

Thus, based on the recommendations of existing scholars, the present study aimed to test the moderating role of Area of living on the direct relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Consumer Vulnerability is a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products (Baker et al, 2005). According to the existing literature, majority of the existing studies are available on Consumer Demographics;, Gender (Lacoba et al, 2020; Li et al, 2020; Fox & Hoy, 2019; McCoy et al, 2017; Nora et al, 2015; Svensson 2003; Barber, 2013), Social Class (Paniagua et al ,2014; Ranjith et al, 2015; Skårdaal et al, 2014; Svastisalee, et al, 2012; Wills et al, 2009; Hanson and Chen, 2007) Low-literacy (Stewart & Yap , 2020; Jayasundara et al, 2020; Nishadi, 2020; Crowell, 2014; Broderick et al, 2011) Older age (Melnikas & Smaliukiene, 2007; Moschis et al, 2011; Silvera, Meyer & Laufer; Berg, 2015) and Lack of resources (FCA, 2014; Canhotoa & Dibb, 2016), Income (Powell & Binh, 2013; Li et al, 2020; Khan et al, 2012; Bowman et al, 2004). However, desired research findings are not enough to figure out the reasons of adolescent consumer vulnerability (Niankara et al, 2020;

Batat & Tanner, 2019; Kennedy et al, 2019; Mason et al., 2013; Batat, 2012; Pechmann et al., 2011).

2.2. Socialization Agents

According to the existing literature, socialization agents such as Peers, Parents and TV advertising have a direct relationship with adolescent consumer vulnerability (Ubayachandra & Eldeniya, 2017; Jain & Sharma, 2016; Lenka & Vandana, 2015; Barber, 2013; Abbas et al, 2013). Thus, the extant literature highlighted the importance of studying the influence of Internet (Batat and Jfner, 2019; Barber, 2013), Social Media (Niankara et al, 2020; Kennedy et al, 2019; Somasiri and Chandralal, 2018), and Retailers (Thyne et al, 2019; Grier and Davis, 2013) on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

2.3. Moderating role of Living Area

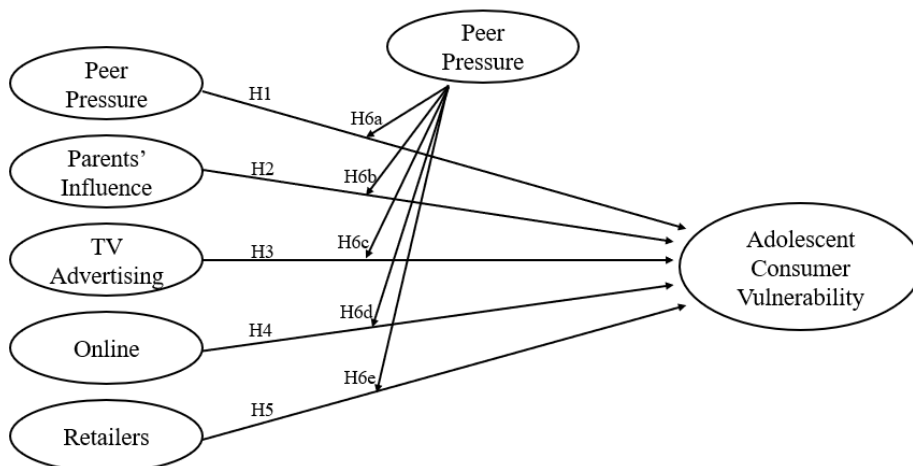
Area of Living has become a significant determinant of fast-food consumption among adolescents worldwide (Carel et al., 2022). This is true for Asian countries, highlighting that adolescents living in populated areas eat more fast food than those living in rural areas (Wu et al., 2021). Regarding the franchised fast-food industry, Dun et al. (2022) findings emphasized that fast-food restaurant availability has a positive direct relationship with franchised fast-food exposure. This idea was further proved in another study conducted by Man et al. (2021), revealing that adolescents' fast-food consumption is higher in populated areas than non-populated areas. Further, the findings of Bohra et al. (2021) highlighted that availability outlets close to schools is a major reason for higher consumption of franchised fast food by school children.

2.4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the present study that was developed Through careful examination of the existing literature.

As mentioned in the Conceptual Framework, it was hypothesized that there is a positive influence from socialization agents on adolescent consumer vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka. The first five hypotheses were derived to measure the impact of independent variable (socialization agents) on dependent variable. Additionally, the next hypothesis was developed to measure the moderating effect of social structures on the direct relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. Further, the impact of each of the five socialization agents and the moderating variable on adolescent consumer vulnerability can be explained in detail as follows.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



2.4.1. Peer Influence on Adolescents Fast food Consumption

Peers are emphasizing the importance of exercising along with a socially-oriented consumption of junk food (Harari and Eyal, 2019). Usually vulnerable, adolescents compare themselves to their friends and may alter their choices to conform to the behavior of their peers (Fortin and Yazbeck, 2011). According to the existing findings, for many beverages and fast-food restaurant types, friends' behaviors are associated, especially fast-food visits for older adolescents (Bruening et al, 2014). That is increasing fast food consumption of peers induce adolescents to increase their own consumption of fast foods (Fortin and Yazbeck, 2011). When it comes to Sri

Lankan context, existing findings revealed that peer influence through social media determines the conformity behavior of adolescents and young consumers (Yekbun & Piumi, 2021; Piumali and Rathnayaka (2017). However, the impact of peer pressure on adolescent consumer vulnerability has not been discussed so far within the current body of knowledge. As such, the study aimed to analyze how peers influence on consumption of fast food among adolescents in Sri Lanka. Within this backdrop, the first hypothesis of the study was derived as follows.

H1: Peer Pressure positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

2.4.2. Parents influence on Adolescents Fast food Consumption

In the case of children and adolescents, the most central socializing agents are usually the parents, who from an early age make food-related decisions in the household and who serve as primary role models (Harari and Eyal, 2019). Parents emerged as positive role models for nutritional health (Harari and Eyal, 2019) while parental intervention in children's food preferences has been studied extensively (Benton 2004). Parents' role seems to be more important for the variables associated with adolescents' well-being and health (Camacho et al., 2010; Newman, Harrison & Dashiff, 2008). Further, it was revealed that the impact of parents on adolescents' meal selection followed by adolescent consumer vulnerability should be studied in upcoming researches (Harari and Eyal, 2019; Saranya et al, 2016). As far the Sri Lankan context is concerned, recent researchers highlighted that parent are the main agent of socialization who first teach their children to consume products since birth (Senevirathna et al, 2021; Yekbun & Piumi, 2021).

Based on the above literature, the second hypothesis was derived as follows.

H2: Parents positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

2.4.3. TV Advertisements influence on Adolescents fast food consumption

Adolescents are vulnerable to food advertising due to its complex and contrasting messages communicated through thin models (Eyal & Te'eni-Harari, 2016). The possibility of deceiving by advertising is problematic especially when it results in unhealthy food choices (Effertz., 2013). Advertising to children and adolescents is regarded as a source of misleading information that distracts children's attention from possible health hazards, especially for unhealthy food products like snacks, sweets, or fast-food (Effertz et al, 2013). Fast food advertisements, restaurants and menus all provide environmental cues that may trigger addictive overeating (Damari et al, 2016; Garber and Lustig, 2011). Despite the fact that many advertised foods are not of high nutritional quality, many such ads include health claims and persuasive techniques to convince children to purchase the food items (e.g., Vilaro, Barnett, Watson, Merten, & Mathews, 2017).

When it comes to Asian counties, most of the television programs have started occupying the leisure time of adolescents (Mistry & Puthussery, 2015; Samanthi, 2010).

Although, adolescents express greater uncertainty towards advertising than younger children, they remain highly vulnerable to influence from food-related advertising (Brownell, Schwartz, Puhl, Henderson, & Harris, 2009; Harris & Fleming-Milici, 2019).

H3: TV Advertising positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

2.4.4. Online influence on Adolescents fast food consumption

Children and adolescents are exposed to various forms of food marketing while using social media applications, most of which promotes unhealthy foods. (Kent et al, 2018). At present, Adolescents' media usage has changed substantially (Milici & Harris (2019), with higher use of social media (Kent et al, 2018) while lower exposure

to TV (Friedman, 2017). Further, it is revealed that, hours spent on digital media, including computers, tablets, and smartphones, have increased drastically by 2018. (Twenge, Martin, & Spitzberg, 2018; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). According to Holmberg et al (2016), young people share food marketing information through online social networks like Instagram. Additionally, food and sugary drink brands maintain millions of adolescent followers on social media (Rummo et al, 2020; Freeman et al, 2015; Kim et al, 2010).

However, there is less evidence on the impacts of new media food marketing, although it is hypothesized that new media could have a greater impact on children (Kelly et al, 2015). While, it is known that food marketers target young people on social media, no study has yet quantified children's exposure on these platforms. (Kent et al, 2018). Through careful examination of above literature, the fourth hypothesis of the current study was derived as follows.

H4: Online Context positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

2.4.5. Retailers' Marketing Strategy on Adolescents Fast Food Consumption

Consumption of fast food among adolescents is higher due to its easy availability and ready-to-use package (Bohara et al, 2021). Adolescents' incapacity for making independent and confident decisions has direct consequences for the way they deal with market actors, especially salespeople. (Batat, 2010). As far as Fast-food promotions are concerned, advertising and in-store promotions, are important components of fast-food marketing (Grier et al, 2007). Fast food retailers heavily target their marketing strategies to adolescents (Nestle, 2002). According to Hastings et al (2003), fast food marketing influences children food preferences and what they repeatedly ask their parents to buy for them. Consumption of fast food in a restaurant is dependent on the length of time adolescents are spending with friends and the environmental cues (Bruening et al, 2014).

However, it was highlighted that the impact of retail store on customer behavior should be discussed in upcoming researches, conducted in other settings, because cultural differences may produce different results (Bruening et al, 2014). Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of the present study was derived as follows.

H5: Retailers positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

2.4.6. Moderating Effect of Area Structure

In Asia, the higher intake of fast-food is determined by the increasing availability of fast food outlets within the region (Wu et al., 2021). According to Dun et al. (2022), the availability of restaurants has a direct positive relationship with the consumption of franchised fast food among adolescents. The same idea was proved in another study conducted by Man et al. (2021), revealing that the consumption of fast food is higher among the adolescents living in urban areas than those are from non-urban areas.

Regarding the school children, the proximity of fast-food outlets to school is a major determinant of higher intake of franchised fast-food by school children (Bohra et al. 2021).

As far as the Sri Lankan context is concerned, the proportion of family income spent on food is higher in Urban areas (nearly 60-75) compared with rural areas in Sri Lanka (25-30%) (Dawoodbhoy, 2018). In the franchised fast-food industry, fast-food operators like Pizza Hut, KFC, McDonalds, Burger King and Dominos are spread everywhere, even in rural areas within Sri Lanka (Gunasingha & Cooray, 2020). As such, the exposure to fast food has increased in rural and urban areas within the country (Gunasingha & Cooray, 2020).

Finally, Carel et al. (2022) highlighted the significance of studying the moderating impact of Area structure on fast-food consumption.



H6: Area of Living moderates the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sampling Design and Data Collection

Based on a pre-determined structured questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 1000 respondents studying in national government schools located in 06 Districts; Colombo, Kandy, Kaluthara, Jaffna, Galle and Matara. Further, Stratified Random Sampling was used to collect data in each of the 06 districts. Additionally, sample was drawn from the list of relief periods where students are free from the fixed class schedule. Out of the collected 965 questionnaires, 55 were excluded on the grounds that they had more than 10% missing values (Hair et al, 2010). Ultimately, we got a usable sample of 910 cases.

3.2. Model Specification and Data Analysis

For the purpose of measuring both reflective and formative constructs, present study used Smart PLS as a standard PLS-SEM software (Ringle et al., 2015; Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020). The rationale behind selection of Partial Least Squares path modeling is, its' common usage as a composite based estimator or simultaneously investigate structural equation models with latent variables in business research (Cheah et al, 2020).

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Basically, measurement model is used for the purpose of assessing the quality of the constructs. Thus, the data relevant to Reliability, Validity and Multicollinearity can be explained as follows.

4.2. Reliability

Basically, Reliability of the study was assessed based on Cronbach's alpha, rho_a, and composite reliability taking the recommended value of 0.700 as the threshold level (Wasko & Faraj, 2005).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Peer Pressure	0.984	0.985	0.986	0.888
Parents Influence	0.985	0.988	0.987	0.907
TV Advertising Influence	0.978	0.978	0.982	0.902
Online Influence	0.982	0.983	0.984	0.862
Retailers' Influence	0.978	0.979	0.982	0.869
Adolescent Vulnerability	0.978	0.979	0.983	0.919

(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

As far as the data on Table 01 is concerned, it is depicted that all the Cronbach's alpha values lie in between 0.975 and 0.985 exceeding the threshold level of 0.7. In addition to that, the statistics for composite reliability fallen between 0.975 and 0.989, further proved that the items used to measure the dimensions are good enough to measure that particular dimension. Moreover, the rho_a value returned was between the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2017), exceeding the threshold level 0.70, indicated a good reliability (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016).

4.3. Validity

Based on the findings of existing scholars, validity of the present study was determined considering the Convergent and Discriminant validity statistics as follows.

4.3.1. Convergent Validity

Based on the standard loading estimates 0.5 or higher and ideally 0.7 or higher, it was determined that the repeated measurements of the same concept are correlated and the scale is good enough to measure the intended concept (Hair et al, 2010). When it

comes to the present study, the data on Table 01 further illustrate how items are correlated with each other. According to the results, it was revealed that all the dimensions have higher Average Variance Extracted values exceeding the threshold level of 0.5, proved that the items used to measure the dimensions are converged together.

4.3.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant or Divergent validity means the degree to which two conceptually similar concepts are distinct (Hair et al, 2010). The notion of Discriminant Validity is that, if two or more concepts are unique, then valid measures of each concept should not be correlated (Baggozi et al, 1991). Further, it is highlighted that summated scale is correlated with a similar, but conceptually different measure (Hair et al, 2010). For the purpose of measuring the Discriminant Validity, researchers of the present study applied two most commonly used methods of determining Discriminant Validity as follows.

Fornell and Larcker Criterion

In Smart PLS, we can have multiple ways of establishing Discriminant Validity. Among them, Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion is one of the frequently used methods of determining Discriminant Validity. Following the data shown in Table 02, it is clear that all the AVE values across the diagonal are greater than its correlation with all other constructs. So, establishment of the Discriminant Validity of present study was determined based on the higher AVE values across the diagonal.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	ACV	ONLINE	PARENTS	PEERS	RETAILERS	TV
ACV	0.693					
ONLINE	0.333	0.931				
PARENTS	0.225	0.052	0.949			
PEERS	0.592	0.310	0.189	0.946		
RETAILERS	0.362	0.231	0.128	0.293	0.929	
TV	0.280	0.318	-0.037	0.209	0.140	0.950

(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT Ratio)

In addition to the Fornell and Larker method, Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was also used to determine the Discriminant Validity. According to the findings of Hair et al (2017) and Henseller (2015), discriminant validity of the present study was determined considering the (HTMT) value < 0.85 as the threshold level. Thus, the data on Table 03 illustrates the results of discriminant validity under HTMT method. Based on the results, it is depicted that all the HTMT values are less than the threshold level of 0.85 proving that Discriminant Validity was established within the study.

In addition to the HTMT list, the data on following table highlighted the HTMT Matrix.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ACV	ONLINE	PARENTS	PEERS	RETAILERS	TV
ACV						
ONLINE	0.332					
PARENTS	0.228	0.053				
PEERS	0.598	0.314	0.191			
RETAILERS	0.369	0.235	0.129	0.298		
TV	0.284	0.322	0.051	0.212	0.142	

(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

4.4. Indicator Multi-collinearity

To assess multi-collinearity in the indicators, Variance Inflation Factor is used by the researchers (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Based on the findings of Hair et al (2016), multi-collinearity problem is not occurred, when the VIF value for the indicators are below 5. Thus, the data on Table 04, proved that there is no issue of multi-collinearity having the VIF values lower than the threshold level 5.

Table 4: Indicator Multi-collinearity

Socialization Agents	VIF
Peer Pressure	1.178
Parents Influence	1.029
TV Advertising	1.112
Online	1.181

Retailers	1.077
ACV	1.131

(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

4.5. Assessment of Structural Model

After establishing the measurement model's validity and reliability, we moved on to the analysis of structural model. The paths hypothesized in the research framework are reflected by the structural model and it is assessed based on the path coefficients, T values and significance of the paths (Latiff et al, 2020). Further, for both reflective and formative measurement models, performance was measured based on the loadings and weights of path coefficients (Garson, 2016).

Thus, the path analysis of the current study can be illustrated as follows.

Table 5: Path Coefficients and Hypotheses Test Results

Hypothesis		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Results
H1	PEER -> ACV	0.491	0.492	0.031	16.024	0.000	Supported
H2	PARENTS -> ACV	0.142	0.142	0.027	5.369	0.000	Supported
H3	TV ADVERTISING -> ACV	0.113	0.112	0.031	3.626	0.000	Supported
H4	ONLINE -> ACV	0.082	0.083	0.029	2.870	0.004	Supported
H5	RETAILERS -> ACV	0.126	0.128	0.030	4.206	0.000	Supported
H6a	AREA STRUCTURE x PEER -> ACV	-0.085	-0.087	0.041	2.096	0.033	Supported
H6b	AREA STRUCTURE x PARENTS -> ACV	-0.014	-0.015	0.029	0.493	0.622	Not Supported
H6c	AREA STRUCTURE x TV ADVERTISING -> ACV	0.007	0.004	0.030	0.234	0.815	Not Supported
H6d	AREA STRUCTURE x ONLINE -> ACV	0.018	0.017	0.030	0.600	0.548	Not Supported

H6e	AREA STRUCTURE x RETAILERS -> ACV	-0.007	-0.005	0.031	0.234	0.815	Not Supported
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(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

As far as the data on table 05 is concerned, the first five hypotheses were proved with statistical evidences. Thus, the results revealed that there is a significant impact of Peer Pressure on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability ($\beta = .491$, $t = 16.024$, $p = 0.000$) accepting the H1. Secondly, the H2 evaluates whether Parents have a significant impact on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in Sri Lankan franchised fast food industry. In here, the statistical evidences ($\beta = 0.142$, $t = 5.369$, $p = 0.000$) proved that Parents have a significant influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in franchised fast-food industry accepting H2. Thirdly, the hypothesis three was also accepted with the statistical evidences ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 3.626$, $p = 0.000$) proving that TV advertisements of franchised fast food companies positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. Next, the fourth hypothesis was formulated to measure the impact of online and social media on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. Based on the analysis results ($\beta = 0.082$, $t = 2.870$, $p = 0.004$), it was also revealed that Internet and Social media messages have a direct influence on Adolescents' consumption of fast-food, accepting H4. Finally, H5 was also accepted suggesting that Franchised Fast-food Retailers' positively influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability ($\beta = .126$, $t = 4.206$, $p = 0.000$).

4.6. Multi-group Analysis - Area Structure as the Categorical Moderator

For the purpose of testing group wise comparison of differences in Areas of living as the categorical moderator, Multigroup Analysis was run within this study. Multigroup Analysis (MGA) in smart PLS, is an efficient approach to evaluate moderation across multiple relationships in a research model (Cheah et al, 2020). For multidimensional models comprising categorical moderator variables, Multi-group in Smart PLS is the best approach (Ringle et al., 2015; Sarstedt and Cheah, 2020). As such, Multigroup Analysis in smart pls was used within the present study for the purpose of comparing the three groups of Area of Living as follows.

Table 6: Moderating Effect of Area Structure

	Difference Urban-Rural	Difference Urban-Suburban	Difference Rural-Suburban	1 tailed Urban Vs Rural (P)	1 tailed Urban Vs Sub-urban	1 tailed Rural Vs Sub-urban (P)	2 tailed Urban Vs Rural (P)	2 tailed Urban Vs Sub-urban	2 tailed Rural Vs Sub-urban (P)
PEER -> ACV	0.236	0.253	0.017	0.036	0.022	0.425	0.072	0.043	0.850
PARENTS-> ACV	-0.366	-0.336	0.026	0.945	0.937	0.371	0.112	0.125	0.745
TV -> ACV	0.091	-0.033	-0.124	0.195	0.611	0.831	0.389	0.778	0.338
ONLINE -> ACV	-0.092	-0.065	0.026	0.858	0.779	0.372	0.284	0.442	0.744
RETAILER S->ACV	-0.034	0.070	0.103	0.631	0.207	0.123	0.738	0.413	0.247

(Source: Survey Data, 2022)

As per the data on Table 06, Area Structure moderates the relationship between Peer Pressure and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. In here, the positive coefficient value of 0.253 between Urban and Sub-urban peers revealed that the impact is greater among Urban Peer groups in comparison to Sub-urban peers with p value 0.043. Based on the above statistics, H6a was accepted while H6b, H6c, H6d and H6e were rejected.

Due to the fact that Area Structure moderates the relationship between Peer Pressure and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, it was concluded that Area of living act as a significant moderator for the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine how socializing agents affect adolescent consumer susceptibility while controlling for living area. The study used a deductive technique to analyze how five socialization agents—parents, peers, TV advertising,

the internet, and retailers—affect adolescent consumer vulnerability across various living areas. All five socializing agents have a favorable impact on teenage customer vulnerability in Sri Lanka's franchised fast-food industry, according to the analysis results produced by SmartPLS 4.0.

Peer pressure has the greatest effect of the five agents, with a t value more than 1.96 ($\beta = .461$, $t = 16.024$, $p = 0.000$). The second-highest influence on obtaining the values is parents ($t = 5.369$, $p = 0.000$). Thirdly, it was noted that fast food chains significantly affect the vulnerability of teenage consumers ($t = 4.206$, $p = 0.000$). Fast-food television commercials have the fourth-highest impact ($t = 3.626$, $p = 0.000$). Lastly, when compared to the other four socializing agents, the Internet has a comparatively smaller significant impact ($t = 2.870$, $p = 0.000$). Area of living considerably moderates the association between Peer Pressure and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, in addition to the direct impact, according to the results of the multigroup analysis.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings provide valuable insights in the following domains. The study is the first in Sri Lanka to look at how socialization agents affect the vulnerability of adolescents as consumers, and it satisfies the need to focus on the underrepresented adolescent consumer group. Second, the findings will be useful to Sri Lankan parents since, in the country's franchised fast food industry, exposure to fast food was identified as the second most significant socialization element determining the vulnerability of teenage customers. Third, the study's conclusions provide the Sri Lankan government with useful guidance on how to address the nation's growing obesity problem.

Third, the results of this study provide useful recommendations for reducing the amount of money being repatriated to other countries and slowing the fast-food companies' rapid expansion. This will be a helpful strategy to overcome the country's present economic problems.



7. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES

Future researchers in this area can build on their results in a number of relevant domains. The first step in effectively addressing the problem of teenage socialization is to expand the research's scope by introducing more complex models that include the government and schools as extra socialization actors. Second, in order to more clearly identify the causal links that are currently in place, it would be more beneficial for future researchers to evaluate the current study's model through a longitudinal inquiry. Thirdly, this study is limited to examining a particular outcome variable that is produced by socialization agents. Future studies should therefore focus on other consumer effects of the socialization effect, such as materialism, pester power, and impulsive purchasing.

8. CONCLUSION

The main objective of the present study is to analyze the impact of five socialization agents; Peers, Parents, TV advertising, Online context and Retailers on adolescent consumer vulnerability. Further, adolescent consumer vulnerability was measured based on the seven dimensions of consumer vulnerability associated with; Lack of product knowledge, Higher dependency on promotion, Social Pressure, Dependency on replacement policy, Marketing pressure, Inability to distinguish the best product and Inability to purchase the best product.

Both Consumer Vulnerability model and Social Learning Theory were used when constructing the phenomena and basic five hypotheses, namely H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were used to measure the direct relationship between five Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. In addition to that, H6 was used to test the moderating role of Area Structure. In line with research questions and objectives, the first investigation was conducted to measure the direct impact of Peer Pressure, Parents' Influence, TV advertising, Online impact and Retailer's marketing strategy on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. As per the findings, it was revealed that all five Socialization Agents directly influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability



with special reference to Franchised Fast-food industry in Sri Lanka. Further, the findings of the present study highlighted that Area of Living as a moderator partially moderates the relationship between socialization agents and adolescent consumer vulnerability.

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