



Consumers' Awareness and Attitudes Towards Consumer Protection Act 1986 – A Study with Reference to Consumers in Virudhunagar District

KEYWORDS

Consumer, Attitude, Products, Services

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Introduction

Globalization and liberalization of trade and business has resulted in many products and services being available to the consumers. Growth in economy has resulted in increase in the purchasing power of the middle class section, which is the largest segment of the population. This has necessitated giving high priority for the protection of the consumers and promotion of responsible consumer movement in the country. Modern technological growth and complexities of the sellers' techniques, existence of a vast army of middlemen and unethical and untruthful advertisements have aggravated the situation of consumer exploitation. The consumer has to be aware of his rights and play a key role. The success of consumerism is a strong function of consumer awareness and to avoid exploitation consumer must become knowledgeable. Many constitutional provisions have been made by government to protect the consumers. Until and unless the consumers avail of these provisions, the protection of consumer becomes inevitable. There is a great need to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Review

The consumer is one of the harassed persons in India. Although he is the kingpin in the entire trade and commercial activity on whom the prosperity of the trade and commerce is dependent, he does not receive fair treatment from the sources that prosper at his cost and these have been suffering silently (Bunch, 1990, and Sundaram 1985).

In India, consumers face problems like unfair business practices like misbranding, spurious products, unsafe products, planned obsolescence, adulteration, fictitious pricing, price collusion, deceptive packaging, false and misleading advertisements, defective warranties, hoarding, profiteering, black marketing, short weights and measures, etc (Cocharan and Bell, 1956; Singal et al., 1980 and Sundaram, 1985).

Consumerism and Consumer Protection Act 1986

Consumerism is a movement that promotes the interest of buyers and goods and services. Consumerism is a social force within the environment designed to aid and protects the consumer, by exerting legal moral and economic pressure on business. As Senator Charles Percy observes "Consumer movement is a broad public reaction against bureaucratic neglect and corporate discharge for public".

The Consumer Protection Act 1986 is a milestone in the history of socio-economic legislation in the country. The main objective of the new law is to provide for the better protection of the consumers unlike existing laws, which are punitive or preventive in nature. The Act intends to provide simple, speedy & inexpensive redresses to the consumer's grievances. It seeks to promote and protects the interest of consumers against deficiencies and defects in goods or services. It also seeks to secure the rights of a consumer against unfair or restrictive trade practices, which may be practiced by manufacturers and traders. There are various levels of adjudicatory authorities that are set up under the Act, which provide a forum for consumers to seek redressal of their grievances in an effective and simple manner.

Need for the study

A wide range of consumers pay their hard – earned money to buy several products, but in case they do not get the right value for their money in terms of the right quality or quantity of goods and services bought or if they are made wrong promises, they are supposed to stand against their deceit. Quite often, they are either unaware of their rights or unable to raise their voice against exploitation. So, they need protection against malpractices and deceit by seller.

Statement of the problem

A Change in the perception of consumer attitude as regards safe guarding his right in the matters associated with consumption of a product or service is obvious in view of the legal protection granted by the Government of India. The Consumer Protection Act 1986 is one of benevolent social legislation intended to protect the large body of consumer from exploitation. But in reality it is not so. The unscrupulous sellers continue to defraud and take advantages of every situation. Hence the research finds initiative to study the consumer awareness and attitudes towards Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out consumers' understanding about problems in the market.
2. To study level of awareness and attitudes of consumers towards their rights and responsibilities
3. To analysis the general awareness and impact of consumers towards Consumer Protection Act 1986.
4. To draw conclusion and recommendation for strengthening the consumer awareness programme more effective.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from the sample of 280 respondents of Virudhunagar District. Apart from this, the secondary data were collected from journals, books, websites and published data. The respondents were selected on simple random method.

Tools for analysis

The following statistical tools were applied to analyze the data collected from the respondents. Chi-square analysis, Mean score analysis, Weighted Average Ranking and ANOVA - Two factors without replication method have been applied for analysis to interpret the valuable solutions.

Data Analysis and interpretations

Chi-Square Test has been applied to examine the relationship between socio economic profiles of the respondents and consumers' problems.

Null Hypothesis stated: (Ho)

Ho: There is no relationship between consumers' problems and socio – economic status of the respondents.

Table1: Socio-Economic status and Consumers' Problem

Socio-Economic variables	Particulars	No. of respondents	%	C.V	T.V	DF	Inference
Age	Below 25 years	48	17.14				
	25-50 years	165	58.93	44.98	15.51	8	Significant
	Above 50 years	67	23.93				
Gender	Male	214	76.43	23.74	9.49	4	Significant
	Female	66	23.57				
Educational qualification	Below High School	27	9.64	10.56	21.03	12	Not significant
	Higher Secondary	39	13.93				
	Graduate	116	41.43				
	Professional Diploma	98	35				
Occupation	Unemployed	45	16.07	19.04	21.03	12	Not significant
	Employed	120	42.86				
	Business	79	28.21				
	Professional	36	12.86				
Marital status	Married	229	81.79	4.39	9.49	4	Not significant
	Unmarried	51	18.21				
Monthly income (in Rs.)	Up to Rs 10,000	61	21.79	13.88	15.51	8	Not significant
	Rs 10,000- Rs 20,000	144	51.43				
	Above 20,000	75	26.79				

Source: Primary data

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents 165 (58.93%) belong to the age group of 25-50 years, 214 (76.43%) are

male, 116 (41.43%) are graduates, 120 (42.86%) of the respondents employed, 229 (81.79%) of the respondents married, and 144 (51.43%) earned a monthly income of Rs.10,000 – Rs.20,000.

Out of six socio economic variables, two variables, age and gender are significant to consumer problems. The remaining four variables education, occupation, marital status and monthly income are not significant to consumer problems.

problems faced by the consumers

Consumers face many problems that influence their buying behavior and purchasing decisions. The major problem of the consumers in this regard has been shown in the table 2.

Table-2: Consumer's Problem

Sr No	Problems	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Lack of knowledge about legal system.	97	34.64
2.	Information Exploitation	34	12.14
3.	Lack of a definite buying pattern	30	10.71
4.	Deceptive trade practices	55	19.64
5.	Poor consumer guidance	64	22.86
	Total	280	100

Source: Primary data

Table 2 shows that out of 280 respondents, 97 (34.64%) have lack of knowledge about legal system, 64 (22.86%) have poor consumer guidance, 55 (19.64%) come under deceptive trade practices, 34 (12.14%) fall under information exploitation and 30 (10.71%) are suffered by lack of definite buying pattern.

Awareness and Attitudes towards rights and responsibilities

The consumers have a number of rights regarding the purchase of things, but at the same time they have some responsibilities too. Table 3 shows level of awareness and attitudes of consumers towards rights and responsibilities.

Table-3: Awareness and Attitudes towards Rights and Responsibilities

Sr.no	Rights and responsibilities	Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	Exercise consumer rights to get products or services	81	151	48
2.	Plan in advance to purchase	109	87	84
3.	Habit of visiting two or more shop to purchase	80	105	95
4.	Habit of reading all the information and instructions of goods or services	117	49	114
5.	Check quality of the product	91	97	92
6.	Verify the date of manufacturing and date of expiry	76	115	89
7.	Get guarantee/ Warranty card	173	48	59
8.	Use the products as per instruction	93	48	139
9.	Demand for bill connected with payment	145	65	70
10.	Make complaint against unfair trade practices	153	86	41

Source: Primary data

Weighted Average ranking

Weighted Average ranking technique has been employed to analyze the awareness and attitude of consumers towards rights and responsibilities and the results are given in

Table-4: Awareness and Attitudes towards Rights and Responsibilities

Sr.no	Rights and responsibilities	Always	Sometimes	Never	Total score	Mean score (100X/5887)	Rank
1.	Exercise consumer rights to get products or services	243	302	48	593	10.07	IV
2.	Plan in advance to purchase	327	174	84	585	9.94	V
3.	Habit of visiting two or more shop to purchase	240	210	95	545	9.26	IX
4.	Habit of reading all the information, and instructions of goods or services	351	98	114	563	9.56	VI
5.	Check quality of the product	273	194	92	559	9.50	VII
6.	Verify the date of manufacturing and date of expiry	228	230	89	547	9.29	VIII
7.	Get guarantee/ warranty card	519	96	59	674	11.45	I
8.	Use the products as per instruction	279	96	139	514	8.73	X
9.	Demand for bill connected with payment	435	130	70	635	10.79	III
10.	Make complaint against unfair trade practices	459	172	41	672	11.42	II
					5887		

Source: Primary data

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents gave I Rank to 'Get guarantee / Warranty card' with score of 11.45 followed by 'Make complaint against unfair trade practices' with score of 11.41.

GENERAL AWARENESS ABOUT CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986

The consumer must be aware about Consumer Protection Act 1986 regarding his rights and the available legal measures against exploitation. Table 5 shows about General awareness about Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Table-5: General awareness about Consumer Protection Act 1986

Sr.no	Consumer Protection Act 1986	Yes	No	Total	
1.	Awareness of Consumer Protection Act 1986	Count	127	153	280
	Percentage	45.36	54.64	100	
2.	Simple formalities	Count	149	131	280
	Percentage	53.21	46.79	100	
3.	Consumers themselves can conduct cases	Count	91	189	280
	Percentage	32.5	67.5	100	
4.	Less expensive	Count	134	146	280
	Percentage	47.86	52.14	100	
5.	Awareness of the Consumer Forum	Count	188	92	280
	Percentage	67.14	32.85	100	

6.	Awareness of the filing of complaint	Count	103	177	280
		Percentage	36.79	63.21	100
7.	Complaint entertained	Count	102	178	280
		Percentage	36.43	63.57	100
8.	Compensation can be claimed for the loss suffered	Count	146	134	280
		Percentage	52.14	47.86	100

Source: Primary data

Table 5 shows that out of 280 respondents, 188 (67.14%) respondents aware about Consumer forum and 149 (53.21%) opines that the formalities are simple.

IMPACT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986

Consumer Protection Act plays a vital role for each and every individual. By this act consumers and marketers both are well treated in the society. Table 6 shows that Impact of Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Table-6: Impact of Consumer Protection Act 1986

Sr.no	Statements	SA	A	NO	DA	SD	Total
1.	Increase the consumer awareness	45	58	27	69	81	280
2.	Stimulates fair trade practices	69	53	52	63	43	280
3.	Creates quality and price consciousness in the minds of consumers	54	48	84	32	62	280
4.	Compare to previous legislations the procedures under this Act is simple	77	34	111	11	47	280
5.	Speed disposal of cases	53	51	93	64	19	280

Source: Primary data

SA – Strongly Agree; A- Agree; No – No opinion; DA- Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree.

ANOVA – two factors without replication method has been applied to analyze the Impact of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and the results are given in Table 7.

Table 7

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	0	4	0	0	1	3.006917
Columns	2330.8	4	582.7	0.91429	0.479413	3.006917
Error	10197.2	16	637.325			
Total	12528	24				

Source: Calculated data

From Table 7, it is clear that the calculated value of F (0, 0.91429) is less than the table values of F (3.006917). Hence, the impact of Consumer Protection Act 1986 is not significant.

findings

The following are the findings of this study.

1. It is revealed that most of the respondents lie under the age group of 25 – 50 years, male, graduate, employed,

- married and earns between Rs.10, 000 and Rs.20, 000.
2. It is inferred that out of six socio – economic variables, two variable age and gender significant to consumers' problems and four variables education, occupation, marital status and monthly income are not significant to consumers' problems.
 3. It is revealed that 34.64 percent of the respondents do not have knowledge about legal system.
 4. It is lucid that most of the respondents gave first rank to Get guarantee/warranty card with the mean score of 11.45.
 5. It is inferred that 67.14 percent of the respondents have awareness about consumer forum.
 6. It is shown that impact of consumer protection Act 1986 is not significant.

RECOMMENDATION

Consumers are cheated in the market because they do not get proper consumer education. The government, voluntary organization and educational institutions should come forward to educate the rural respondents towards importance of their rights and responsibilities. It helps the consumers to develop the ability to decide and choose things intelligently. The government should take immediate action on the unscrupulous traders by cancelling their licenses when the alleged change on them is proved and criminal action should be taken against them.

CONCLUSION

Consumers need protection from different kinds of exploitation at the market place. Rural respondents are lacking with their rights and responsibility. They should be educated and trained towards their own welfare. Every consumer in own interest has to realize the role and importance in the right perspective. In a competitive economic environment, the consumer has to exercise the choice either in favor of or against the goods and services. The choice is going to be vital and final. One would have to realize the importance and prepare to exercise their rights with responsibility. The consumers in society get a position in the market depending upon what they do or do not do.

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