

RESEARCH AREAS IN CONSUMER VULNERABILITY A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Consumer Vulnerability is a phenomenon used to explain the powerlessness of consumers in marketplace interactions. Comprehension of different areas of vulnerabilities that consumers face in the modern marketplace is a central and broadly discussed topic in current literature. Further, the majority of current studies on Consumer Vulnerability focus on consumer demographics, such as income, age, education, minority status, and area of living. However, the field lacks studies on possible causes, victims, and effects of consumer vulnerability in consumption contexts. Thus, this systematic literature review was conducted to fill the extant knowledge gaps and identify research areas related to vulnerability with specific consumer groups and reasons. Based on a comprehensive review protocol, 60 papers selected from 750 articles, were reviewed using the mixed-method approach. Further, primary study selection was done on the grounds that the articles; were published within the 2005-2020 period, relevant to the field of Consumer Vulnerability, published in English, have more than 3 pages in the paper. The findings of the study revealed five areas of consumer vulnerability; namely, Online Consumer

Vulnerability, TV Advertising and Child Consumer Vulnerability, Low literacy and Consumer Vulnerability, Older Consumer Vulnerability, and Consumer Vulnerability in the Multi-cultural marketplace. The results indicated that the impact of the internet, social media, and TV advertising on young consumer vulnerability should be studied in greater depth in future research.

Keywords: Consumer Vulnerability; Research areas; Systematic Literature Review

1. Introduction

Consumer Vulnerability is a broader term used to elucidate the helplessness of consumers in marketplace interactions. During the consumption process, consumers may experience variety of instances of powerlessness, which hinder them to get quality consumption. As such, the phenomenon of consumer vulnerability is used within the field of consumer behaviour, to understand the possible causes and effects of consumer powerlessness. Although, consumer vulnerability is a broadly discussed topic within the current body of literature, desired research findings are not enough to figure out who experience vulnerability and how consumers are vulnerable in consumption context. So, this systematic literature review was conducted to fill the above mentioned extant knowledge gaps by identifying relevant research areas with current importance.

According to existing researchers, a significant amount of researches are available relating to Consumer Vulnerability (Hamilton, Dunnet, & Piacentini, 2015; Hill & Dickinson, 2005), giving more attention to consumer demographics. Thus, consumers are vulnerable due to Income (Li et al, 2020; Powell & Binh, 2013; Khan et al, 2012; Bowman et al, 2004), Gender (Li et al, 2020; Lacoba et al, 2020; Nora et al, 2015; Svensson 2003; Barber, 2013; McCoy et al, 2017; Fox & Hoy, 2019), Lack of resources (FCA, 2014; Canhotoa & Dibb, 2016), Young Age (Kennedy et al, 2019; Karacic & Kriz,2017; Lapierre et al, 2017; Batat, 2012; Batat & Jfner, 2019;) and Social class (Ranjith et al, 2015; Paniagua et al ,2014; Skårdal et al, 2014; Svastisalee, et al, 2012; Wills et al, 2009; Hanson and Chen, 2007).

However, it was the view of several scholars that upcoming researches of consumer vulnerability should move beyond the overly restrictive demographic categories of income, age, education, and minority status to the other areas where consumers are highly exposed (Kennedy et al, 2019; Garrett and Toumanoff, 2010)

In the meantime, the field lacks studies on the impact of Social Media (Niankara et al, 2020; Kennedy et al, 2019; Somasiri and Chandralal, 2018), Internet (Batat and Jfner, 2019; Barber, 2013) and Advertising Exposure (Harris et al, 2020, Lapierre and Rozendaal, 2019; Elliott, 2017; Ozdogan and Altintas, 2010, Nairn and Berthon, 2005), despite the fact of rapid growth in internet and social media penetration both in local and international contexts. Additionally, recent literature suggest that the impact of Literacy level (Stewart & Yap , 2020; Jayasundara etal, 2020 Crowell, 2014; Broderick et al, 2011) Older age (Silvera, Meyer & Laufer; Berg, 2015; Moschis et al, 2011; Melnikas & Smaliukiene, 2007) and Multiculturalism (Amanda et al; 2011; Melnikas & Smaliukiene, 2007) on Consumer Vulnerability should also be studied in more detailed within future research studies.

While recognizing the existing knowledge gaps, the aims of this systematic literature review was to explore the concept of consumer vulnerability through untouched areas (RQ1), followed by the comprehension of extant research gaps and future research avenues (RQ 2). Further, it was expected to discover the key theoretical discussions in the area of consumer vulnerability (RQ 3). Thus, this paper will contribute to the field of Consumer Vulnerability by suggesting future research avenues of Consumer Vulnerability and exploring the new concepts and theories relevant to the field.

2. Methodology

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) can be conducted under three phases namely; Defining a Review Protocol, Review Methodology and Reporting the findings (Kitchenham and Charters, 2007). According to that, this review was conducted under three sequential steps as follows.

2.1 Defining a Review Protocol

The protocol is a plan that helps to protect objectivity by providing explicit descriptions of the steps to be taken. The protocol contains information on the specific questions addressed by the study, the population (or sample) that is the focus of the study, the search strategy for identification of relevant studies, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review (Davies and Crombie, 1998). Thus, the Review Protocol of this specific study can be elaborated as follows.

2.1.1. Research questions

Based on the existing knowledge gaps and background information, three research questions were formulated followed by three basic research objectives.

RQ1 – What are the untouched areas of Consumer Vulnerability with current importance?

RQ2 – What are the existing research gaps and possible avenues for future researches?

RQ3- How key theoretical discussions have been evolved in the area of consumer vulnerability?

2.1.2 Research Objectives

Consisting with the three research questions developed above, we aimed at achieving three basic objectives as follows.

To explore the recent research areas in Consumer Vulnerability.

To elaborate existing research gaps and provide suggestions for future research avenues.

To evolve and explore the new concepts and theories built relevant to the field.

2.1.3 Search Strategy

For facilitating the literature search, several key terms were used when searching the articles; Research gaps in Consumer Vulnerability, Current issues of Consumer Vulnerability, Consumer Vulnerability research studies in Sri Lanka, Online Consumer Vulnerability, TV Advertising and Consumer Vulnerability, Older Consumer Vulnerability, Low Literacy and Consumer Vulnerability and Consumer Vulnerability in Multicultural market place.

Aligning with the research theme of identifying research gaps, the search process was limited to the researches published within 2005-2020. Based on the above key words search, articles published within the last 15 years' period in English, were found from publishers such as Emerald, ELSVEIR, Taylor and Francis, Wiley, Sage and Western Publishers. Additionally, more research papers were selected based on the reference list and bibliographies of the selected articles. Moreover, publications, that cannot be accessed directly, were obtained by personally writing to the authors.

2.1.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included into the analysis process, based on the year of publication (published within 2005-2020), relevancy to the field of Consumer Vulnerability, no: of

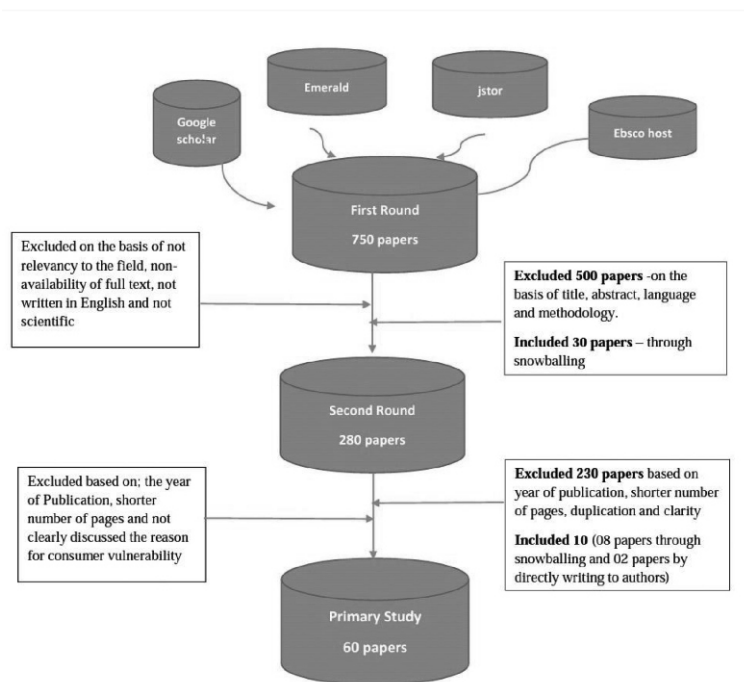
pages included in the paper, recognition of the journal, number of citations, and language.

As a result, majority of papers were excluded depending on the criteria that they were; published before 2005, not directly relevant to the field of Consumer Vulnerability, available without full-text, less no: of pages, not written in English and not scientific.

2.1.5 Identification of Primary Studies

Based on the above mentioned steps, identification of primary studies was taken place as follows.

Figure 01. Selection of Primary Studies



As depicted in the Figure 01, the study population refers the broader area of Consumer Vulnerability and search string was done accordingly. Based on the above key terms, articles were downloaded from numerous search engines mentioned under search strategy. Additionally, to get more primary studies, we used several strategies such as; selecting papers through snowballing, visiting digital libraries of universities and writing directly to authors who had papers in the field of consumer vulnerability.

When it comes to study selection, articles were screened, categorized and synthesised manually under several steps. At first, 750 articles were screened using Thematic analysis and identified the distribution pattern of studies across themes, depending on the title, abstract and relevance. During this manual screening process, 500 articles were rejected grounding that those are not directly relevant to the field of consumer vulnerability. At the same time, we added 30 new papers to the screening process through snowballing technique by scanning the reference list of initially selected articles and sending mails to authors who had researches in this specific field. Moving to the second stage, the available 280 papers were again synthesized manually and removed 230, reasoning that those were; published before 2005, available without full-text and not clearly focused the reason for consumer vulnerability. However, even in this stage, another set of 08 papers were added through snowballing and 02 more, by directly writing to the authors who possess researches in this specific field. As a result, we got 60 primary studies for the analysis.

2.2 Conduct the review

After selecting the 60 primary studies, review was conducted under several steps based on mixed method approach, by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. At first, the distribution pattern of selected articles across different areas was determined based on the thematic analysis. Thus, articles were categorized into five different themes of consumer vulnerability, considering the title, abstract, methodology and conclusion. Second, articles were coded in an ascending order based on the first letter of the name of the author/first author. For instance, Adkins, N.R. & Jae, H. (2010) was coded as P1 to denote paper 1. Third, a detailed table was maintained to record the findings of each of the 60 primary studies under the titles of area of consumer vulnerability, name/s of the author/s, year of publication, name of the journal, research methodology deployed, key theoretical discussions, gaps identified and suggestions for future researches. Finally, the comprehensive analysis process was taken place by expanding the records of the above mentioned table as follows.

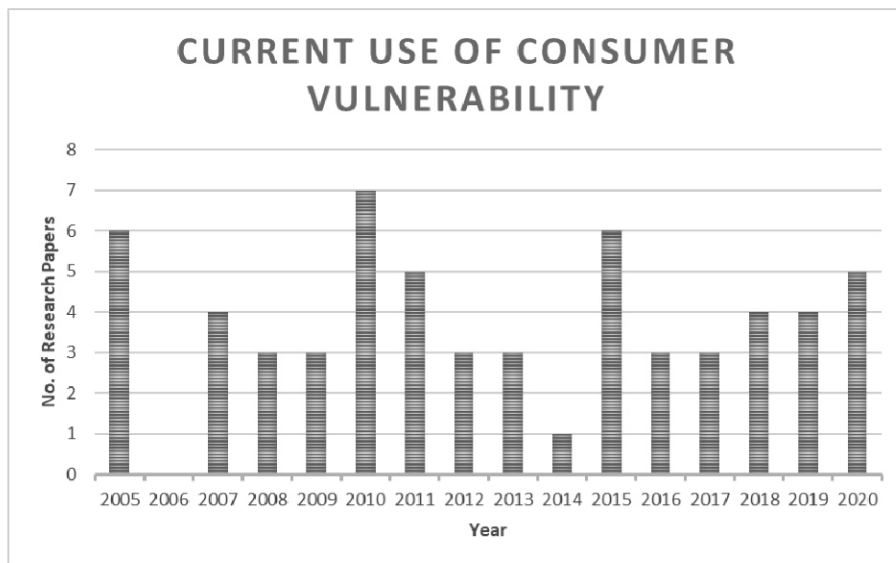
3. Data analysis

This section presents the detailed analysis of the findings under five different themes; Current use of Consumer Vulnerability, Publication venue, Areas of Consumer Vulnerability, Research methods deployed and Evolution of key theoretical discussions. Next, the section 04 elaborates results and discussions with suggestions for future research avenues, whereas section 05 presents concluding remarks.

3.1 Analysis of current use of Consumer Vulnerability within the existing body of knowledge.

This type of categorization is useful, because it clearly indicates the recent trend of researches that have been conducted within the field. According to the data on figure 02, it is obvious that majority of studies have been conducted in year 2010 while less studies in year 2014 relating to Consumer Vulnerability. However, it is to be noted that out of the 60 papers reviewed, not a single study has been conducted during the year 2006.

Figure 02 **Current use of Consumer Vulnerability**



3.2 Distribution of Papers across Journals

This section tries to identify the variety of journals that the publications are available. According to the data on table 01, the highest numbers of papers are available in Journal of Macro Marketing. Additionally, the second highest numbers of papers (03 papers in each) are available in Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, Journal of Consumer Affairs and Journal of Marketing Management. In addition to that, Journal of Services Marketing and International Journal of Consumer Studies are having the third highest amount of studies (02 papers in each). The next sets of articles are also available in recognized journals having one article in each. Depending on the above pattern of distribution, it is clear that the recent studies of consumer vulnerability have been published in indexed journals with higher impact rate.

Table 01 Distribution of Publications across journals

Name of the Journal	Author/s	Year of Publication
Journal of Macro Marketing	Adkins, N.R. & Jae, H.	2010
	Adkins, N.R. & Ozanne, J.L.	2005
	Baker, S.M. et al	2005
	Hill, R., & Dickinson, R.	2005
	Commuri, S. and Ekici, A.	2008
	Ringold, D.J.	2005
Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	Clifford, J. et al	2009
	Ford, N. et al	2019
	Pechmann, C., et al	2011
The Journal of Consumer Affairs	Garrett, D.E. & Toumanoff, P.G.	2010
	Kennedy, A.M. et al	2019
	Moschis, G.P. et al	2011
Journal of Marketing Management	Falchetti, C. et al	2015
	Rap and Hill	2015
	Hill, R.P & Sharma, E.	2020
Journal of Services Marketing,	Amine & Gatfaoui	2019
	Tanner, Emily C., Su, Lixun	2019
International Journal of Consumer Studies.	Berg, L.	2015
	Stewart, R., & Yap, S.F.	2020
Journal of Research for Consumers	Amanda <i>et al</i> ,	2011
OUSL Journal	Ariyaratna, B.A.R.R.	2018
Child and Teen Consumption	Batat, W.	2010
Advances in Consumer Research	Batat, W.	2012
Journal of Financial Services Marketing	Brimble, M. and Blue, L.	2013
Journal of Interactive Marketing	Brown, Jo. et al	2007
Marketing Review	Chaudhuri, H. R.	2010
International Journal of Healthcare Management	Chiang, K.P. & Jackson, A.	2012
Family & Community Health	Crosnoe, R. & McNeely, C.	2008
Journal of Business Research	Davis, B., & Ozanne, J. L.	2018
Journal of Financial Services Marketing	Drew, J.M.	2013
Journal of Retailing	Elizabeth, A. et al	2014
Qualitative Market Research	Ford, N., Trott, P. & Simms, C.	2019
Marketing Management Journal	Jae, Haeran.	2009
Psychiatric Danubina	Karacic, S., & Kriz, S.	2017
Psychology and Aging	Kircanski, K. et al	2018
Pediatrics	Lapierre et al,	2017
Global Business Review	Lenka & Vandana	2015a
Psychological Studies	Lenka, U. & Vandana	2015b
Journal of Pension Economics and Finance	Lusardi, A. & Mitchell, O.S	2011
Journal of Marketing	MacInnis, D. J., & de Mello, G.E.	2005
Family & Consumer Sciences Research Journal	Matzek, A. E. & Stum M.S.	2010
Journal of Business Economics and Management	Melnikas, B. & Smaliukiene, R.	2007
Business & Society	Nairn, A. & Berthon, P.	2005
Journal of Financial Services Marketing	Nejad, M.G. & O'Connor, G.	2016
Young Consumers	Ozdogan, F.B. and Altintas, M.H.	2010
Digi-world Economic Journal	Pierson, J.	2012
Journal of Business Ethics	Ramsey, R.P. et al	2007
Criminal Justice and Behavior	Reisig, M. D. et al	2009
European Academic Research.	Somasiri, S., & Chandralal, L.	2018
Asia-Pacific Advances in Consumer Research	Tan, M.C. et al	2015
Journal of Promotion Management	Watson, S. et al	2011
Journal of Social Marketing	Jayasundara, S.K.. et al	2020
Journal of Business Ethics	Rowthorn, D.	2017

3.3 Analysis of Areas of Consumer Vulnerability

Within this section, existing studies have been categorized based on the areas of Consumer Vulnerability. While identifying the five areas of Consumer vulnerability, this part of the analysis tries to address RQ1. As per the table 02, primary studies can be categorized into five different areas namely; Online Consumer Vulnerability, TV Advertising and Child Consumer Vulnerability, Low literacy and Consumer Vulnerability, Older Consumer Vulnerability and Consumer Vulnerability in Multi-cultural market place. Among the five different areas, majority of studies have been conducted on Low literacy and Consumer Vulnerability while less attention has been paid to analyse Consumer Vulnerability in Multicultural market place.

The studies which consider Low literate consumer vulnerability attempts to elaborate; how misinterpreting labels, misusing products and purchasing the wrong item, will lead to make poor decisions out of ignorance (Adkins & Ozanne,2005; Stewart and Yap, 2020), how English language limitations such as information overload, distrust in buying, purchase confusion, and difficulties in reading labels put consumers into a vulnerable situation (Jayasundara et al, 2020; Adkins and Jae, 2010;) and how lower financial literacy will lead to financial consumer vulnerability (Nejad & O'Connor, 2016; Berg, 2015; Mitchell and Lusardi 2015; Lusardi and Mitchell; 2011; Brimble and Blue, 2013; Drew, 2013).

The second highest number of publications are available relating Online consumer vulnerability, which highlights how; seeking the online opinions of other consumers before buying (Brown, Broderick, & Lee 2007; McQuail 2010), dealing with unknown sellers and venders (Fernando, 2013; Ariyaratna et al, 2018), social media as a socialization agent (Pierson, 2011; Somasiri and Chandralal, 2018; Fox and Hoy, 2019), making risky online payments (Horrigan, 2008; Reisig et al, 2009) and e marketers' information collection practices (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008; Elizabeth et al., 2014; Karacic S & Kriz 2017; Lapierre et al., 2017) will lead to consumer vulnerability in online context.

Next set of publications discuss the impact of TV advertising on Consumer Vulnerability. Accordingly, findings revealed that over exposure to TV advertising make children more vulnerable and violent (Lapierre et al., 2017; Rowthorn 2017; Lenka & Vandana, 2015; Galdolage & Wijesundara, 2007; Pechmann et al., 2005), and consumer are vulnerable due to deceptive product claims in ads (MacInnis & de Mello, 2005; Watson et al, 2011).

Fourth set of articles highlighted that Older consumers are vulnerable due to unethical business practices of marketers (Ramsey et al, 2007), fixed income generated through financial investment (Kircanski et al, 2018), vulnerability in food consumption ((Ford, Trott and Simms (2019) and limited literacy ability (Adkins and Ozanne, 2005).

Ultimately, studies of multicultural market place uncover that misunderstanding of cultural identity (Amanda et al, 2011) and restrictions on access to the marketplace (Chaudhuri 2010; Jae 2009) are some of the reasons of consumer vulnerability in multicultural market places.

In addition to the above five areas of Consumer Vulnerability, 10 papers discusses the impact of several dimensions on Consumer Vulnerability.

Table 02. Areas of Consumer vulnerability

Area of Vulnerability	No: of Papers
Online Consumer Vulnerability	15
TV Advertising on Children Consumer Vulnerability	09
Low Literacy and Consumer Vulnerability	16
Older Consumer Vulnerability	07
Consumer Vulnerability in Multicultural Market place	03
More than one area	10

3.4 Research Methods deployed

In terms of the methodology used, reviewed papers were categorized into three basic groups as Qualitative, Quantitative and Literature Reviews. According to the table 03, majority (29 papers) of studies out of 60, are literature reviews coming under five different categories; Theoretical Literature Review, Systematic Literature Review, Narrative Literature Review, Integrative Literature Review and Argumentative Literature Review. Even among the 29 literature reviews, argumentative literature review has been applied in 09 studies and Integrative Literature Reviews were deployed in same no: of papers (7 papers each). The next set of 6 papers includes 05 Systematic literature reviews and 01 Narrative Literature Review. Moreover, it is to be noted that important research gaps and future avenues were uncovered through careful examination of these five types of literature reviews.

Apart from the literature reviews, Qualitative Research design, as one of the dominant research methodologies has been applied extensively in 16 studies. Among

them, higher use of in-depth interviews underpins that consumer vulnerability as a behavioural concept can be better measured through customer inputs, than other methods. However, Case studies, Narrative analysis, Observation, Grounded Theory, Story-telling, Discourse analysis were deployed in relatively few studies.

Ultimately, use of Survey based questionnaire is the dominantly applied Quantitative data collection method in majority of selected studies. In addition to that, Telephone survey, Semi-structured interviews and Experimental design have also been used to collect data.

Table 03 Research Methods deployed

Method	Data Collection Technique	Paper ID	No: of papers
Quantitative	1. Survey based questionnaire	P24, P25, P31, P37, P39, P41, P46, P47, P19, P36, P59	11
	2. Telephone survey	P51	01
	3. Semi-structured interviews	P53	01
	4. Experimental Design	P33, P45	02
			(Total 15)
Qualitative	1. In-depth Interviews	P02, P09, P22, P23, P30, P11,	06
	2. Case study	P04, P18	02
	3. Narrative analysis	P10, P20	02
	3. Observation	P07, P40,	02
	4. Grounded Theory	P08	01
	5. Story telling	P03	01
6. Discourse analysis	P05, P21	02	
			(Total 16)
Literature Reviews	1. Theoretical Literature Review	P06, P15, P32, P43, P60, P14, P38	07
	2. Systematic Literature Review	P27, P48, P50, P13, P17	05
	3. Narrative Literature Review	P44	01
	4. Integrative Literature Review	P01, P07, P39, P49, P57, P12, P35	07
	5. Argumentative Literature Review	P16, P26, P29, P54, P55, P28, P34, P42, P52	09
			(Total 29)

3.5 Evolution of Key theoretical discussions

Aligning with RQ3, one of the objectives of this review is to evolve and explore the key theoretical discussions made by the previous authors to the current body of knowledge. By doing so, this paper will understand the untouched areas of existing knowledge and provide suggestions for future avenues.

Table 04 Key theoretical discussions

Author/s	Findings	Paper ID	Contexts
Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg (2005)	A Model of Consumer Vulnerability was developed. According to the model, the actual vulnerability arises from the interaction of individual states, individual characteristics, and external conditions within a context where consumption goals may be hindered and the experience affects personal and social perceptions of self.	P6	Multiple Context
Commuri and Ekici (2008)	Defined two components of Consumer Vulnerability. 1. State based view of Consumer vulnerability 2. Class based view of Consumer Vulnerability	P15	Multiple Context
Shultz and Holbrook (2009)	Identified two key characteristics related to Vulnerability. 1. Knowledge of beneficial means–ends relationships assumes that, consumers are vulnerable because they don't know what is good for them. 2. Access to beneficial means suggests that consumers are vulnerable when they don't have the abilities, skills, funds or other resources needed to acquire it.	P15	Multiple context
Batat W. (2010)	Identified two categories of young consumer vulnerability in online transactions namely; 1. Info-pollution 2. Enslavement.	P07	European Context
Amanda et al (2011)	Identified two key sources of Consumer Vulnerability in Multicultural market place. 1. Lack of Language skills 2. Lack of Market practice understandings	P03	Multi-cultural context.
Moschis et al (2011)	Consumer Vulnerability has been defined in two ways. 1. Cognitive 2. Behavioural	P44	Multiple Context
Watson et al (2011)	Proposed a model suggesting that consumers most vulnerable to deceptive product claims in ads are those with high hopes of attaining idealized standards.	P60	. USA context
Pierson J. (2012)	Defined two folds of Vulnerability as follows. 1. External The external perspective refers mainly to the structural dimensions of vulnerability exposure. 2. Internal. The internal dimension of vulnerability focuses on coping and action to overcome or at least mitigate negative effects (BOHLE, 2001)	P50	Western Context
Batat W. (2012)	Adolescents Consumer Vulnerability has been explained in two folds as follows. 1. Deliberate Vulnerability (ex: surfing porn websites is a desired behaviour by showing their independence and their resistance to adults' rules) 2. Imposed Vulnerability (ex: purchasing brands that they can't afford).	P08	European Context
Falchetti , et al... (2016)	The degree of vulnerability is dependent on two factors. 1. Internal Factors It includes emotional well-being, acceptance, self-esteem, symptoms of depression and anxiety and prejudice regarding their own disability. 2. External factors They are consumption facilitating social support, social contexts and aspects of the market place, such as physical access, the availability of information about products and services	P20	Multiple Context
Stewart .R and Yap S.F (2020)	A new conceptual framework has been developed on Low-literate consumer vulnerability based on the existing findings about Class based view of Consumer Vulnerability and State based views of Consumer Vulnerability	P57	New-Zealand context
Hill R. P. and Sharma E. (2020)	Identified two folds of vulnerability; 1. Experienced Vulnerability 2. Observed Vulnerability	P27	Multiple context
Mogaji, E. (2020)	Financial Consumer Vulnerability was identified due to two reasons. i. Personal Characteristics – health, age, life events, resilience, capabilities ii. Other factors - This covers the under banked around the world that do not have access to bank products or services, either due to their location or access to technology.	P43	Multiple context

As shown in table 04 the evolution of key theoretical discussion is started from Baker et al (2005), definition of Consumer Vulnerability. Accordingly, Consumer Vulnerability can be defined as a state of powerlessness that arises from an imbalance in marketplace interactions or from the consumption of marketing messages and products. Later, Commuri and Ekici (2008) identified two components of Consumer Vulnerability as State based view of vulnerability and Class based view of Consumer Vulnerability. Further, they revealed that, in State based vulnerability, people become vulnerable when and because there is a risk that someone (an agent) or something (an outcome) may cause them harm when they are in a particular state. In Class based vulnerability, certain classes should be identified as more likely to experience Vulnerability.

The two characteristics of consumer vulnerability defined by Clifford et al (2009) are Knowledge of beneficial means–ends relationships and Access to Beneficial means. The first assumes that, consumers are vulnerable because they don't know what is good for them. In contrast, access to beneficial means suggests that consumers are vulnerable when they don't have the abilities, skills, funds or other resources needed to acquire it.

Subsequently, Moschis et al (2011), defined Vulnerability at both Cognitive and Behavioural levels of consumer response. Further, they revealed that, when vulnerability is conceptualized at the cognitive level, researchers use various forms of cognitive response, such as the degree consumers deviate from optimal decision making, ability to filter puffery in promotional claims, limited information processing (e.g., non-compensatory information processing) and use of ineffective decision rules. Findings of Pierson (2012) revealed two folds of Vulnerability both External and Internal. The external perspective refers mainly to the structural dimensions of vulnerability exposure, while the internal dimension of vulnerability focuses on coping and action to overcome or at least mitigate negative effects.

In their research, Falchetti., et al (2016) stated that the degree of vulnerability is dependent on two factors namely internal and external factors. Internal factors include emotional well-being, acceptance, self-esteem, symptoms of depression and anxiety and prejudice regarding their own disability. External factors are consumption facilitating social support, social contexts and aspects of the market place, such as physical access, the availability of information about products and services.

Finally, Hill and Sharma (2020), defined Consumer Vulnerability as a state in which consumers are subjected to harm because their access to and control over resources are restricted in ways that significantly inhibit their ability to function in the market place. Further, they integrate both the experiencer's perspective (experienced vulnerability) and the perceiver's perspective (observed vulnerability) into their discussion of identification.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the careful examination of 60 papers published within 2005-2020 period, five research areas were identified within this review.

At first, consumer vulnerability in online context was analysed due to contradictory viewpoints within the existing literature relating to the field. Vulnerability in online transactions, security and trustworthiness of Web vendor, risk of online payments, e marketers' information collection practices and social media engagement are the factors identified to explain online consumer vulnerability. In contrast, relatively few studies revealed that vulnerable consumers who are socially excluded may look for support from online transformative service support.

The second research area highlighted that the impact of TV advertising exposure on Child consumer vulnerability is not adequately discussed within the existing literature both in Sri Lankan as well as in international context. In here, vulnerabilities of over exposure to TV advertising are; higher degree of trustworthiness on advertising claims, higher degree of influence on values and beliefs of children, Children's lack of cognitive capacity to defend themselves, influence on parent's decision making with regards to product choices and consumption patterns etc.

Additionally, it was revealed that most of the existing research studies have been widely explored in the USA, while very limited investigation has been done on adolescents and children receptivity to advertising in other cultures. Moreover, it was emphasized that the role of advertising among adolescents and children should be studied in greater depth in future researches.

The third potential future research area discussed the low literature consumer vulnerability because; low-literate consumers and their level of vulnerability remain an underrepresented topic in consumer research. The existing literature identified low literate vulnerability when consumers misinterpreting labels, misusing products and

purchasing the wrong item, which leads to devastating outcomes as they continue to make poor decisions out of ignorance. Additionally, several studies highlighted that due to English language limitations such as information overload, distrust in buying, purchase confusion, and difficulties in reading labels, consumers are in a vulnerable situation. As a whole most of the studies disclosed that broader and contextual nature of consumer literacy can be identified in different forms as financial literacy, health literacy, and digital literacy so on. Here, majority of studies discuss the financial illiterate consumer vulnerability such as lower financial literacy, lack of calculating skills. Further, it was suggested that future research needs to move beyond the overly restrictive demographic categories of income, age, education, and minority status to investigate more deeply how and why consumers may experience vulnerability in the marketplace.

The older consumer vulnerability is the fourth possible future research area identified within this review due to inadequacy of existing findings both within Sri Lankan as well as in International contexts. According to the current studies, older consumers can be identified as people who have little control and declined performance of bodily systems. Further, it was revealed that older consumers are more vulnerable, due to chronological age, poverty, lower education and living without a spouse. In contrast, several studies highlighted that older people appeared to be less likely than other age groups to make unfortunate decisions in the markets. So, there is an existing knowledge gap in the field of consumer vulnerability relating to aged people. Additionally, it has been highlighted that new researchers should be focused on the contextual and sociocultural effects, because those effects have never been addressed in the context of older consumer's vulnerability.

Finally, fifth research area was identified based on consumer vulnerability in multicultural market place. Multicultural marketplaces (MCM) include: consumers from diverse ethnic groups, religious groups, nationalities; people living in particular geographic regions; or groups that share common physical/mental disabilities, beliefs, values, attitudes or a way of life. The existing literature highlighted that consumers will withdraw from the market place, when they feel vulnerable because of perceived or real misunderstanding of their own cultural identify. Companies' failure to understand and reflect cultural identity complexities in advertisements, a lack of competence in market place, a decrease in self-esteem and omission of cultural identity are some of the vulnerabilities that were identified by the current studies.

Additionally, it is revealed that future researches should pay attention to investigate particular vulnerability challenges manifested in multicultural marketplaces.

As per the existing studies, most of the researchers have focused on; how consumers are vulnerable in online context, how social media influence consumer buying decisions, how exposure to TV advertising creates consumer vulnerability and how strategies of marketers put people into vulnerable situation. For instance, findings of recent studies uncover that dealing with unknown sellers and vendors (Fernando, 2013; Ariyaratna et al, 2018), Impact of Social-media as a socialization agent (Pierson, 2011; Somasiri and Chandralal, 2018; Fox and Hoy, 2019), Adolescent vulnerability to e marketers' information collection practices (Karacic & Kriz 2017; Lapierre et al., 2017; Elizabeth et al., 2014; Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008), making risky online payment (Horrihan, 2008; Reising et al, 2009) will lead to consumer vulnerability. Further, it is apparent that over exposure to TV advertising (Galdolage & Wijesundara, 2007; Lenka & Vandana, 2015, Pechmann et al., 2005; Lapierre et al., 2017; Rowthorn 2017), deceptive product claims in ads (MacInnis & de Mello, 2005; Watson et al, 2011) and junk food marketing appeals (Harris et al, 2020) put consumers into vulnerable situation, making them powerless in decision making.

However, desired research findings do not exist to figure out the Young Consumer Vulnerability in online context, though they are considered as a vulnerable customer group (Kennedy et al, 2019). Additionally, it is evident that less studies are available to explain the role of social media as a consumer socialization agent on young consumer vulnerability (Somasiri and Chandralal, 2018; Kent et al, 2018; Kelly et al, 2015). When it comes to TV advertising there is an existing research gap of inherent unfairness and negative outcomes of child advertising (Rowthorn 2017). According to existing authors, children and advertising are widely explored in the USA, with fewer studies in other cultures. (Ozdogan and Altintas, 2010, Nairn and Berthon, 2005). Finally, it was suggested that longitudinal research exploring how youth process marketing messages across media platforms and across ages should be conducted in future researches (Lapierre et al, 2017; Ramsey et al, 2007).

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review was conducted to understand the different areas and future prospects within the field of Consumer Vulnerability. The results of this review contribute to a better understanding of Consumer Vulnerability and show important gaps for future researches. Although, significant amounts of studies are

available to identify the vulnerable people under different areas, the field lacks systematic literature review with a rigorous analysis and systematic synthesis. To fill that existing research gap, this study was taken place, based on a comprehensive Review Protocol covering the specific questions addressed by the study, aims and scope of the study, the search strategy for identification of relevant studies, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review.

Through extensive search of 60 primary studies, five research areas with current importance were identified as; Online Consumer Vulnerability, Advertising Exposure and Children Consumer Vulnerability, Low literate Consumer Vulnerability, Older Consumer Vulnerability and Consumer Vulnerability in multi-cultural market place.

According to the empirical evidences, it is apparent that explanations are limited in the area of how socialization agents such as; internet, social media and TV advertising create consumer vulnerability. In the meantime, majority of studies are cross sectional giving less attention to the impact of chronological age on consumer vulnerability. So, longitudinal research exploring how socialization agents influence on adolescent consumers should be studied in upcoming researches.

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