



Unveiling (In)Vulnerability in an Adolescent's Consumption Subculture: A Framework to Understand Adolescents' Experienced (In) Vulnerability and Ethical Implications

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Abstract

Consumer (in)vulnerability is studied via a quasi-ethnographic longitudinal study of adolescents aged 11–15. The study focuses on how adolescents define their vulnerabilities within their adolescent consumption subcultures, the factors enhancing this vulnerability, and the social actors involved in their experience of vulnerability. The findings contribute to consumer vulnerability literature in three ways. First, by adopting an adolescent-centric approach based on an emic perspective, we go beyond the monolithic approach of studying one source of vulnerability at a time seen in present marketing literature. Instead, we introduce a polyadic or multiple simultaneous approaches that can consider risk sources. Second, the findings show that adolescents' perceptions of consumer vulnerability are anchored within their consumption subcultures. This study introduces the concept that young consumers experience vulnerability in multiple ways, including imposed by adults or by adolescents deliberately engaging in risky behaviors. Third, this research provides ethics policy-makers and scholars with the conceptual framework of adolescent-centric vulnerability, which can help them to develop actions based on both imposed and deliberate sources of vulnerability from the perception of the adolescent.

Keywords Adolescent vulnerability · Invulnerability · Imposed and deliberate sources of vulnerability · Adolescent consumption subculture · ACV framework

Marketing researchers have long assumed that adolescents, compared to adults, may be at higher risk of experiencing consumer vulnerability, but do adolescents see themselves in that way? Considering that adolescents' brains are still developing (Pechmann et al. 2005) and that they also have limited consumer experience (Batat 2014), it is not surprising that consumer researchers tend to treat them as one vulnerable population (e.g., Cook 2005). Researchers further take a monolithic approach by studying only one source of vulnerability at a time. Yet significant works (e.g., Batat

2015; Mason et al. 2013; Tanner et al. 1991) indicate that multiple vulnerabilities occur simultaneously in clusters; attempting to influence one ignores the influence of others. This research attempts to address this shortcoming by taking a polyadic view—in other words, both a multidimensional and multi-risk view.

The tendency to incorrectly assume that outcomes associated with a particular vulnerability are equally catastrophic in all situations (Mason et al. 2013) has also hindered research on the topic. Assuming that a risky behavior has catastrophic outcomes (e.g., teen pregnancy always ruins a teen's life) may not reflect the perspective of adolescents, based on their own observations or experience (e.g., a teen parent supported by her family and school might still accomplish her life goals) or diverse socioeconomic situations (e.g., Lin and Pantano 2015).

Scholars have called for understanding vulnerability from the consumer's perspective (Baker et al. 2005) precisely because vulnerability varies across consumers. This study represents a first attempt to capture adolescent consumers' viewpoints from a youth subculture perspective. The

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resulting adolescent-centric vulnerability (ACV) framework offers three novel aspects not considered in the Baker et al. (2005) model: (1) vulnerability considered from the individual's perspective requires recognizing multiple potential risk sources; (2) the framework underscores the importance of an emic perspective that embeds consumer vulnerability within a specific (adolescent) subculture; and (3) the framework distinguishes between imposed vulnerability and deliberate vulnerability, or risky behaviors that adolescents adopt to grow up, learn, or transgress adult rules. Following a review of the consumer vulnerability and adolescent subculture literature, we present a quasi-ethnographic study of adolescents and develop the ACV conceptual framework. We conclude with a discussion of the ethical implications of the ACV.

Consumer Vulnerability

Consumer vulnerability has been defined in various ways across disciplines without achieving any consensus, due both to its complexity and the researcher's perspective. Researchers have distinguished between vulnerability and risk by showing that vulnerability is considered an outcome of the actual exposure to risk, or the "objective probability that security will be lost" (Baker 2009, p. 118). The most thorough examination of vulnerability in consumer research to date defined vulnerability as "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, p. 134). The related model illustrates consumer vulnerability as a flexible concept that depends on external factors (e.g., marketers) and internal factors (e.g., a consumer's mood), as well as elements such as a consumer's age, race and ethnicity, income, and education that can reflect interaction between internal and external factors (e.g., marketers exploiting age-related vulnerabilities).

Vulnerability is multidimensional and context-specific, and does not have to be enduring (Baker et al. 2005). Indeed, most researchers agree that for most consumers, vulnerability is typically situational and temporary because they ultimately develop coping mechanisms to deal with their circumstances or external factors change and eliminate the risk. At the other end of the spectrum are individuals with enduring vulnerability, such as those with permanent cognitive impairments.

Shultz and Holbrook (2009) expanded the concept of vulnerability by adopting a macro perspective. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) definition of cultural versus economic capital, they defined two consumer characteristics related to vulnerability: (1) knowledge and beneficial means-ends relationships (similar to cultural capital); and (2) access to beneficial means (similar to economic capital). They conclude

that consumer vulnerability is flexible and depends on time, resources, and a shift in abilities or other "circumstances that might affect a person's knowledge of beneficial means-ends relationships and/or access to beneficial means" (Shultz and Holbrook 2009, p. 125). Thus, vulnerability is shaped by the norms and codes of the cultural setting in which it is embedded, and is perceived in a reflexive and subjective way by the individual as a feeling related to powerlessness and fear of a potential loss due to risk. All people—skilled, healthy, or rich—experience vulnerability at one time or another (Canhoto and Dibb 2016). Although recent works on disadvantaged consumers (e.g., Garrett and Toumanoff 2010) and children as vulnerable consumers (Spotswood and Nairn 2016) have contributed to the clarification of the concept, little research has considered adolescents, especially their perceptions of vulnerability within their consumption subcultures. As a consequence, a significant gap exists in the literature, hindering the development of effective ethics frameworks with respect to the treatment of adolescents.

Further, the adolescent subculture perspective introduced here contrasts with the paternalistic view, which equates vulnerability and risk. As Baker (2009, p. 116) stated, "equating vulnerability to demographic groups is fundamentally flawed." That approach only serves to marginalize groups and smacks of a paternalistic view (Mason et al. 2013). This study represents an attempt, through an ethnography of consumer vulnerability in an adolescent's consumption subculture, to address these gaps.

Vulnerability Created by an Adolescent's Consumption Subculture

Taking a monolithic perspective (one risk at a time), many researchers have examined adolescent behaviors and vulnerability in different consumption areas. They include alcohol use and driving (Pechmann et al. 2005), sexting (Soster and Drenten 2011), obesity (Grier and Davis 2013), smoking and alcohol (Zhao and Pechmann 2007), sexual activity (Moore et al. 2002), video games and Internet addiction (Kuss and Griffiths 2012), drugs (Carpenter and Pechmann 2011), and advertising influence (Martin et al. 1999). None of these works, however, have explored how adolescents perceive consumer vulnerability or embedded it within their consumption subcultures. As Mason et al. (2013) suggested, future research on the risky behaviors of youths should shift the focus away from a paternalistic perspective to an adolescent perspective shaped by the norms of the youths' consumption subcultures.

According to Clarke et al. (1976), the creation of an adolescent subculture is a response to resolve conflicts with the dominant parent or adult culture from which youth subcultures emerge. Based on Bourdieu's (1984) cultural

capital, Thornton defines a youth subculture as “a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (1997, p. 201). As members of a subculture, adolescents adapt to fit in with its norms and behaviors, embracing the hierarchies, perceptions, and definitions that exist within it. Adolescents embedded in an adolescent subculture may attempt to resolve conflicts using tools from their dominant adult cultures (e.g., Cohen 1997; Thornton 1997), which can initiate adolescents' vulnerabilities since they may then engage in unsafe behaviors, such as smoking in order to fit in.

Drawing on these works, we define an adolescent consumption subculture as a set of social rites that reinforce the collective, social, and personal identity of adolescents who ascribe to them. Adhering to the rites, for example, by completing middle school, getting a driver's license, or joining different types of clubs, defines the adolescents as a group instead of an array of individuals. Adolescents also familiarize themselves with consumption objects and reinterpret them from their perspective into idiosyncratic styles recognized by others. The objects, such as clothing worn in a particular manner, express collectivity and become embodied in rituals of consumption experiences, relationships, movements, and events.

Viewing adolescents as part of a consumption subculture describes their behaviors as a collective response to dominant norms; “youth subcultures are based on rituals that resist the values inherent in the dominant culture” (Maira 1999, p. 34). This resistance to the dominant adult/parent culture can provoke vulnerability. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the areas and the behaviors associated with the vulnerable behavior of adolescents within their own consumption subcultures—but to explore it from their own perspective.

The monolithic, paternalistic approach limits our understanding of adolescent vulnerability (Mason et al. 2013), and in turn, the ability of marketers, scholars, and policy-makers to address it. In contrast, the subculture perspective allows this research to move past the monolithic limitation and results in the identification of two types of vulnerability: (1) vulnerability imposed by adults via social institutions

and roles; versus (2) deliberate vulnerability, which occurs when adolescents choose to engage in risky activities.

Methodology

We conducted a quasi-ethnographic study of adolescents and their consumer vulnerability since it is rather difficult to directly enter the world of adolescents to understand their experiences in their natural settings. Quasi-ethnography refers to a range of techniques that are approximate to ethnography and enable the researcher to get involved in the field and gain trust among participants when participant observation is inappropriate or not possible (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott 2003). Like an ethnography, a quasi-ethnography utilizes immersive and longitudinal methods for working *with*, rather than *on*, people; and for discovering meaning *in*, rather than imposing meaning *on*, their behavior (Eckert 1988). Likewise, a quasi-ethnography study allowed us to uncover various consumption vulnerability dimensions imbued with tacit social meaning. We did this by looking at the day-to-day consumption practices of adolescents, which provided us with a rich, in-depth look at their vulnerabilities from their perspective.

Sample

Our study was conducted in a French middle school. The school was selected because of its diverse population. A sample that reflects the population of the school was recruited based on the three criteria in Table 1: (1) socioeconomic status (SES) (high, working-class, and low SES); (2) rural or urban status; and (3) family structure (nuclear, single-parent, or blended), a characteristic that can affect vulnerability (Batat 2015): children in single-parent and blended families are perceived as most vulnerable. The school organized an opening session at school to inform adolescents about the study and introduced the researcher who gave a short talk about the purpose of the research and the desire to learn more about youth consumption practices. Then, interested adolescents were asked to fill out a form explaining why they wanted to participate in the study. The

Table 1 Sample overview

Group	Geographical area	SES defined by parents' professional status	Family structure
20 Adolescents	10 Adolescents from rural areas	3 Adolescents from high SES	1 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended
		4 Adolescents from middle SES	2 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended
		3 adolescents from low SES	1 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended
	10 Adolescents from urban areas	3 Adolescents from high SES	1 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended
		4 Adolescents from middle SES	2 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended
		3 Adolescents from low SES	1 Nuclear, 1 single-parent, and 1 blended

researcher provided statements with a clear indication of which box they needed to tick for participation (e.g., “I’m interested in knowing more about my consumption”; “It’s during my free time, and I have nothing else to do”; “My friend is participating”). The final selection, completed by the researcher and the school, included only adolescents who were motivated by the topic since such motivation facilitates and helps maintain strong research engagement (Clark 2010).

The researcher met with participants informally four times over 2 weeks for 1 h per meeting to speak with them about different subjects: their lives, their studies, their hobbies, etc. Initially, there were two groups of five adolescents; initial observations led the researcher to seek additional participants through a purposive snowball sampling to form the final sample. In so doing, differences among adolescents related to their experiences of vulnerability could be addressed. In total, a sample of 20 (10 boys and 10 girls) participated (see Table 2). Informed consent was obtained from each participant and their parent(s).

Various ethical considerations guided our research with adolescents. First, ethical procedures were established by the school and parents in collaboration with the researcher. These guidelines encompassed a code of conduct for the researcher according to three principles: respecting adolescents’ dignity and treating them with regard; promoting the well-being of adolescents by listening to their difficulties; and making sure of justice and balance in our interactions

with adolescents. Adolescents and their parents were offered an opportunity to view a presentation of the study’s results and were given coupons as incentives for participating. Participants could exit the study at any time or skip any individual element. In addition, the school was interested in understanding their students’ consumption habits, so it could develop educational programs based on the final recommendations proposed by the researcher whose role as a responsible adult interacting with children could lead her to immediately inform and warn the school and parents about potential risky practices emerging in the discourse of the participants. Also, videos were deleted by the researcher after analysis to protect participants’ rights.

Second, the researcher followed international UNICEF guidelines when engaging in different consumption activities with adolescents, such as going to McDonald’s, shopping, or simply hanging out. In this case, the researcher followed a code of conduct based on Ethical Research with Children guidelines developed by UNICEF in 2013 and adapted to our field activities, e.g., no purchase of alcoholic beverages, keep an eye on the interactions among adolescents to avoid bullying or aggressive/inappropriate behaviors, etc.

Data Collection

The data collection included observation, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations and followed three phases: socialization, collaboration, and auto-confrontation phases (Batat 2014). Table 3 summarizes the data collection process for each phase.

Socialization Phase

The *socialization* phase extended over 3 months and included a 1-h session (at school or after) twice a week, during which the researcher immersed herself in the adolescent’s consumption subculture by informally interviewing or talking to him or her as often as possible and engaging in activities the participant liked to do (e.g., drawing, writing poems, listening to music). During the socialization phase, the participants completed a form about their parents’ job(s), where they live, and the composition of their families. As the researcher became involved, the interviewing became more systematic and more natural to conduct. The participants’ behaviors and reactions were video-recorded to capture any emotional nuances that might not be obvious on transcripts. A small camera was discreetly placed in the corner of the room. Initially, a student might feel skeptical about being filmed, so the camera was turned off. However, once the student felt comfortable and seemed to forget about the existence of the camera, it was then switched on.

Participants formed their own daily workgroups to minimize the anxiety related to participating in the study. The

Table 2 Sample detail

Participants	Age	Gender	SES	Family structure	Location
Participant 1	11	Male	High	Nuclear	Urban
Participant 2	12	Female	Middle	Single-parent	Rural
Participant 3	13	Male	Low	Single-parent	Urban
Participant 4	14	Female	High	Nuclear	Rural
Participant 5	15	Male	Middle	Blended	Urban
Participant 6	11	Female	Low	Blended	Rural
Participant 7	12	Male	High	Blended	Urban
Participant 8	13	Female	Middle	Nuclear	Rural
Participant 9	14	Male	Low	Nuclear	Urban
Participant 10	15	Female	High	Single-parent	Rural
Participant 11	11	Male	Middle	Single-parent	Urban
Participant 12	12	Female	Low	Nuclear	Rural
Participant 13	13	Male	High	Single-parent	Urban
Participant 14	14	Female	Middle	Nuclear	Rural
Participant 15	15	Male	Low	Blended	Urban
Participant 16	11	Female	High	Blended	Rural
Participant 17	12	Male	Middle	Nuclear	Urban
Participant 18	13	Female	Low	Single-parent	Rural
Participant 19	14	Male	Middle	Nuclear	Urban
Participant 20	15	Female	Middle	Blended	Rural

Table 3 Data collection

Stages	Methods	Tools	Individuals involved	Place
Socialization	Participant and non-participant observation	Field notes Diary for personal notes Videography (filming)	Groups, sub-groups, and individual	School during free workshop sessions
Collaboration	Participatory action research. Adolescents involved as partners to assist the researcher in the data collection process	Formal and informal conversation, interview, drawings, photographs, filming, posts	Individual and in sub-groups	School during free workshop sessions and outside of school
Auto-confrontation	Interactive and comprehensive empathetic interviewing	Formal and informal interviews, video and image display	Individual	School during free workshop sessions

researcher used these creative and varied sessions to socialize with the participants and give them activities to complete (e.g., drawing their favorite brands and consumption items, brainstorming, playing games). For example, to learn more about their consumption sphere and to create a friendly atmosphere among participants, adolescents were given disposable cameras to take pictures of the consumption objects they like and asked to comment on them.

Also, the role of the researcher was as a detached observer. In this role, she observed adolescents when they were involved in mundane consumption practices, such as ordering hamburgers but not getting access to alcoholic beverages because of the policy of the restaurant. Once participants trusted the researcher, they invited her to join in posting pictures and comments on Facebook, a sign of friendship and began sharing intimate details of their lives with her and expressing anticipation for upcoming sessions. Indeed, the friendship was such that ending the data collection phase was painful, both for the researcher and the participants. Because ending the data collection phase might generate vulnerability for the researcher (Law 2016) and participants, the process of termination was gradual, and the researcher's connection with the school and participants was maintained through formal forms of interaction (e.g., participating in workshops and collaborating with teachers to design education programs).

Collaboration Phase

In the *collaboration* phase, we applied the principles of Participatory Action Research (Ozanne and Saaticioglu 2008), which advocates a local and contextualized understanding of a phenomenon (i.e., adolescent consumer vulnerability) developed in collaboration with participants through individual and group interviews. The adolescents' roles transform from passive into involved participants by choosing topics they felt were important to discuss, suggesting activities and trips, etc.

Interviews began by asking participants to recall and describe a recent consumption experience. After conducting the first interviews and workshops, the data showed differences between older and younger adolescents in terms of their consumption experiences and vulnerabilities (e.g., the way they talk about their vulnerabilities, the consumption domains they mentioned). Therefore, we split our sample into two distinct groups: younger adolescents aged 11–13 years old; and older adolescents aged 14–15. Once they felt comfortable discussing the topic of consumption, we delved more deeply into peer-group influence, parenting styles, the use of the Internet within their consumption activities, experiences with salespeople, consumption limits and fears, impulsive behaviors, and other specifics of consumption vulnerability. Consistent with an ongoing process of data analysis, additions and modifications to the initial interview questions were made throughout the process.

Auto-confrontation Phase

The data collection in the *auto-confrontation* phase was conducted via individual meetings to help the adolescents feel comfortable. All participants were asked to comment on the preliminary results, which included the following: (1) themes highlighting vulnerable behaviors and (2) videos displaying interviews in which adolescents describe their own and others' vulnerabilities (individuals within the group). In these interviews, the researcher showed videos of the adolescents talking about their consumption practices, just having fun, searching for shopping information online, or hanging out. Participants were asked to express their thinking and feeling about the consumption situation in groups or their own interviews. Adolescents were readily able to describe someone whom they felt to be a vulnerable consumer. This ease of identification suggests that there was some sort of normative description, at least in their minds, of what it means to be a vulnerable consumer. To create empathy, the researcher expressed her personal consumption vulnerabilities. Adolescents also evaluated their own vulnerabilities

and limits as consumers, using their descriptions of other vulnerable consumers as a frame of reference.

Analysis

The data included over 400 pages of interviews, field notes, and observations, and videos. We applied different forms of analysis: hermeneutical, grounded theory methods, and ethnographic conventions to define the themes that emerged from the various sources of qualitative data. To capture the meanings of consumption practices embedded within the adolescent consumption culture, a hermeneutical approach (Thompson 1997) enabled conducting an intra-textual analysis of each filmed interview to define categories linked with the definition of consumer vulnerability or invulnerability, of each adolescent in the group.

After an open coding process (Strauss and Corbin 1990), we described domains and behaviors associated with a state of vulnerability by interpreting participants' perceptions of their own consumption incapacities and the dimensions related to consumer vulnerability. Following Kutsche's (1998) mapping model, we defined adolescent consumption subculture markers based on observations and exchanges with our participants. Meanings and the drivers of the adolescent consumer in/vulnerability were

structured within the context, following Wolcott's (1994) analysis method, which follows an iterative process of interpreting going back and forth from field to theory and vice versa. Based on Wolcott's ethnographic conventions, we analyzed material generated by adolescents by constantly moving among interviews, videos, transcripts, field notes, and theory to identify recurring themes. Then, we structured the meanings and drivers of the adolescent consumer in/vulnerability in the context.

Thematic Findings

The ACV framework emerged from the data and articulates the meanings, drivers, and outcomes of consumer vulnerability from an adolescent perspective (see Fig. 1). This organizing framework extends Baker et al.'s (2005) consumer vulnerability model to reflect consumer vulnerability as an experience that is embedded and shaped by a particular adolescent consumption subculture rather than by a single event or source of vulnerability. The findings are explored using themes identified in the data with textual excerpts offered below to illuminate the emergent themes.

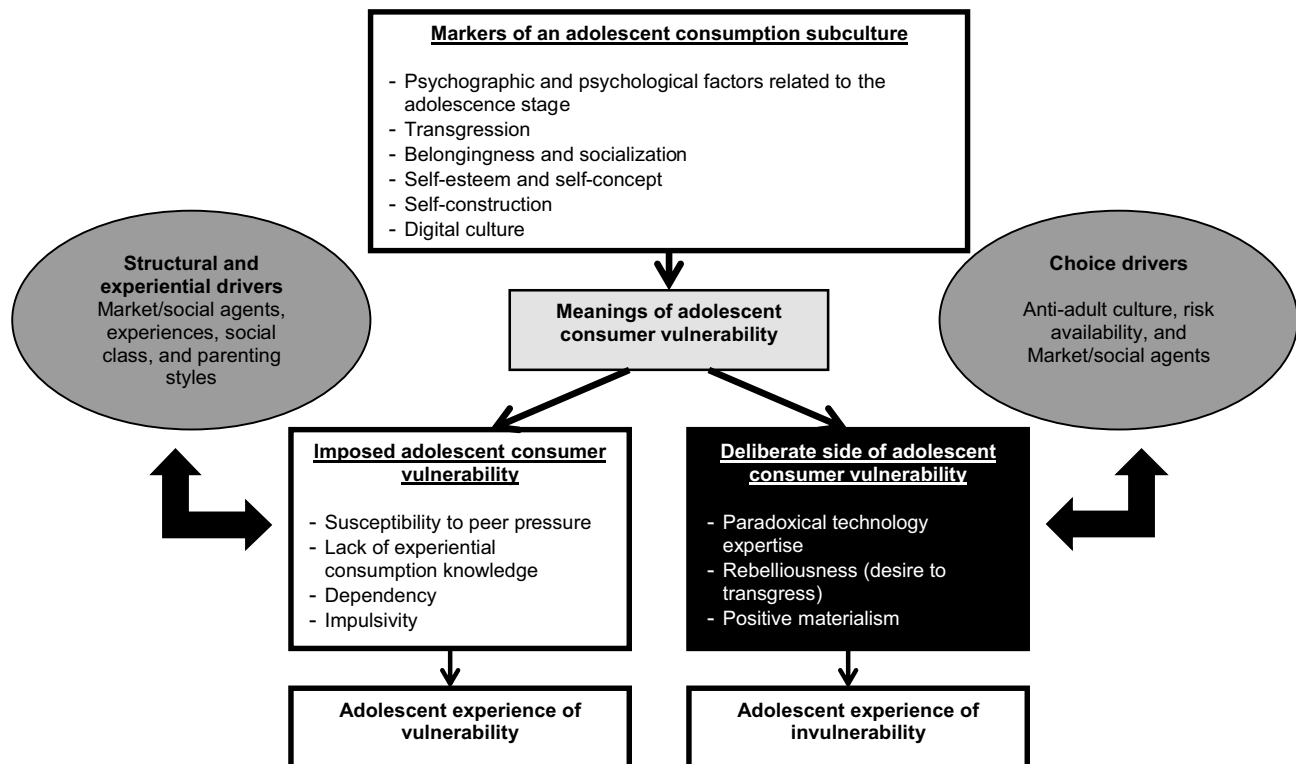


Fig. 1 Adolescent-centric vulnerability (ACV) framework

The Adolescent-Centric Vulnerability (ACV) Framework

The ACV framework describes consumer vulnerability as a social construction embedded in an adolescent's consumption subculture. This approach helps us understand the role vulnerability plays when adolescents move to adulthood and as a response to conflicts with adult norms. What adults view as vulnerability might not be experienced as such by adolescents, particularly when a risk is taken on deliberately, sometimes as a trade-off to avoid an imposed vulnerability. For example, an adolescent may choose to smoke cigarettes in order to integrate a peer group where this practice is valued as a protection against bullying (Batat 2015). Further, the framework relates vulnerability to adolescents' stages of socialization as consumers. These results show that the meanings of adolescent consumer vulnerability are generated in a context marked by adolescent consumption subculture characteristics such as psychographic and psychological factors related to the stage of adolescence, transgression, belongingness and socialization, self-esteem and self-concept, self-construction, and digital communities.

Imposed Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Imposed adolescent consumer vulnerability refers to what adolescents define as a vulnerable state 'forced' upon them by others or by circumstances. According to our participants, imposed adolescent vulnerability encompasses four related drivers, peer-group pressure, a lack of experiential consumption knowledge, dependency, and impulsivity.

Peer-Group Pressure Adolescents' susceptibility to peer influence is significant (e.g., Roedder-John 1999). We observe peer-group pressure as a determining factor for adolescent decision making, inducing feelings of vulnerability in the young adolescents when they are 'forced' to follow cultural group codes imposed by their peers (Mason et al. 2013):

"In my group, we do all purchase the same brands, of course, they are a bit expensive to me, but it's the rule, and we can't change it ... I feel forced to follow what they do and even if I'm against the logic of following all that the others do ..." (Female, 14, low SES)

As in other studies (Batat 2008; Mason et al. 2013; Batat 2014), peer groups play a dual role. Among older adolescents (13–15), peer groups are a powerful socialization agent that can enhance their self-confidence when they are dealing with adults (Tomé et al. 2012). At the same time, the findings show that peer groups are seen as a source of pressure as a result of subcultural norms adolescents feel "forced" to follow or face being marginalized by their peers.

The results show that, as younger participants (ages 11–13) approach adolescence, they become uncertain about the self and feel a need to belong; finding one's unique identity as a person becomes significant. Thus, conformity to peer pressure is one of the hallmarks of younger adolescents who struggle to build their own unique identities while cohering to a peer group's consumption norms and cultural codes (Tarrant 2002):

Sometimes I do try out bad things when I'm with my buddies.... I mean thing that parents should not know about (laughs)... you know we do smoke cigarettes or cannabis (Male, age 12, middle SES)

As the quote indicates, adolescent risk-taking behaviors (e.g., consuming cannabis) arise in peer-group settings. While prior research (e.g., McCoy et al. 2017) found that adolescent males are more eager to engage in risky behaviors, our results show that female adolescents are also susceptible to peer-group pressure and are eager to adopt risky behaviors, thus experiencing vulnerability.

In contrast to younger adolescents who reported feeling vulnerable and unable to cope with peer-group pressure, some older adolescents demonstrate an ability to live with it and remain able to make independent judgments *if* they are well informed. This duality was best expressed by one participant:

I can say that my friends influence me a lot, and sometimes I follow their advice even if I'm not convinced, but at the same time I can make my own decision if I know the products or the brand. (Female, 15, low SES)

Thus, as they get older, many adolescents learn how to navigate peer pressure in a consumption context; yet, a lack of experiential knowledge of consumption can still lead to situations that create vulnerability (Batat 2015).

Lack of Consumption Experiential Knowledge The findings indicate a relationship between adolescents' vulnerability and their limited knowledge due to their lack of consumption experiences. Both younger and older adolescents reported feeling that they lacked sufficient experience in many domains. While any consumer unfamiliar with a particular product category or context may experience feelings of vulnerability, in adolescence, this can happen even when they thought they did everything well. For example, when asked, "Do you feel/think you are a vulnerable consumer?" One response was:

Honestly, I can't answer the question whether I'm skilled or vulnerable because I'm too young and I don't have enough consumption experiences like my parents. However, I can say that I'm not that skilled and especially if you talk about my experience I know

nothing about bills, banks, and stuff like that. When I see my parents dealing with this kind of stuff, I'm really impressed and afraid of becoming an adult and managing a house budget or my own salary ... I think that we can get empowered through our past experiences, even the worst. (Female, 13, high SES)

This adolescent speaks of a fear of being prepared for adult decision making, which is consistent with Perales-Blum et al.'s (2014) research on the "fear of growing-up" syndrome. But sometimes, adolescents reported feeling vulnerable when they were surprised by a purchasing outcome:

Like the day I found a good deal, I was looking for shoes, my favorite luxury brand Tod's. They are expensive, but I found them at a very attractive price. When I got them delivered, it was a counterfeit product from China, I was so sad... I mean, what was painful for me is that I did not have a clue about the way I'm supposed to deal with it and what to do next to get my money back and of course I tried to contact the website but it was useless, and I was incapable of handling it by myself (Female, 15, middle SES)

This adolescent felt vulnerable, not so much because she got scammed, but because she did not know how to deal with the situation and, as a result, she felt powerless. The experiential consumption knowledge acquired and developed by adolescents is often limited to adolescent consumption fields, a limitation they recognize. Of course, in some instances, they have to learn by doing (Farber and Bishop 2018): they may be "forced" to engage in consumption experiences despite their vulnerability and, as both participants mentioned, to learn from bad experiences. In these instances, dependency can come into play.

Dependency One hallmark adolescents associate with being a vulnerable consumer is their dependency on friends and family, especially when they are not familiar with the consumption field. They also indicate that, as young consumers, they lack the ability or confidence to make decisions on their own (Batat 2015). Thus, younger adolescents' purchase decisions are often dependent on others' advice (e.g., family, peers, salespeople). Our findings show, though, that we can distinguish two groups of adolescents who perceive themselves as more or less vulnerable consumers depending on their knowledge of the consumption field. Older adolescents with experiential knowledge in familiar consumption domains feel more independent and less vulnerable within the marketplace:

I'm very confident when I purchase videogames and stuff like that because I know everything about games and my friends know that. I feel good when it's my thing; otherwise, I need to ask for advice because I

don't feel comfortable, and I'm always afraid of getting ripped off. (Male, 14, middle SES)

In contrast, younger adolescents view themselves as vulnerable consumers much of the time and may feel more dependent on others' advice in the marketplace, although they can make small purchases, such as candy, with confidence. Younger adolescents report that these purchases neither involve high skill nor require advice from others.

Younger adolescents reported a strong lack of self-confidence that makes them easily influenced by external factors such as media, family, market actors, and peers (Tomé et al. 2012). Furthermore, younger adolescents try to meet the expectations set by their friends and family. Dealing with these challenges might easily cause them to lose self-confidence, increasing their dependency on others' opinions and, consequently, their consumer vulnerability within the marketplace. Younger adolescents found it difficult to make independent decisions since what is perceived to be stylish or appropriate is often determined by others (Roedder-John 1999). This dependency, or the need to know what others think, was perceived as difficult to experience by both younger and older adolescents:

I can say that it is really tough to decide by myself when it comes to purchasing items, I don't know why, but I need assistance from my friends or even advice from my parents, it's very important what my buddies think about the product. It's also good to know that my friends like the product. My parents, it's more to be sure of the deal and the right price...well, at the end of the day, the decision to purchase something is very complicated to make and makes me feel bad and angry. (Female, 12, low SES)

This quote highlights the idea that vulnerability, for these young people, is related to feeling dependent upon others to make decisions. Asking for advice from their parents or peers might be considered a solution to this weakness, but not all adolescents have access to these two valuable sources of information (Kang'ethe and Makuyan 2014) or do not have a close and supportive relationship with their parents. For example, as one participant noted:

Some kids feel bad because they do not have parents they can rely on, like a friend of mine. He lost his father and his mother is an alcoholic; you know, not that easy. (Male, 13, high SES)

Moreover, our participants reported that depending on one's parents is not perceived as part of their learning processes and consumption socialization; rather, the participants referred to depending on their parents as a weakness, especially if they did not have friends to ask or preferred to avoid asking their parents due to family tensions that might be

generated. In fact, according to our participants, consulting one's parents reminds them that they are children who need a responsible adult to help them manage their daily lives:

Asking my parents or other people for advice about shopping and consumption or even other topics is something that I hate beyond all. It makes me feel like I'm not able to make decisions by myself, and sometimes I do not agree with my parent's advice, which can end up in tension; I hate that. (Female, 15, high SES)

The findings of this study show that both younger and older adolescents' perceived incapacity to make independent and confident decisions has a direct consequence on how they deal with the marketplace and, especially, with salespeople. Both younger and older adolescents reported feeling vulnerable because they felt that they were incapable of resisting adult salespeople who, intentionally or unintentionally, placed adolescents into the role of child, thus reminding them that they are still immature, incapable of making decisions, and reducing their self-esteem and self-confidence. Yet, as adolescents begin to make many more independent decisions, they can feel unsure about their ability to make the right decision, which will lead them to experience vulnerability. These situations can be related to two factors: (1) individual characteristics (personal feelings and doubts); and (2) the environment/people, which includes social interactions that make adolescents feel vulnerable because of the lack of self-confidence in making independent decisions when dealing with adults as well as being satisfied and happy with their decisions (Batat 2015; Mason et al. 2013):

I don't feel comfortable when dealing with salespeople particularly when I'm alone, it's very difficult to resist their pressure ... Sometimes, I can't resist salespeople's pressure, so I purchase the item and then when I get back home I'm always very angry against myself because I did not control the situation and I was vulnerable ... it's not funny at all. (Male, 15, middle SES)

Interactions with salespeople remain the most important vulnerable consumption experience mentioned by both older and younger adolescents. To rebalance their perceived lack of power, both younger and older adolescents described information gathering through personal and online resources (Batat 2008). In addition, they also reported seeking support from their peers by shopping in groups:

The thing that works very well is that I need to gather information from different sources and then I ask my friends to go with me. I guess it would be fine not to be bothered by salespeople. (Female, 12, high SES)

Further, inexperienced adolescents may lack self-confidence to the point at which they will not follow their better

judgment when faced with either strong opposing opinions from adults. This perceived intimidation and awkwardness when dealing with adults (when they are alone) may occur even when adolescents consider themselves to be true "product experts" who possess high levels of cognitive knowledge and purchasing experience in a specific product category (Batat 2014):

... it does not make me feel good when I have to talk to adults or people in general ... I do not know why I feel so embarrassed, awkward, afraid, and ashamed when I have to ask for information about a product like a new video game, and yet I know everything related to video games, it's something weird. (Male, 11, low SES)

Impulsivity Participants' narratives indicate that younger adolescents attribute their vulnerability to impulsivity enhanced by their heightened susceptibility to self-consciousness (Pechmann et al. 2005). In contrast with younger children (those under 11) and adults, adolescents are more likely to experience self-consciousness and social anxieties (Keles et al. 2019) since they are focused on their physical appearance, their image, and the way in which others, especially their peers, perceive them (Pine et al. 2001). Both younger and older adolescents reported experiencing impulsivity when feeling self-conscious and embarrassed, which is important because adolescents report feeling self-conscious and embarrassed about two to three times more often than adults do (Larson and Richards 1994):

I know, I should not care about what others think of me or of my clothes; for sure you do not feel good, and I guess you feel like you are very low. I have to be strong, but I can't do it. ... I'm not confident and I have like low self-esteem of myself; that's why I need to purchase some items and brands you know just to be like my buddies in the group ... Yeah, if I can't be like them, this might make me feel embarrassed and very bad, you see how much this stuff is important for me, I just can't resist. I can buy everything my buddies consider as cool, I don't care about the money I spend. (Male, 12, middle SES)

In summary, our results reveal that imposed adolescent consumer vulnerability was identified within both younger and older adolescent groups. Their imposed vulnerability arises out of market actors such as salespeople, the power distance between adults and adolescents, and adolescents' need for belonging. This finding is consistent with prior research that focused on the relationship between adolescents and salespeople, as adolescents may feel forced to purchase items they do not need (Batat 2008). Imposed vulnerability, though, might be unintentional by market actors. Imposed vulnerability makes adolescents depend on peers

and on external factors when navigating the marketplace. Dependency, in this case, may enhance or leverage the weaknesses of adolescents and, thus, increase their feelings of vulnerability. Our results also indicate that factors such as age and experience, diminish a person's vulnerability, consistent with prior research (Baker 2009).

An adolescent's consumer vulnerability is not only related to the individual's characteristics, external conditions, perceived parenting styles, and the consumption context in which vulnerability has been experienced (c.f., Baker et al. 2005); it is also derived from the adolescent's quest for social status within the peer group. For adolescents, the priority is to socialize one's self within the group by following its norms and codes, although this situation might be confusing to the adolescent (Tarrant 2002). Therefore, the quest for social status is an essential factor that can lead adolescents to experience vulnerable situations, as we see with deliberate adolescent consumer vulnerability.

Deliberate Adolescent Consumer Vulnerability

Deliberate adolescent consumer vulnerability, what Pechmann and her colleagues (2005) call the dark side, refers to an adolescent's motivation to experience paradoxical, risky, or, from an adult perspective, socially undesirable situations. We use the term "deliberate" rather than "dark" to represent the adolescent perspective, rather than a paternalistic perspective. Based on our participants' discourses, we identified three forms of the deliberate side of adolescent consumer risk-taking defined from an adolescent-centric approach to understand their vulnerability: paradoxical technology usage, engaging in transgressive behaviors, and positive materialism.

Paradoxical Technology Usage Our results indicate that adolescents can develop risk-taking behaviors related to the paradoxical use of technology and the Internet. Many factors combine to enhance their vulnerability to online risk, under specific situations and with diverse outcomes. Our findings provide evidence about two significant factors: (1) paradoxical vulnerabilities related to the efficiency/inefficiency of technology and (2) paradoxical vulnerabilities associated with the dual feeling of freedom/enslavement of technology.

The efficiency/inefficiency construct reflects how technology can facilitate less effort or time spent on some activities, even as it can lead to more effort or time being spent on other activities (Mick and Fournier 1998). Our findings underscore this duality; moreover, vulnerability arises when adolescents feel unable to sort out the relevant information. Inefficiency in searching online information to do their homework can lead to poor outcomes as well as when shopping, generating doubts among adolescents (Keles et al. 2019):

The Internet is good and bad at the same time. Sometimes, it becomes really messy, you start searching for a book for your homework and then you end up spending the whole day without getting anything out of it ... it's very exhausting. (Male, 12, low SES)

Particularly shared among participants is the paradox of freedom/enslavement (Mick and Fournier 1998), or feelings of dependence and independence associated with the Internet, an refers to the idea that technology can facilitate fewer restrictions and greater independence, yet can simultaneously lead to greater dependence and more restrictions. Participants reported feeling powerful and invulnerable because they can live in both a real (family, school, peers) and a virtual space (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) at the same time; their dependence is illustrated in that they cannot imagine themselves living without online connections and social media:

"We are a lucky generation because of the Internet. We can gain a lot of time when working, and using this time to socialize, to go out and to play, of course. If I have homework to do, the first thing I think about is to check out information online and sometimes I can find the solution to my homework so I don't need to prepare the work but just print it out and give it to my teacher ... life and work are very cool with Internet thanks God and obviously scientists! However, if I can't get access to Internet during the exam in the classroom, it's very hard to find a solution. I feel that the Internet is an integral part of my life and I can't live without it ... but at the same time we have mixed feelings like you can't really do anything without Internet so you are kind of dependent and strongly attached to WIFI. You ask for it every time when you travel because without it you feel that you can't really do your work or connect with your friends on Facebook ... but then you can have a lot of freedom, especially when it comes to sexuality talk, we feel free to ask any question online because people do not see us." (Male, 12, middle SES)

This quote highlights the paradoxical behaviors of technology use; adolescents feel vulnerable because of dependency and invulnerable because of efficiency and free exchange with others. The freedom/enslavement paradoxical use of technology is particularly acute when adolescents participate in virtual communities to explore taboo topics: an important activity in the development of their identity. Such virtual communities are, therefore, potentially strong socialization agents (Boulianne 2015). The results show that adolescents claimed that these communities give them more freedom and control in their life

by providing answers about taboo topics, such as sexuality or drugs, without requiring direct adult interaction:

Some of the topics are really very embracing, such as sexuality and girlfriends, I prefer searching for answers on the Internet, and it's very convenient. (Male, 14, low SES)

I do trust my friends on Facebook, even if I do not know them and I have never seen them, they are like a second family, and they always give me awesome tricks and advice, like for makeup or even diet and dating. (Female, 12, high SES)

I'm part of a video game community online and it's really very cool. Not only can we play (the videogames), but also they can tell me about their dates with girls, it's a good way to learn about girls and to flirt, isn't it! It's better than asking real friends or my cousins who are the same age, I feel kind of awkward, which is not the case when you do not know people online. (Male, 11, high SES)

Our findings show that these communities hold a strong prescriptive power, particularly among participants who are struggling to build their identity. Risky online communities contribute to isolating adolescents from their families and therefore from society, a negative outcome (Boulianne 2015); yet our adolescents stated that online communities such as Proana (an online community focusing on extreme diet and anorexia) allow them to feel like they are part of a big family with the same interests, and where they can meet people who can understand and comfort them without making judgments:

I do feel good when I chat with my friends online; they know how to make me feel good because they understand that I need to reach a certain weight, which my parents cannot really get and keep telling me you should eat! I do not need this kind of comment you know. So I try to stay away from my parents and stick to my friends on Facebook to get tips about diet and body fat. (Female, 13, low SES)

I like using websites or blogs to socialize; you talk with people online who have the same interest as you and even you can block out unwanted people or choose your friends according to their profile. One day, I started a diet when I was chatting with a girl on her blog; she was giving advice regarding the diet and the way we should do it. In her webpage, she shows her picture before and after her magical diet ... I was convinced and I said to myself why not test this diet and keeping in touch with the girl. Of course, it's very important to share this with the people online rather than talking with our parents, they don't understand.

When I feel sad, I prefer talking with people online who are in the same state of mind because they don't know me and they don't judge me. (Female, 15, high SES)

These quotes are examples of how adolescents can act on information and engage in potentially risky behavior (i.e., extreme dieting) without recognizing their vulnerability. Rather, they are acting on information in order to achieve what they believe to be socially desirable outcomes tied to their (forming) identity (Shapiro and Margolin 2014). Thus, adolescents may be uniquely bound to the paradoxical vulnerabilities of technology and online communities, particularly in the form of dependence/independence.

Engaging in Transgressive Behaviors When adolescents knowingly engage in risky behaviors, the objective is to transgress adults' rules. Thus, adolescents do not consider themselves vulnerable since they discount the risk. Risk is often characterized as having two dimensions: the probability of a negative outcome and the severity of that outcome (e.g., Rogers and Prentice-Dunn 1997). When discounting risk, the focus appears to be on the severity, particularly since they have not observed or experienced the negative consequences. Consequently, social learning (Bandura 1989) does not reinforce the risk as presented by their parents:

I used to surf porn websites when I'm with my friends, it's funny ... I also do soft drugs sometimes and I don't think that I'm in danger or my health is in danger ... my parents said this but I don't think so, it's a bit exaggerated. (Male, 15, middle SES)

Other risky (as defined from an adult perspective) behaviors were seen as a means of achieving implied standards and not merely ends in themselves. Smoking, for example, was seen as a low-risk behavior and the easiest way to appear grown-up, show independence, receive recognition, and have fun. To reach these objectives, both younger and older adolescents might try out risky or banned behaviors:

It's very fun and cool to be with friends and especially when we are trying out something different and original. You know, we are young and we are interested in experimenting with new stuff and of course what is banned and we're not supposed to be doing it. Occasionally, when we are in our group, we surf online porno websites, I know that we should not be doing it but it's very funny ... and you know it's just the way it is in my group so no big deal ... we all smoke when we are together. (Female, 14, high SES)

As this quote shows, what is considered as risky behaviors from an adult perspective is not perceived as a

vulnerable situation from an adolescent-centric approach (c.f. Batat 2015). Our results underscore that behaviors that are considered to be risky by adults and researchers can appear to adolescents as fun, cool, ways to be grown-up, to socialize, and to be recognized by their peers.

Positive Materialism The findings showed a strong materialistic orientation among adolescents in our sample. We know that material possessions provide a way to cope with one's insecurity, class anxiety, and feelings of low self-esteem (e.g., Solberg et al. 2004). Focusing on young consumers, Moschis and Churchill (1978, p. 607) define materialism as "orientations emphasizing possessions and money for personal happiness and social progress." We observed such outcomes in this research; however, materialism through accumulating consumption items is viewed by adolescents, particularly older adolescents (ages 13–15), as a way to reinforce one's consumption skills, and thus to become an expert within the group. The status of *expert* is valuable and allows adolescents to be both popular and recognized and to serve as a reference for their peers when they are searching for advice about consumption items:

I need to purchase too many things to feel good and impress my friends; I'm the only one in my group who has different kinds of digital items. Well, I have: Xbox, PS3, Game Boy (the last one of course), Wii, laptop, iPhone, iPod ... and I'm kind of proud of that. You know what, all my friends consider me as an expert and very in. I'm very popular in my school because I'm always the first one who will purchase the last digital product. For the iPhone, I was the first one in the whole school who bought it the first day it was launched in Paris, my friends were very impressed ... it's so cool. (Male, 13, middle SES)

As the quote shows, materialism is a strategy followed by some adolescents to gain expertise which facilitates their integration in the peer group. While prior works established adverse outcomes of materialism, such as lower levels of personal well-being among adolescents (e.g., Batat 2015; Gentina et al. 2018; Tang and Chen 2008), our findings show that adolescents view materialism as a mechanism to develop consumption knowledge and skills:

It's good to purchase new items every time, I can learn more about the product and I can see what the brand changed in its design. I do learn a lot even if I always end up having too many things and of course my parents do spend too much...the good thing now is that I know more than my friends who did not have all these products and I feel good about myself (Male, 15, high SES)

For these adolescents, materialism is viewed as a deliberate behavior that has positive outcomes. Since it allows them to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, adolescents reported the importance of possessions that convey their expert status and desirable image:

I don't feel like somebody forces me to buy stuff; let's say I'm a material girl as they said (laugh) but I'm fine with it... I'm not doing it to have friends but more for myself as I do love makeup and I want to be a makeup artist, so purchasing more and more makeup helps me to learn more about different brands and then I can advise friends, which is pretty cool (Female, 14, middle SES)

In summary, our findings show that deliberate adolescent consumer vulnerability reflects adolescent perceptions of invulnerability, where technology paradoxical usage, engaging in transgressive behaviors, and positive materialism are all deliberate choices intended to achieve desirable outcomes. Adolescents adopt these behaviors to achieve a particular objective (e.g., socialization, consumption expertise) within their groups. Although the deliberate side of consumer vulnerability (Pechmann et al. 2005) occurs among both older and younger adolescents, our results revealed it occurs more frequently among older participants. Older adolescents view themselves as less vulnerable and more confident consumers because they consider themselves knowledgeable, experienced within the marketplace, and thus more eager to experience the deliberate side of vulnerability. Our results show that deliberate adolescent vulnerability can be driven by adolescent consumption subculture markers such as an anti-adult culture, risk-taking, and socialization, as well as psychographic (e.g., age range) and psychological (e.g., self-esteem) factors.

Implications

Theoretical Insights

Baker et al. (2005), recognizing the need to avoid paternalism, were the first to call for a consumer view of vulnerability. Mason et al. (2013) added that research should consider multiple sources of vulnerability simultaneously. This research accomplishes both, contributing the first framework that operates from adolescent consumers' perspectives within that subculture, illuminating the central importance and the necessity of (in)vulnerability to the adolescent experience and the transition to adulthood. The framework offers seven key themes, classified into two categories: imposed (peer-group pressure, lack of experiential knowledge, dependency, and impulsivity) and deliberate (paradoxical technology usage, engaging in transgressive

behaviors, and positive materialism) risk-taking and feelings of (in)vulnerability.

Consumers classify risks according to two categories: risks they can live with and risks they should deal with (Baker 2009), a perspective that assumes imposed vulnerability and focuses on coping mechanisms. This study adds the distinction of the risks consumers want to take on and the risks they want to avoid, or deliberate vulnerability. Our findings suggest that adolescents deliberately take on risks due to perceptions of invulnerability created by subculture influences and their experiences. Their deliberate consumer vulnerability appears to be based on a personal identity that is tied to adolescent subculture markers, such as transgression, rebelliousness, defiance, risky behavior, self-concept, belonging, self-esteem, and cyberspace. Additionally, the findings suggest that at least some deliberate vulnerability may be necessary for the maturation of an adolescent.

Further, adolescents seek to reduce vulnerability by dealing with risks. For example, adolescents gather information online to address their feelings of vulnerability by reducing the risk of their making an uninformed and possibly less desirable choice. Luczak and Younkin (2012) propose that adolescents' Internet use comprises a socialization process that influences their consumption behaviors by influencing their attitudes, beliefs, and values. We observed such a socialization process, such as when our participants reported exploring taboo topics with members of online communities like Proana (groups promoting control of weight and eating disorder related to anorexia nervosa), which shaped the participants' attitudes and beliefs about dieting. Luczak and Younkin (2012) also suggest that the Internet could serve as a vehicle for developing consumption knowledge and skills; indeed, although the process is fraught with info-pollution and other deliberate realities, we observed participants using the Internet for these reasons. At the same time, by taking a subculture-based emic approach to understanding the polyadic view of (in)vulnerability experienced by seemingly disadvantaged consumers, these results not only provide a set of theoretical contributions that can inform future research, but they also provide a framework with ethical implications.

Ethical Implications

The development of the adolescent-centric vulnerability (ACV) framework in this study facilitates an understanding of the drivers, meanings, and outcomes of adolescent vulnerabilities within the marketplace. Important ethical implications have emerged from the results.

First, ethical implications from our research include the need for sales-process guidelines when dealing with young consumers. Given the power distance felt by adolescents when dealing with salespeople and other adults, retail salespeople should not just sell a product. Instead, they should

be trained and monitored, for example, by educators specializing in youth protection, to avoid overwhelming adolescent consumers and provide them with guidance on how to make good decisions. These guidelines would not only contribute to the consumer's well-being but are also likely to support trust and long-term relationships (Berry 1993). In line with the findings of Fullerton et al. (1996), salespeople must look beyond short-term benefits and focus more on the social consequences of their sales techniques in terms of consumer well-being and ethical behaviors in the purchase experience. Instilling ethical and responsible practices within salespeople who deal with adolescents will strengthen the relationship between sellers and young buyers, allowing both to achieve well-being.

Second, our research contributes to business ethics literature in relation to adolescent consumption. Prior research on young consumers and materialism, especially among younger and older adolescents (e.g., Batat 2015, 2015; Gentina et al. 2018; Tang and Chen 2008) showed the dark side (Pechmann et al. 2005; Tang et al. 2014) of adolescents' materialism and its negative consequences in business ethics, which results in the adoption of unethical behaviors (Gentina et al. 2018). Our findings, however, show that materialism can be a positive and deliberate behavior that allows adolescents to develop consumption skills and knowledge, and thus define for themselves a personal and social identity within a peer group. Materialism, through accumulating consumption items and sharing them, can then lead to increased well-being among adolescents who can then cope with loneliness, but also can adopt fewer unethical behaviors (Gentina et al. 2018).

Third, our research also contributes to the literature on adolescent risky behaviors and vulnerability both in the fields of consumer behavior (Batat 2008, 2015) and in business ethics (Gentina et al. 2015, 2018). Research on vulnerability and risky behaviors among adolescents focuses on the negative effects of transgression and risky behaviors (e.g., Pechmann et al. 2005; Mason et al. 2013). Our findings offer some evidence for this perspective, underlining the negative effects of imposed vulnerability that can result in harmful situations for adolescents in the marketplace, with salespeople, or among their peer groups, a situation that calls for developing ethical guidance to protect these vulnerable young consumers. Yet, our research also shows that deliberate vulnerability, such as transgression, can also have a positive effect on the learning process and identity construction of adolescents, which is consistent with Batat's (2014) research on the positive role of transgression in adolescent consumption culture. Transgression can be one way for adolescents to experience different "selves" until they adopt an identity and behaviors that make them feel confident. Thus, we provide an expanded view of adolescent identity construction through emphasizing the positive role

of a “controlled transgression” that should be under adult supervision, rather than banned and punished to help adolescent achieve and improve their well-being.

Marketing and Policy Implications for Ethical Treatment of Adolescent Consumers

In this section, we discuss the marketing implications (highlighted in Table 4) derived from the ACV framework.

Addressing Transgression and Risk Attractiveness

The desire for transgression and risk attractiveness are two separate factors that contribute to deliberate side vulnerability. To address deliberate side vulnerability, we offer four major measures: (1) developing attractive off-line and online educational campaigns by (2) co-creating educational campaigns with adolescents resulting in (3) micro-targeted campaigns, and (4) developing experiential consumption knowledge among adolescent consumers.

Co-creating educational campaigns with adolescents through empathetic collaboration, and incorporating adolescents’ cultural markers and views in educational discourses and policies can offer numerous advantages over more traditional paternalistic approaches to counter risky behaviors and vulnerable situations. For example, a recent study demonstrated the value of harnessing young consumers’ perspectives on autonomy and social justice to create an effective campaign promoting healthy food choices (Bryan et al. 2016).

This study further indicates that adolescents are aware of their imposed vulnerability and open to influence if their trust can be gained. Thus, any communication strategy beginning from an adult perspective is likely to fail because of a lack of trust—the anti-adult driver being important. For example, smoking may be viewed as deliberate vulnerability, but when reframed as imposed vulnerability through a campaign suggesting that tobacco companies are manipulating adolescents into smoking, then successful behavior change may be secured (c.f., Pechmann and Reibling 2000). Thus, a communication strategy about recognizing and coping with imposed vulnerability may prove to be more effective. This approach leverages adolescents’ desire to master their environments (Bryan et al. 2016). Our results, though, not only point out the need to incorporate subculture understanding of adolescent smoking, as differences occur among adolescents (Davis and Grier 2015), but also recognize any potential related risky behaviors in a polyadic fashion, one reason for micro-targeted campaigns.

At the same time, manufacturers of adult products who sincerely wish to ethically avoid marketing to adolescents should explore the adolescent subcultural understanding of their messaging. In this way, they can identify strategies

and opportunities to appropriately market without accidentally also reaching adolescents.

Addressing Risky Online Behaviors

Risky online behavior is a form of deliberate side adolescent vulnerability that reflects the feeling of invulnerability among adolescents. As we mentioned, our insights suggest adopting approaches that help adolescents recognize attempts to impose vulnerability on them. In order to enhance online risk management, social platform providers should investigate virtual experiences among adolescent subcultures. The adolescent consumption subculture is characterized by a very high-tech context, one in which adolescents find themselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, instant as well as global exchanges, virtual socialization, and the transformation of the human relationships. Yet at the same time, the context threatens to isolate individuals and negatively affects their well-being (Twenge et al. 2018). Marketers should develop methods for contending with risky online communities (e.g., Proana). Similar to the way Facebook and other social media platforms are working to address fake news, ethical marketers should create online communities that address youth issues with experts who take a youth perspective and work to minimize the potential impact of dangerous sites.

Enhanced digital literacy that empowers adolescents can help them balance online risks with social media opportunities. Although our research shows that adolescents perceive themselves as powerful and knowledgeable in terms of media use, they need cognitive and reasoning skills for searching and sorting the information. A collaboration between digital firms and educators can develop content that encourages adolescents to think critically about privacy and safety.

Addressing Consumption (II) literacy

Consumption literacy can enhance the well-being of adolescents. Developers of adolescent programming should consider building intentional coping *and* reflexive coping skills when developing consumption literacy among adolescents. They are likely to find themselves in vulnerable positions unintentionally due to unexpected imposed vulnerability and are therefore in need of reflexive coping skills. However, in addition to developing coping skills, such as how to research product specifications and how to recognize puffery, adolescents can learn to recognize unethical behavior and avoid people trying to impose vulnerability on them in order to take advantage of them.

Table 4 Marketing and policy implications

Domain of adolescent consumer vulnerability	Types of vulnerability	Domain of marketing, policy and adolescent well-being	Actors	Specific example recommendations
Transgression and risk attractiveness	Deliberate side of vulnerability/ deliberate vulnerability (adolescent feeling of invulnerability)	Creating attractive off- and online educational campaigns with adolescents Co-creating educational campaigns with adolescents Relying on peer groups when promoting educational campaigns Developing an experiential consumption knowledge approach	Educators, NGOs, gov'ts, schools, businesses, agencies, and sub-agencies	Create suitable off- and online sexual education to address teen pregnancy issues by developing campaigns and web strategies that can take advantage of teenagers' confidence Reframe smoking as imposed vulnerability by Big Tobacco, taking advantage of anti-adult tendencies Involve peer role models, such as teen mothers, who can present real and personal view of risks and negative consequences Adopt and promote an experiential approach based on knowledge, pleasure, exploration, and novelty to educate adolescents about the art of drinking, making, and tasting wine Address online harassment and other social and personal issues among adolescents and intensify online presence Balance risk with opportunity by developing empowering strategies
Online risky behaviors	Deliberate side of vulnerability/ deliberate vulnerability (adolescent feeling of invulnerability)	Creating policies advancing digital well-being and online risk consciousness Enhancing digital literacy	School, family, gov't, community, digital firms, agencies, and businesses	Create consumption literacy programs that reframe positive behaviors like healthy eating as achieving immediate goals (e.g., acceptance), not future goals Address materialism as counter to subculture norms, such as social justice, based on micro-targeting to the local subculture
Consumption illiteracy	Deliberate side of vulnerability/ deliberate vulnerability (adolescent feeling of invulnerability)	Developing school programs that focus on the construction of consumption knowledge among adolescent subcultures Applying subcultural values to frame consumption knowledge	School, family, gov't, community, NGOs, and businesses	Address materialism as counter to subculture norms, such as social justice, based on micro-targeting to the local subculture
Social anxiety, pressure, and adolescent identity construction	Imposed vulnerability (adolescent feeling of vulnerability)	Developing school and family educational programs for the enhancement of positive identity development among adolescents	Educators, researchers, school, family, gov't, community, and NGOs	Create and promote positive identity-building online communities, such as those related to self-image and eating Initiate motivational program sessions and workshops tackling adolescents' social anxiety problems at school, home, and in the community

Addressing Social Anxiety, Pressure, and Adolescent Identity Construction

Social anxiety, pressure, and adolescent identity construction are the only dimensions of the ACV that relate to what adolescents consider as a real and imposed state of vulnerability. Helping an adolescent develop a positive identity helps him or her transition more easily into adulthood (Tsang et al. 2012). These recommendations will support adolescents in developing coping strategies to avoid vulnerability.

The materialistic behavior of adolescents may reflect a state of perceived or desired invulnerability as they develop skills and become subject-matter experts (e.g., in video gaming or electronics). In contrast, adult materialism literature relates materialism to emotional and social vulnerability (Roberts et al. 2003). Materialism, however, can be addressed by developing strategies that offer counter-values, such as social justice, that empower adolescents. For example, relating unnecessary purchases to environmental issues can empower adolescents when they realize they have the capacity to make choices that have positive environmental consequences, especially when these choices are also viewed as anti-adult. Thus, understanding and leveraging the subculture values of adolescents is important in helping them develop strategies to reduce negative materialism. Another recommendation based on the results of this research is to help parents teach their children to manage their social anxieties on their own, and thus empower them to develop coping mechanisms and other strategies to develop self-confidence and transform their weaknesses into strengths. For instance, rather than providing children with reassuring answers, parents can ask their children to examine their anxieties so as to manage unfamiliar situations, face their fears, and develop self-confidence. In so doing, adolescents can develop strategies that help them feel more equipped to make good decisions as consumers.

Conclusion

The ACV framework suggests that marketers' ethical responsibility needs to be considered beyond the principle of mere accountability (i.e., paying for damages incurred when they sell harmful goods and services and/or develop deceptive sales strategies). The forthcoming challenge might be how to involve all social actors—marketers, legislators, parents, and educators—to engage in a wider and more open conversation on the vulnerability of adolescents and the impact the commercial world has on their well-being. The goal is to create skeptical, but not cynical, consumers who can successfully navigate social and market pressures while avoiding learned helplessness and other conditions that increase one's vulnerability. Our findings demonstrate

that adolescents do not all face similar issues because the experience of vulnerability is fluid and depends on the sub-cultural norms that form it. The ACV framework takes a bottom-up approach, using adolescents' voices and their own definitions of what vulnerability means to them to create a more harmonious view with a polyadic reality. The ACV framework incorporates one's subculture, which is a bubble within one's broader national culture. By addressing vulnerability from the adolescent perspective, ethical marketers can empower adolescents to develop consumer literacy and grow into effective adult consumers.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declares that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval Humans were involved, and all procedures performed in studies involving human participants were completed in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Regarding our field and the characteristics of the minor participants involved in this research, we followed the ERIC (Ethical Research Involving Children) guidance developed by UNICEF in 2013 and adapted it to our field activities.

Research Involved in Human or Animal Rights This article does not contain any studies involving animals, performed by any of the authors.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all of the individual participants included in the study.

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