Topic:

*The following appeared in the opinion column of a financial magazine:*

*"On average, middle-aged consumers devote 39 percent of their retail expenditure to department store products and services, while for younger consumers the average is only 25 percent. Since the number of middle-aged people will increase dramatically within the next decade, department stores can expect retail sales to increase significantly during that period. Furthermore, to take advantage of the trend, these stores should begin to replace some of those products intended to attract the younger consumer with products intended to attract the middle- aged consumer."*

**In this argument, the author predicts that** department stores will increase their retail sales by replacing some products intended to attract younger consumers with the ones intended to attract middle-aged consumers. **To substantiate this conclusion, the author** expects that the number of middle-aged people will increase, and believes that the increase will lead to high retail sales as they devote 39 percent of their retail expenditure to department store. **While at first glance the author’s argument appears convincing, a careful examination would reveal how groundless it is.**

**First, the argument arbitrarily assumes that** as younger consumers grow up, they would follow the same shopping behavior pattern as the current middle-aged consumers do, devoting 39 percent of their retail expenditure to department stores. **Such an assumption, however, is too strong to make, as the future is uncertain**. In the era of information technology, **for example**, online shopping has been gaining a lot of popularity among consumers, given the convenience and low prices it provides. It is probable that a majority of consumers will switch to this new platform for shopping. Hence, their devotion to department stores will decrease dramatically, instead of increasing. **Due to a lack of consideration on the metrics that may affect consumer’s shopping behavior**, the argument per se is unconvincing.

**Second, the author unwisely (recklessly) thinks that** the absolute sales amount contributed by the middle-aged consumer is higher than that by the younger consumer. **The data provided in the argument is not sufficient enough to reach such a conclusion.** The numbers represent the proportion of retail expenditure of each individual. As far as absolute logic is concerned, 39 percent of one’s expenditure can be lower than 25 percent of another person’s. **Another flaw** is the overlook of the potential increase of the younger consumers demographic. If it grows faster than the middle-aged one, the retail sales from younger consumers will be higher, which is contradictory to what the initial argument presumes. Therefore, the author should analyze what contributes to the retail sales in detail.

**In conclusion, the argument is not sound or persuasive as it stands. Accordingly, it is hasty and unwise for the author to jump to the conclusion that** department stores should put their efforts into catering more to middle-aged consumers. **Only with more adequate reasoning and clear analysis could this argument become more thorough.**