

Consumer Awareness Regarding Legislation Organisations and Consumer Protection Laws

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INTRODUCTION

In the early times, consumer was considered as King of the market but in the contemporary society, consumers are no longer safe against the mal practices such as, substandard goods and unsatisfactory services. The consumer has every right to reject any product or services rendered by any manufacturer in the market and can mould them to produce goods of their choice. Indian Consumer are ignorant, illiterate and do not know the role of consumption vis- a- vis economic system as well as quality of life. When they are ignorant of their rights, they cannot know their responsibility as consumers. Consumers in the market find themselves deceived by wrong weights and measures, adulterated and substandard products causing great damages to health. Neelkanta and Anand (1992) found that people prefer to absorb and endure the wrong done to them rather than fight against injustice. This is because consumers do not know the ways and means of facing them confidently. At present the consumer movement in India is in its infancy. Vast majority of the people are not even aware of consumerism as a movement closely connected with the protection of their interest. Many constitutional provisions have been made by government to protect the consumers. Until and unless these provisions are availed of by the consumers, the protection of consumer become inevitable. There is a great need to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. The current investigation has been undertaken to seek answers to key aspects such as level of consumer awareness regarding legislation and organizations with the specific objective to assess the awareness of male and female respondents towards consumer legislation organization and consumer protection laws.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive type of research design was considered to achieve the objectives of present investigation. Structured interview schedule was

used to record the data. A multistage random sampling technique with stratification at the household level was adopted to select sample. Commensurate with the set objectives and information (primary as well as secondary) available, various analytical tools were employed for the analysis and interpretation of the data. Male and female respondents classified the acts into three groups on the basis of the total assigned scores separately. The mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard Error (S.E.) were calculated to classify the acts into three groups-high, medium and low.

The scoring of consumer awareness, legislations and consumer protection laws were carried out for arriving at the results (Table 1). Students t- test was applied to find out the significant difference between male and female respondents towards legislation and organization and consumer protection laws.

Table 1: Score values for awareness level and for consumer protection laws

Response	Awareness level	
	High awareness (score value)	Low awareness (score value)
Always	2	0
Sometimes	1	1
Never	0	2
	Awareness regarding consumer	protection laws (score values)
Fully	2	0
Partially	1	1
Nil	0	2

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 36 to 50 years, both in case of the male 70 (percent) and female 56 (percent). 54 percent males and 72 percent females were graduates. Seventeen percent male respondents were professional with post graduation, whereas, none amongst female respondents were so qualified. Only 14 percent male and 8 percent female had their own business. (Table 2).

Consumer legislation and organizations are

Table 2: Personal characteristics of the respondents

S. No.	Male	Female	Total
1. Age (Years)			
Below 35	5(10)	20(40)	25(25)
36-50	35(70)	28(56)	63(63)
Above 50	10(20)	2(4)	12(12)
2. Education			
Illiterate	0	1(2)	1(1)
Higher secondary	6(12)	13(26)	19(19)
Graduate	27(54)	36(72)	63(63)
Post graduate	17(34)	-	17(17)
3. Occupation			
Government service	38(76)	7(14)	45(45)
Private service	5(10)	5(10)	10(10)
Business	7(14)	4(8)	11(11)
Not gainfully employed	-	34(68)	34(34)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages of total sample in each category.

necessary to reduce consumer exploitation. Parameshvar (1988) analyzed that unless consumer awareness is created the effort of the government and voluntary organization cannot achieve the desired results. Thus, the consumer education should be given the top priority.

Awareness Regarding Consumer Protection Laws

Consumer protection laws can exercise more effectively towards rights and responsibility of consumers. According to Table 3 majority of the male respondents were aware about the weight and measures Act, thus was placed in the high group. Household electric appliance order was

placed in low group as least number of respondents were aware of this act. Various other acts viz. The Drug and cosmetic Act; Prevention of food adulteration, food product order. The essential commodity Act.; Display of price order; the prevention of black marketing and maintenance of supplies were categorized in the middle group according to their scores regarding awareness of there acts.

Majority of the female respondents were also aware about the weight and measures act, thus was placed in the high group. A very few respondents knew about the Display of price order, therefore it was placed in low group. Medium level of awareness was ascribed to various acts viz. The consumer protection act; food product order; prevention of food adulteration; Electric appliance order. The prevention of black marketing and maintenance of supplies; the essential commodity act, as the female respondents were partially aware about these acts. Awareness regarding consumer protection laws in the male and female respondents showed significant difference (Table 4). The results indicated that awareness of the female respondents regarding consumer protection laws was significantly less than their counter part male respondents. Consumer awareness level of respondents was examined by a study conducted by Dhir (1995). The findings reported were similar to present findings that 72 percent of respondents were aware of consumer protection act (1986).

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to their awareness regarding consumer protection laws

S. No.	Acts	Total Scores in descending order (Males)	Group	Females	Group
1	Weight & Measure Act	70	High	42	High
2	The Consumer Protection Act	53		23	
3	The Drug &Cosmetic Act	40		21	
4	Prevention of Food Adulteration	37		14	
5	Food Product Order	33	Medium	14	Medium
6	The Essential Commodity Act	31		7	
7	Display of Price Order	23		5	
8	The Prevention of Black Marketing Maintenance of Supplies	22		4	
9	Household Electric Appliances Order	15	High	1	Low

Males Mean (x) = 36; Standard Error (S.E.) = 16.96 ; Sample Size (N) =50.

Female Mean (x) =14.55; Standard Error (S.E.) = 12.80; Sample Size (N) =50.

Table 4: Students t-test showing significant different between the awareness level of the male and female respondents regarding consumer protection laws

Variable (Awareness level)	Mean Value	t- calculated value	t- tabulated value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
Male	6.38	6.1037	1.99	98	0.05
Female	2.48	0	0	0	0

Table 5: Distribution of the respondents according to their awareness regarding organizations working at district level and at national level

S. No.	Male	Female
<i>I. Consumer Organisation at District Level</i>		
1. Consumer Forum at Mandi	24 (48)	10 (20)
2. Consumer Court at Sundernagar	8 (16)	3 (6)
3. Consumer Forum and Consumer Court	8 (16)	4 (8)
4. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM)	3 (6)	3 (6)
5. Public Supply Office	3 (6)	2 (4)
<i>II. Consumer Organisation at National Level</i>		
1. National Consumer Forum (Delhi)	25 (50)	6 (12)
2. Consumer Guidance Society Hyderabad	1 (2)	0
3. Consumer Forum, Bombay	1 (2)	0

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages of total sample in each category.

Awareness Regarding Organization Working At District and National Level

All the respondents were not aware about organization working at district and national level. Out of total sample, 48 percent males and 20 percent females were aware of both consumer courts as well as consumer forum. Only 6 percent each of male and female respondents were aware about the sub- divisional magistrate (S.D.M.) office. Very few knew about the public supply office (Table 5). Majority of respondents that is 50 percent males and 12 percent females were aware about the National Consumer Forum at Delhi. 2 percent males each were aware of consumer Guidance Society, Hyderabad and Consumer Forum Bombay. None of the female respondents were aware about Consumer Guidance Society and Forum. Findings by Heggade (1983) reported that consumer co-operatives and organizations are concentrated to a large extent in urban areas. The consumer co- operatives provide the necessary protection against the exploitation of the leading community.

CONCLUSION

The main source of information regarding consumer organization and legislation for the male was printed media and for the females friends

and neighbours. Out of all consumer protection acts, most of the male and female respondents knew about weights and measures act and were least aware about Household electric appliance order and Display of price order respectively. More percentage of male respondents knew about consumer forum and more aware about the organizations working at national level than female respondents. The main reason considered by female respondents regarding the unawareness of legislation and consumer organization was high degree of illiteracy, but it was not so for male respondents.

KEYWORDS Consumer; organization; protection laws; awareness; act

ABSTRACT The present study was conducted in Himachal Pradesh. A multistage random sampling technique with stratification at the household level was adopted to select sample area. The study revealed that 48 percent males and 20 percent females were aware of the consumer courts and consumer forums. Printed media was the main source of information for males and friends and neighbours for the females. As the awareness regarding consumer protection laws was concerned, both the male and female respondents were highly aware about weights and measures act and least aware of household electric appliance order. Only 2 percent males were aware of consumer Guidance Society, Hyderabad and Consumer Forum, Bombay. Awareness of the male and female respondents regarding consumer protection laws showed significant difference.

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