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Socialization Agents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability: Moderating Role of Mother's Employment (With Reference to Franchised Fast-food Industry in Sri Lanka)

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents are considered as a highly vulnerable customer group due to overconsumption of fast-food. According to existing scholars, adolescents' food preferences are greatly determined by socialization agents. Moreover, it was revealed that the consumption of fast-food is varied with Mother's Employment. Within this backdrop, the study aimed to analyze the impact of Socialization Agents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability with the moderating role of Mother's Employment due to the scarcity of existing studies relevant to the field. Primary data were collected from 910 Adolescents through a 69-item self-administered questionnaire. Results indicated that Peers, Parents, TV advertisements, the Internet, and Retailers positively influence Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, proving the first five hypotheses. Further, hypotheses 6b and 6e were also proved, revealing that Mother's Employment partially moderates the impact of Socialization Agents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

Keywords: Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, Fast-food Industry, Mother's Employment, Socialization Agents

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are different from other life stages and are adopting both healthy and unhealthy eating behaviors based on identity development and shifting interpersonal influences (Freeman et al., 2016). In comparison to other stages of life, consumers are more interested in eating junk foods during adolescence and have no intention to eat homemade foods (Mohammadbeigi et al., 2019; Damari et al., 2016). As such, fast-food is a popular food item among young consumers, especially among adolescents (Chowdhury et al., 2018; Nirmani et al., 2017; Majabadhi et al., 2016).

As far as the Sri Lankan context is concerned, rice and curry are the major food items among Sri Lankans (Weerasekara et al., 2018). However, owing to changes and transitions in the lifestyle and dietary habits of people, there is an increasing trend of consuming fast-food among adolescents (Dasanayaka & Priyanath, 2022; Nirmani et al., 2017; Majabadhi et al., 2016). As a result, body weight among adolescents has increased steadily due to higher intake of fast-food with flour and sugar (Medicine Net, 2021; Krishnasoban et al., 2021; WHO, 2020).

When considering the reasons behind fast-food consumption, existing scholars highlighted that adolescents' health perceptions and food choices are influenced by socialization agents, including peers, parents, food advertisers, the internet, retailers, schools, and governments (Kennedy et al, 2019; Padeniya et al., 2019; Truman & Elliott, 2019; Harari & Eyal, 2020; Somasiri & Chandralal, 2018; Chan et al., 2010). Although adolescents are seen as vulnerable consumers, desired research findings are not enough to figure out the reasons behind adolescent consumer vulnerability (Kennedy et al., 2019, Harari & Eyal, 2020; Padeniya et al., 2019).

Additionally, it was revealed that children's exposure to fast-food restaurants is limited when mothers are not working outside their homes (Ostbye, 2013). On the other hand, when parents have some college education, children's likelihood of consuming fast-food is higher than children with less educated families (Song et al., 2015). Further, the consumption of fast food among those families is higher because working mothers have no time to spend preparing and cooking traditional meals (Saraniya & Thevaranjan, 2015; Song et al., 2015; Ostbye, 2013).

Within this backdrop, the present study strived to test whether Mother's Employment moderates the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in the Sri Lankan franchised fast-food industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

The term Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability is derived from the concept of Consumer Vulnerability. According to Baker et al. (2005), Consumer Vulnerability is a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products. As far as the recent research findings of consumer vulnerability are concerned, the majority of the existing studies are available on Consumer Demographics and low literacy (Stewart & Yap, 2020; Jayasundara et al., 2020; Nishadi, 2020; Crowell, 2014; Broderick et al., 2011), Gender (Lacoba et al., 2020; Li et al, 2020; Fox & Hoy, 2019; Mccoy et al, 2019; Nora et al., 2015; Svensson, 2003; Barber, 2013) Lack of resources (FCA, 2014; Canhotoa & Dibb, 2016), Income (Li et al, 2020; Bowman et al, 2004), Social Class (Paniagua et al.,2014; Ranjith et al, 2015; Skårdal et al., 2014; Svastisalee et al., 2012; Wills et al., 2009; Hanson & Chen, 2007) and Older age (Melnikas & Smaliukiene, 2007; Moschis et al., 2011). As such, the existing consumer vulnerability research suggested concentrating more on young consumers by moving the focus away from the adult perspective to the adolescent perspective shaped by the norms of the youths' consumption subcultures (Niankara et al., 2020; Batat & Tanner, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019; Mason et al., 2013; Batat, 2012; Pechmann et al., 2011).

Socialization Agents

The concept of consumer socialization has a direct link with adolescent research (Batat & Tanner, 2019). However, the desired research findings are not enough to figure out the vulnerability of adolescents to various socialization agents (Batat & Tanner, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019). While explaining the importance of Peers, Parents, and TV advertising as traditional agents of socialization (Ubayachandra & Eldeniya, 2017; Jain & Sharma, 2016; Lenka & Vandana, 2015; Barber, 2013; Abbas et al., 2013), the extant literature highlighted the importance of studying the influence of 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) on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

Thus, the conceptual framework of the study can be illustrated as follows.

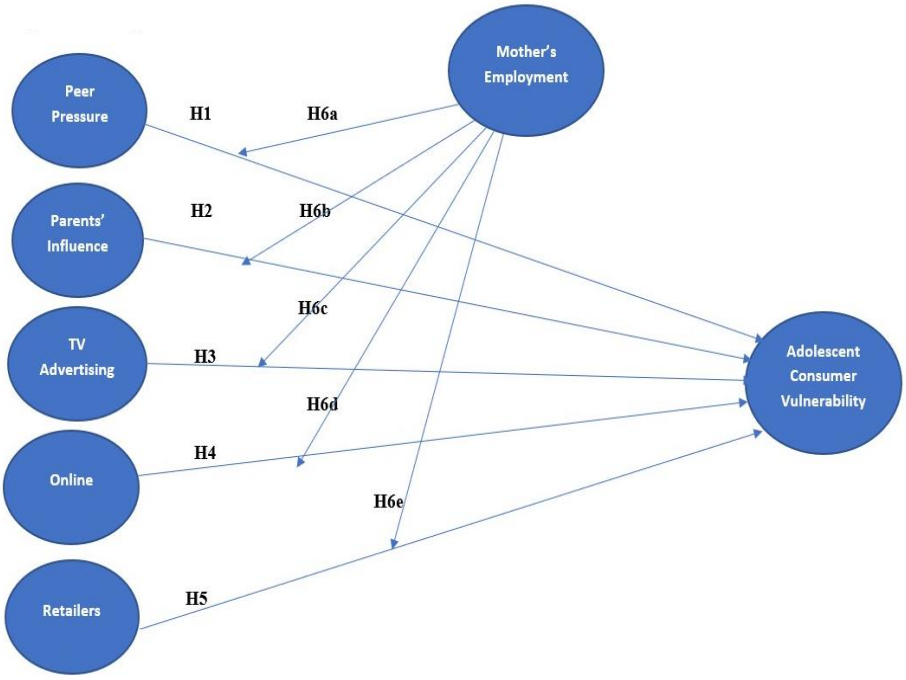

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As mentioned in the Conceptual Framework, it was hypothesized that socialization agents have a positive influence on adolescent consumer vulnerability in the franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka. Here, the first five hypotheses were derived to measure the impact of the independent variable (socialization agents) on the dependent variable. Additionally, the next hypothesis was developed to measure the moderating effect of Mother's Employment 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.

Peer Influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Peers are emphasizing the importance of exercising along with a socially-oriented consumption of junk food (Harari & Eyal, 2020). Usually vulnerable, adolescents compare themselves to their friends and may alter their choices to conform to the behavior of their peers (Fortin &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 by peers induces adolescents to increase their own consumption of fast foods (Fortin & Yazbeck, 2011). When it comes to the Sri Lankan context, existing findings revealed that peer influence through social media determines the conformity behavior of adolescents and young consumers (Piumali & Rathnayake, 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 the 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 influences Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in the franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

Parents Influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

In the case of children and adolescents, the most central socializing agents are usually the parents, who are from an early age, make food-related decisions in the household and serve as primary role models (Harari & Eyal, 2020). Parents emerged as positive role models for nutritional health (Harari & Eyal, 2020), 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 research (Harari & Eyal, 2020; Saranya et al., 2016). As far as the Sri Lankan context is concerned, recent researchers highlighted that parents are the main agents of socialization who first teach their children to consume products from birth (Senevirathna et al., 2021). Based on the above literature, the second hypothesis was derived as follows.

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

TV Advertisements Influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

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 being deceived 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 & 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).

In Asian countries, most television programs have started occupying the leisure time of adolescents (Mistry & Puthussery, 2015; Samanthi, 2010). Although adolescents express greater uncertainty about 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 influences Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in the franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

Online Influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Children and adolescents are exposed to various forms of food marketing while using social media applications, most of which promote unhealthy foods. (Kent & Pauze,2018). At present, Adolescents' media usage has changed substantially (Milici & Harris (2019), with higher use of social media (Kent & Pauze,2018) and lower exposure to TV (Friedman, 2017). Further, it has been 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 of the impact 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 & Pauze, 2018). Through careful examination of the above literature, the fourth hypothesis of the current study was derived as follows.

H4: Internet positively influence Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in the franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

Retailers' Marketing Strategy on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

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 on 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, 2013). According to Hastings et al. (2003), fast food marketing influences children's 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 spend with friends and the environmental cues (Bruening et al, 2014).

However, it was highlighted that the impact of retail stores on customer behavior should be discussed in upcoming research, 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 Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability in the franchised fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

Moderating Effect of Mother's Employment

Parental employment provides many benefits to children's health, and several studies have observed associations between mothers' full-time employment and less healthful family food environments (Bauer et al., 2012). Further, Song et al. (2015) found that children with high-educated mothers have a much higher likelihood of consuming Western fast-food than children with less educated mothers.

The existing Sri Lankan scholars highlighted that maternal employment and education level, as well as the busy lifestyles of the family, are major determinants of fast-food consumption among families (Saraniya & Thevaranjan, 2015, Jayawardana et al 2014; Rasanthika & Gunawardhana 2013). Further, the extant scholars highlighted that desired research findings are not enough to figure out the moderating effect of Maternal Employment Structure (Song et al., 2015; Lenka & Vandana, 2015) on socialization agents and adolescent consumers.

As such, the present study aimed to investigate whether Mother's Employment moderates the relationship between socialization agents and adolescent consumer vulnerability. Further, three categories of occupation structure in Sri Lanka, namely White Collar, Blue Collar, and Non-Employee were identified based on the findings of Anuradha (2021).

H6: Mother's Employment moderates the relationship between Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design and Data Collection

Based on a pre-determined structured questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 1000 respondents studying in government schools located in 08 Districts: Colombo, Kandy, Gampaha, Kaluthara, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Galle, and Matara. Stratified Random Sampling was used to collect data in each of the 08 districts. Further, the 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, the researcher obtained a usable sample of 910 cases.

Model Specification and Data Analysis

For the purpose of measuring both reflective and formative constructs, the present study used SmartPLS as a standard PLS-SEM software. The rationale behind the 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). According to existing scholars, PLS-SEM was originally developed by Herman Wold in 1970 as an alternative estimator to covariance-based structural equation modelling (Wold, 1982; Jöreskog & Wold, 1982). Further, the Moderating effect of four social structures was also measured based on Multi-group Analysis in SmartPLS.

ANALYSIS

Assessment of Measurement Model

Basically, the 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.

Reliability

Basically, the 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). As far as the data in Table 1 is concerned, it is depicted that all the Cronbach's alpha values for both Socialization Agents and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability lie between 0.975 and 0.985, exceeding the threshold level of 0.7. In addition to that, the statistics for composite reliability fell between 0.975 and 0.989, further proving that the items used to measure the dimensions are good enough to measure that particular dimension. Moreover, the rho_a value returned was between Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2016), exceeding the threshold level of 0.70, indicating good reliability (Henseler et al., 2016).

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
Lack of Product Knowledge	0.978	0.979	0.983	0.919
Higher Dependency on Promotion	0.980	0.980	0.983	0.908
Social Pressure	0.978	0.980	0.984	0.939
Replacement Policy	0.979	0.979	0.986	0.960
Marketing Pressure	0.975	0.975	0.981	0.929
Fraudulent Message	0.978	0.979	0.989	0.979
Inability to Purchase	0.984	0.989	0.988	0.955

Validity

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

Convergent Validity

Based on the standard loading estimates of 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 in Table 1 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, proving that the items used to measure the dimensions converged together.

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).

Among the different methods of determining Discriminant Validity, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion is the most frequently used method to assess Discriminant Validity. According to the data shown in Table 2, it is revealed that all the AVE values across the diagonal are greater than their correlation with all other constructs. So, the establishment of the Discriminant Validity of the present study was determined based on the higher AVE values across the diagonal.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	DP	EP	ID	IP	LK	ON	PA	PE	RP	RE	SP	TA
DP	**0.953**											
EP	0.171	**0.964**										
ID	0.171	0.179	**0.989**									
IP	0.167	0.135	0.400	**0.977**								
LK	0.225	0.247	0.275	0.133	**0.959**							
ON	0.249	0.179	0.075	-0.002	0.095	**0.929**						
PA	0.050	0.090	-0.017	0.035	0.192	0.008	**0.952**					
PE	0.257	0.264	0.039	0.047	0.200	0.291	0.148	**0.943**				
RP	0.177	0.287	0.261	0.233	0.162	0.167	0.057	0.169	**0.980**			
RE	0.225	0.279	0.078	0.153	0.115	0.182	0.027	0.247	0.221	**0.932**		
SP	0.234	0.356	0.175	0.163	0.192	0.163	-0.009	0.311	0.299	0.199	**0.969**	
TA	0.450	0.057	0.060	-0.013	0.044	0.292	-0.052	0.179	0.060	0.096	0.072	**0.950**

Note: DP: Dependency on Promotion, EP: Emotional Pressure, ID: Inability to Distinguish, IP: Inability to Purchase, LK: Lack of Knowledge, ON: Online, PA: Parents, PE: Peer, RP: Replacement Policy, RE: Retailers, SP: Social Pressure, TA: TV Advertising

Indicator Multi-collinearity

Based on the findings of Hair et al. (2016), multicollinearity does not occur when the VIF values for the indicators are below 5.

Table 3: Multi-collinearity Statistics

Socialization Agents	VIF	Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability	VIF
Peer Pressure	1.178	Lack of Product Knowledge	1.131
Parents Influence	1.029	Product Promotion	1.109
TV Advertising	1.112	Social Pressure	1.180
Online	1.181	Replacement Policy	1.166
Retailers	1.077	Marketing Pressure	1.380
		Fraudulent Message	1.588
		Inability to Purchase	1.193

The data in Table 3 proved that there is no issue with multi-collinearity when the VIF values are lower than the threshold level 5.

Assessment of Structural Model

After establishing the measurement model's validity and reliability, the next part of the analysis covers the structural model. Here, 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 4: Path Analysis and Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	p-value	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	MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT x PEER -> ACV	0.020	0.022	0.038	0.525	0.600	Not Supported
H6b	MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT x PARENTS -> ACV	0.053	0.052	0.026	**2.032**	**0.045**	**Supported**
H6c	MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT x TV ADVERTISING -> ACV	0.047	0.047	0.039	1.182	0.237	Not Supported
H6d	MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT x ONLINE -> ACV	0.021	0.014	0.041	0.504	0.614	Not Supported
H6e	MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT x RETAILERS -> ACV	-0.083	-0.085	0.042	**1.969**	**0.049**	**Supported**

As per the data in Table 4, all five socialization agents significantly influence Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, having T values greater than 1.96 with p values less than 0.05. Among them, Hypothesis 01 was accepted, revealing that Peer Pressure influence positively affects Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, having t= 16.024 with p= 0.000. Secondly, Hypothesis 02 was accepted with the statistics (*t=5.369, p=0.000*), highlighting that Parents play a major role in changing the behavior pattern of Adolescents. Hypothesis 03, pertaining to TV Advertising, was also proved to have t=3.626 while p=0.000, suggesting that TV advertisements of Franchised Fast-food positively influence Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability. Next, it was revealed that the Internet positively influences Adolescents' consumption of Franchised Fast-food, possessing t=2.870, p=0.004, proving Hypothesis 04. Finally, Hypothesis 05 was also accepted, highlighting that Retailers positively influence Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability with the t= 4.206 and p=0.000.

When it comes to the moderating role of Mother's Employment, the data in Table 4 proved that Mother's Employment significantly moderates the relationship between Two Socialization Agents (Parents and Retailers) and

Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability, partially accepting Hypothesis 06. This idea was proved by the statistics relevant to two socialization agents, namely Parents' Pressure (*t=2.032, p=0.045*) and Retailers (*t=1.969, p=0.049*) accepting only Hypothesis 6b and 6e while rejecting Hypotheses 6a, 6c and 6d.

Group-wise Comparison of Categorical Moderator Variables (Multi-Group Analysis)

For multidimensional models comprising categorical moderator variables, Multi-group in Smart PLS is the best approach. Thus, multi-group analysis in SmartPLS was used within the present study to further analysis of group-wise comparison of Mother's Employment between the three groups. Through this method, viewers can understand which group is more vulnerable than the other when Mother's Employment is acting as the moderator variable. So, a detailed explanation of the above points can be uncovered as follows.

Table 5: Multi-Group Analysis (MGA)

	Difference Blue Collar vs Non-employee	Difference Blue Collar vs White Collar	Difference Non-employee vs White Collar	1 tailed Blue Collar vs Non-employee (p-value)	1 tailed Blue Collar vs White Collar (p-value)	1 tailed Non-employee vs White Collar (p-value)	2 tailed Blue Collar vs Non-employee (p-value)	2 tailed Blue Collar vs White Collar (p-value)	2 tailed Non-employee vs White Collar (p-value)
PEER -> ACV	0.103	0.004	-0.099	0.276	0.418	0.894	0.553	0.837	0.212
PARENTS->ACV	0.024	-0.123	-0.147	0.385	0.741	0.978	0.770	0.518	**0.043**
TV -> ACV	-0.120	0.034	0.154	0.666	0.393	0.038	0.669	0.785	0.077
ONLINE -> ACV	-0.363	-0.336	0.026	0.945	0.937	0.371	0.110	0.125	0.741
RETAILERS->ACV	-0.021	0.121	0.142	0.486	0.287	0.025	0.973	0.575	**0.049**

The data in Table 5 provides the results of a Multi-group Analysis comparing the three groups of Mother's Employment. According to the results, the impact of Parents on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability between Non-employee and White-Collar mothers is -0.147 with a p-value of 0.043. Here, the minus coefficient value highlighted that the impact was greater in families with White-Collar mothers in comparison to families with non-employee mothers. Further, the p-value (0.043) less than 0.05 depicted that the difference between the above two employment groups is significant.

When moving into the next one, it is highlighted that the impact of Retailers' marketing strategy on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability between families of Non-employee and White-collar mother groups is 0.142. So, it is proved that the impact of Retailers on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability is higher in families of non-employee mothers compared to families of White-collar mothers. The relevant p-value (0.049) less than 0.05 further proved that the way Retailers influence Adolescents of Non-employee mothers is significantly different from the way it is influenced families of White-collar mothers.

Thus, it is obvious that Mother's employment significantly moderates the relationship between two Socialization Agents (Parents and Retailers) and Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability.

Finally, the results of the Multigroup analysis suggested that hypotheses 6b and 6e are accepted while rejecting hypotheses 6a, 6c, and 6d.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis results generated through SmartPLS 4.0, it was revealed that all five socialization agents positively influence adolescent consumer vulnerability in the Sri Lankan franchised fast-food industry. Among the five agents, Peer Pressure had the strongest impact with a higher t value greater than 1.96 (*t = 16.024, p = 0.000*), proved H1. Next, Parents possessed the second highest significant impact with the values *t=5.369* and *p = 0.000* accepted H2. Thirdly, it was highlighted that Fast food retailers have a significant influence on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability with the values (*t=4.206, p = 0.000*) verified H5. The fourth highest impact comes from TV advertisements for fast-food having (*t=3.626, p=0.000*) values suggested to accept H3. Finally, the Internet as a socialization agent, having the statistical evidence (*t = 2.870, p = 0.000*), proved H4.

In addition to the direct impact, the results of the indirect relationship further revealed that the Mother's Employment significantly moderates the relationship between two Socialization Agents' influence (Parents' Influence and Retailers' Influence) on Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability by partially proving H6.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present study provide good insights into several aspects as follows. First, this is the first Sri Lankan study to address the impact of socialization agents on adolescents' consumer vulnerability, and the study fulfills the need to focus on the underrepresented adolescent consumer group.

Second, the study provides good insights revealing that overweight and obesity in Sri Lanka is higher due to higher intake of franchised fast-food. Additionally, the study outcomes provide good recommendations to the Sri Lankan government to address the recent issue of increasing obesity rates among Sri Lankans. Third, the results of the present study provide good insights into mitigating the rapid expansion of franchised fast-food restaurants to reduce the repatriation of money to foreign countries. This will be one of the good strategies to overcome the prevailing bad economic system within the country.

Fourth, findings will provide good insights to Sri Lankan parents, whose exposure to fast-food was the second highest socialization agent influence on adolescent consumer vulnerability in Sri Lankan franchised fast food industry. Aligning with the study results, it is clear that parents' role within the family is a major determinant of adolescent consumer vulnerability. So, responsible parents should identify the reasons behind over-exposure to fast-food consumption and take necessary actions to prevent that behavior.

Directions for Future Research

Future researchers in this area can expand their research findings into a number of relevant directions. First, there is a need to expand the scope of the research, with more complex models which can include Schools and Government as new socialization agents together with other socialization agents relevant to adolescent socialization. Second, testing the present study's model through longitudinal research would be more beneficial for future researchers to determine the existing causal links more clearly. Third, the present study is limited to discussing only one outcome variable resulting from socialization agents. So, future studies should examine other customer outcomes of socialization influence, such as Pester Power, Materialism, and Impulse Buying Behavior.

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