A STUDY ON CONSUMER AWARENESS, CONSUMER RIGHTS WITH RESPECT TO DIFFERENT HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

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Abstract:
The contemporary era is marked as the era of consumers. On the other hand, consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of sale and purchase of goods but also of the health and security aspect. Therefore, Consumer exploitation should be bought down with proper awareness to the consumers on their rights and how they could go about with things, if they feel they have been cheated.

No country can knowingly or unknowingly disregard the interest of the consumers. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, is one of the examples that is to be treated as a milestone in the history of socio-economic legislation to protect the interests of the consumers in India. The main objective of the Consumer Protection Act is to ensure the better protection of consumers. The Act is also intended to provide simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal to the consumers' grievances, and relief of a specific nature and award of compensation wherever appropriate to the consumer. This study aims to project and suggest not only the ways and means to safeguard consumer rights but also suggest the manufacturers, distributors, traders to serve the consumer with maximum benefits so that he makes best use of the expenditures. Balanced viewpoint with regard to consumer awareness within socio-economic and legal framework of the society was also taken into consideration to evolve consumer satisfaction.

Keywords: Consumer Awareness, Consumer Education, Consumer Courts, Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Introduction
Consumerism is as old as man. The ancient consumer moved from place to place to hunt for food. He ate whatever he could find such as fruits, nuts, berries, sweet roots and the flesh of animals. He made use of wood and dry leaves from forests to make fire to keep himself warm and also to tenderize the meat he hunted. It was purely by accident that man discovered that food could be grown by sowing seeds. This marked the beginning of man as a producer. Gradually he realized that he could not manage production on his own. So, he began to socialize and take the help of others around him. This led to group living, which resulted in sharing of goods with others, and exchange of services.

Hence in today's world consumer is the person who hires or avails of any services for a consideration which has been paid or promised or partly paid and partly promised or under any system of deferred payment

The importance of consumer education is highlighted when the consumers are seen as part of the economy. Consumer plays a vital role in functioning of the economy. The circular flow of money from consumers and back to consumers in base of economy.

Education and economic condition have direct relation with the consumer awareness. It was seen that consumer awareness regarding household goods reflected through their knowledge of buying and awaring about consumer protection, label awareness, effect of advertisement and standardize mark.

1.1 Forms of Consumer Exploitation:
Consumer exploitation is a type of exploitation in which the consumers are exploited or cheated by the business community in terms of poor quality of product, underweight, under-measurement, duplicate articles etc

Some of the common ways by which the consumers are exploited by the business community are as follows:

1. Underweight and under-measurement
2. Sub-standard quality
3. High prices
4. Duplicate articles
5. Adulteration and impurity
6. Lack of safety devices
7. Artificial scarcity
8. False and incomplete information
9. Unsatisfactory after sale services
10. Rough behaviour

We all know that people in India are not aware about their rights against unscrupulous practices of manufacturers or traders in relation to goods and services supplied by them. Lack of awareness has its root in many things in general and in particular it lies in illiteracy in India. People do not know what they should do in case if they are to be subject to fraud by them. They are not aware of the resources available to them under laws provided for redressing such cause. Lack of consumer education is the root of the problem of unawareness among the people of India about available rights and remedies in cases anything goes against the interest of consumer in India, therefore no law will ever be able to provide people their due rights against such bad practices of sellers or manufacturer unless they are being educated and make aware about the available remedies in case of violation of their rights.

1.2 Meaning of Consumer Awareness
Consumer awareness means awareness of consumers in different aspects of consumption activities. Consumer awareness is a broader and wider concept. It covers the followings:

a) Consumer awareness about Maximum Retail Price (MRP).
b) Consumer awareness about Fair Price Shop.
c) Consumer awareness about price, quality and expiry date of the product.
d) Consumer awareness about their rights and duties.
e) Consumer awareness about certified products like ISI, Agmark, ISO-2000

Therefore consumer is an important component of society and business has an obligation to him. But, when the goods are short in supply the producers charge high prices and consumers have no choice other than to purchase what is available. Therefore, consumer is to be protected from unsafe products, poor quality of goods and services, high prices, unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements. Therefore, it is necessary for consumer rights awareness to prevail amongst the consumer to protect them from unscrupulous trade practices and to give them the idea of the utility of money spent by them. Consumer rights awareness is about making the consumer aware of products or services; however, this is largely unknown to many citizens irrespective of whether they are educated or uneducated.

Market resources and influences are growing by the day and so is the awareness of one's consumer rights. These rights are well-defined and there are agencies like the government, consumer courts and voluntary organizations that work towards safeguarding them. There are six rights of consumer which are provided in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

1.3 Rise of Consumer Awareness
In the globalization, liberalization and privatization era, most of the economic decisions are taken by the market. Though the government has withdrawn itself from many economic activities, it interferes very often when the market mechanism fails due to structural rigidities in the economy and other factors, to provide goods and services to the people.

Consumption is one of the important economic activities, which requires regular government intervention, as the market is unable to promote security and welfare aspects of the consumers. On the other hand, consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of sale and purchase of goods but also of the health and security aspect also. Besides this, they should be aware of their rights and duties being as rational human beings.

1.4 Rights of the Consumers
The following are the rights of the consumers as coded in the Indian laws:

1. Right to safety
2. Right to choose
3. Right to seek redressal
4. Right to consumer education
5. Right to be heard
6. Right to be informed

1. Right to Safety: Consumer right is defined as the ‘right to be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property in areas such as healthcare, food processing and pharmaceuticals, Automobiles, Travel, Domestic Appliances, Housing etc.
2. **Right to Choose:** The right to be assured access to a variety of products at competitive prices, without any pressure to impose a sale, i.e., freedom of choice. Consumer Protection Act, 1986 defines this right as ‘the right to be assured, wherever possible, to have access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices’.

3. **Right to Seek Redressal:** The right ‘to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or restrictive trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers’ is defined as the right to redressal in the Consumer Protection Act 1986. Consumer courts such as District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums at the district level, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions and National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions have been established through the Consumer Protection Act.

4. **Right to Consumer Education:** This right simply ensures that the consumers in India have access to informational programs and materials that would enable them to make better purchasing decisions.

5. **Right to be Heard:** This right is supposed to empower Indian consumers to fearlessly voice their complaints and concerns against products and companies to ensure their issues are handled efficiently and expeditiously.

6. **Right to be informed:** This consumer right is defined as the ‘the right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods or services, as the case may be so as to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices.

### 1.5 Duties of the Consumers:

In order to secure rights, consumers have to fulfill the following duties:

1. While purchasing goods, consumers should look at the quality of the product as well as on the warranty of the product.
2. They should ask for **Cash Memo** for the item purchased.
3. They should form consumer awareness organizations.
4. They must complain for their genuine grievances.
5. They must know their rights and duties.

### 1.6 Consumer Protection Measures:

#### 1.6.1 Administrative Measures:

**Public Distribution System (PDS)** is a system through which the government distributes some essential commodities at a reasonable price through the **Fair Price Shop**. The price of a commodity is determined in the market through the free play of demand and supply. **Equilibrium price** is that price at which demand and supply of the commodity are equal to each other. Government interferes in the market systems by fixing the price lower than the equilibrium price, known as **Control Price** to protect the interest of the consumers belonging to the lower strata of the society. This leads to black-marketing and hoarding. To check these government sales different commodities at different FPS at control price.

#### 1.6.2 Technical Measures:

Technical measures consist of Standardization of the product. This has been achieved through the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), and Agmark**. The Bureau of Indian Standards, earlier known as the Indian Standards Institution (ISI), has the responsibility of laying down the standards for industrial and consumer goods on a scientific basis and certifying the goods that meet the standards and the prescribed quality. The Agmark is implemented under the **Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marketing) Act of 1937, as amended in 1986**. Products such as honey, masala etc, carry such marks.

**International Organization for Standardization (ISO),** established in 1947 serves to provide common reference standard. All the international Companies, goods produced by them, and institutions are certified as ISO 6000, ISO 14000 etc.

For setting international food standards, there is a similar body called **Codex Alimentaries Commission (CAC)** formed in 1963 by the **Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)** and the **World Health Organization(WHO)**. It develops food standards, guidelines and codes for production and international trade in food products like milk, fish etc.

#### 1.6.3 Legislative Measures:

Legislative measures include enactment of **Consumer Protection Act, 1986**. It provides for the establishment of consumer disputes redressal agencies at District, State and National level for the protection of consumer interests and to redress their grievances in a speedy, simple and inexpensive manner. The Act has led to the setting up separate **Department of Consumer Affairs** in Central and State Government, which focus exclusively on the rights of the consumers.

Refer Fig.1

2. **Objectives of the Study:**

- To study the level of consumer awareness of the consumers.
To study effect of education on consumer awareness regarding goods and services.

3. Methodology:
The study is based on secondary data collection. When data collected by the others are used by others for their use or investigation then it is known as secondary data. The total number of households selected was 80. These household has been selected by the Random sampling method. The sampling method is that method in which data are collected about samples or a group of items taken from the population. For analysis of data simple percentage method was used.

4. Results and Discussion:

4.1 Refer Table No.1
Table no. 1 reveals that Out of the total, 80 respondents, 2.5% were illiterate, 12.5% were graduate, 50% were Post Graduate and 35% were Professionally and technically Qualified. Hence it was concluded that majority of the respondents at least had their primary education (Graduation) and were having basic knowledge of purchasing power of a consumer.

4.2 Refer Table No. 2
Table No.2 depicts different aspects of consumer awareness i.e. about standardization, MRP, date of manufacturing and expiry, knowledge about Consumer Courts, rights and duties of the consumers etc. Out of total respondents, 81.25% of them checked MRP, date of manufacturing and expiry. However, 56.25% of people interviewed, check the ingredients used in the product.

As far as Consumer Court is concerned, a majority of them (96.25%) have knowledge about it but only 10 out of total respondents have gone to the Consumer Court to redress their problems on different occasions. Lastly, it is clear that majority of respondents (71.25%) surveyed, insist for Cash Memo at the time of purchase.

Conclusion
Consumer exploitation is very rampant these days. Consumers get exploited in many ways through the more dominating and knowledgeable sources.

On the other hand, consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of sale and purchase of goods but also of the health and security aspect. Besides this, they should be aware of their rights and duties being as rational human beings viz., price and quality of products used by them, about Fair Price Shops, standardization of products, about Consumer Forums etc. Therefore, Consumer exploitation should be bought down with proper awareness to the consumers on their rights.

The objective of the study was to assess the people in the society about different aspects of consumer awareness viz., price and quality of products used by them, about Fair Price Shop, standardization of products, about Consumer Forum, about their Rights and Duties etc. Consumers will lead a happy, healthy and prosperous life if they fully aware about the above-mentioned aspects.

Total number of respondents interviewed was 80 and all belong to urban area. Out of them, 78 were literate whereas only 2 are illiterate. Again, majority of respondents were influenced by the advertisement about the product and the important media is Television.

As far as consumer awareness is concerned, majority of respondents have knowledge about certified products, check MRP, date of manufacturing and expiry at the time of purchase. However majority of them do not check about the ingredients used in the product. On the other hand, majority of them have the knowledge of Consumer Courts, but out of total respondents only 10 have ever gone to the Consumer Courts for complaining about different commodities they purchased and consumed. Lastly, it is evident from the study, majority of them insist for Cash Memo at the time of purchase.

REFERENCES
4. Dissertation, Submitted Department of Commerce, University of Delhi]
Table No.1

Distribution of the Respondents according to their Educational Status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>No. of Persons</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary(graduate)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary(Post-Graduate)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary(Professionally and Technically qualified.)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No.2

Distribution of Respondents according to their knowledge of Different aspects of Consumer Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Awareness</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about Certified Products</td>
<td>65(81.25%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check MRP, Expiry and Manufacturing date</td>
<td>68(85%)</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about Fair Price Shop</td>
<td>60(75%)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check ingredients used</td>
<td>35(43.75%)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about Consumer Courts</td>
<td>77(96.25%)</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever gone to Consumer Court</td>
<td>10(12.5%)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insist cash Memo for Consumable goods purchased</td>
<td>57(71.25%)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>