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- Sharma T., Kwatra, G. (2008) Effectiveness of Social Advertising: A Study of Selected Campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility, Edited by David Crowther & Nicholas Capaldi, Ashgate Research Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility, Chapter 15, pp 287-303.

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A STUDY ON THE CONSUMER RIGHTS AWARENESS LEVEL AMONG RURAL PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAMPAD PANCHAYATH OF MALAPPURAM DISTRICT IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Consumers play a vital role in the development of a nation. The rights of consumers must be informed to the consumers and should do all necessary precautions in order to protect their rights. For this, procedures and rules should be simplified in a way that producers and consumers get benefited out of that. The complete consumer protection is only possible through consumer awareness and education. Unfortunately cheating by way of overcharging, black marketing, misleading advertisement etc has become the common practice of greedy sellers and manufactures to make unreasonable profits and without heed to confer consumer rights and interests. Consumer rights awareness is about making the consumer aware of products or services; however, this is largely unknown to many citizens especially at rural areas irrespective of whether they are educated or uneducated. Majority people are not aware about their rights against unscrupulous practices of manufactures and traders. Moreover those who are aware of their rights escape from taking the legal recourse against wrong doer because they know that the legal recourse will consume a lot of time, energy and money and redressal of legal matter takes years. Because of such reluctant behavior of consumers, wrong doers are left unpunished in India. In the absence of consumer right awareness the consumer are compelled to rely upon the traders. The study is conducted to analyze consumer right awareness level among rural people and also to understand the constraints faced by consumers while filing case. Research methodology followed for this study is self-structured questionnaire and statistical tools. The study proved that most of consumers are aware of their rights but their awareness level is low and no knowledge about consumer rights in depth, so utilization of these right are not possible by them. Similarly it proved that no consumers are willing to file case in the consumer court due to complicated procedure in filing complaint and due to wastage of time and money.

KEYWORDS

consumer education, consumer protection act, consumer redressal, consumer rights, consumer right awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers play a vital role in the development of a nation. Mahatma Gandhi said, "A consumer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are on him. He is not an interruption to our work; he is the purpose of it. We are not doing a favour to a consumer by giving him an opportunity. He is doing us a favour by giving us opportunity to serve him". But late unfortunately cheating by way of overcharging, black marketing and misleading advertisements etc. has become the common practice of greedy sellers and manufacturers to make unreasonable profits and without heed to confer consumer rights and interests.

Consumer rights awareness (CRA) is a comprehensive term, the root of which goes to development of rural areas. An ignorant person hardly find any difference in genuine and spurious product, a consumer faces many problems ranging from variation in prices to malpractices followed by the shopkeepers. It is the interest of every consumer to be aware of such problems and be equipped with the necessary knowledge to safeguard oneself from being cheated.

Consumer rights awareness is about making the consumer aware of products or services; however, this is largely unknown to many citizens irrespective whether they are educated or uneducated. With an enormous population along with high levels of poverty, unemployment and poor literacy levels, consumer rights awareness continues to remain low. Consumer education is an important part of this process and is a basic consumer right that must be introduced at the school level.

Consumer rights awareness is now an integral part of our lives like a consumerist way of life. They have been well documented and much talked about. We have all made use of them at some point in our daily lives. 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. While we all like to know about our rights and make full use of them, consumer responsibility is an area which is still not demarcated and it is hard to spell out all the responsibilities that a consumer is supposed to shoulder. There are **six rights of consumers** which are provided in the consumer Protection Act, 1986.

- ❖ Right to safety
- ❖ Right to information
- ❖ Right to choose
- ❖ Right to be heard
- ❖ Right to seek redressal
- ❖ Right to education

Majority people in India are not aware about their rights against unscrupulous practices of manufactures or traders in relation to goods and services supplied by them. 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.

Moreover those who are aware of their rights escape from taking the legal recourse against the wrong doer because they know that the recourse will consume a lot of time, energy and money and redressal of legal matter takes years. Because of such reluctant behaviour consumers, wrong doers are left unpunished in India. Even today after decades of passing of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 majority of the people in India are not yet aware about the rights available to them. In the absence of Consumer Right Awareness the consumer are compelled to rely upon the traders.

There are several arrangements in Indian economy to protect the interest and rights of consumers. The provision of ISI, Trade Mark is meant for the industrial products and Ag-Mark for the agricultural products. For the redressal of grievances of the consumers there is provision of Consumer Forum in every district of India. At the province level there is State level consumer Forum and the National level organization of Consumers Education and Research. In this context a study regarding consumer right awareness among rural people is an essential aspect and it also reflects and level of utilization of consumer rights among rural consumers.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the level of consumer awareness about consumer rights among rural consumers.
- To find out constraints faced while utilizing consumer rights.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE DESIGN: The study was carried out as a descriptive one and convenient method of sampling is used for the selection. The sample size taken for the study is 80.

SOURCES OF DATA: Both primary and secondary data are used for the study. Primary data was obtained from consumers in Mampad Panchayath of Malappuram district by a detailed survey using a structured questionnaire. Secondary data which are used for the purpose of analysis are taken from various published sources of books, journals, newspapers, various websites and other related publications.

TOOLS USED: Tools used for the study are weighted average method, correlation and one way classification of ANOVA

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vijendra B. Khamesra’s article deals with consumer protection in India and stresses that the Indian consumer needs to be educated about his rights, as has been done in the USA Consumer Protection is possible in India, but effective enforcement by legislation and a sustained drive to educate the people are necessary.

GN Sahu in his article explains that consumerism concerns the entire society as everybody is a consumer of some kind or the other of goods or services. According to him, the problems of consumers in India are: over charge, underweight, adulteration, imitation, defective packing and bad services by fraudulent, deceptive, unethical and unscrupulous businessmen. The problems are accentuated by the illiteracy, ignorance and lack of awareness of the majority of Indian consumers about their rights. Consumers can be relieved of this menacing problem, if both the government and general public join hands with all sincerity.

HC Chaudhary in his article offers a penetrating insight into the issues involved in the consumer protection moment. He explains that the government, business and society shall find it useful in enlightening themselves of the emerging forces emanating from the buying side of business and understanding the social, political, economic and psychological aspects of Indian consumers’ movements.

Narendar Kumar and Neena Batra have conducted a survey on consumer’s rights-awareness and actions in small cities. The study indicates that consumers are well aware of their rights, but only a few consumers exercise them. This not because consumers are lethargic or inactive or important, but the real cause for not availing their rights is the unsatisfactory response of their voice.

Kiran Singh conducted a study of consumer awareness in Hissar district and it was found that consumers’ awareness about consumer protection legislation was lacking among both the rural and urban populations. The study reveals that almost all people in rural areas and nearly 90 percent of urban population had never heard any consumer protection legislation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE 1: ANALYSIS OF AWARENESS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS BY WEIGHTED AVERAGE METHOD

Consumer Rights	Highly Aware (5)	Aware (4)	Partially Aware (3)	Un Aware (2)	Highly Unaware (1)	Total	Mean	Rank
Right to safety	23	18	32	6	1	296	19.73	3 rd
Right to information	24	19	33	3	1	302	20.13	2 nd
Right to choose	38	16	25	1	0	331	22.06	1 st
Right to be heard	12	20	44	3	1	279	18.6	6 th
Right to redressal	20	18	39	2	1	294	19.6	4 th
Right to consumer education	18	20	35	4	3	286	19	5 th

Source: Survey Data

INTERPRETATION

From the above table we can understand that most of the consumers are highly aware about ‘right to choose’, and followed by ‘right to information’. The last rank goes to ‘right to be heard’.

TABLE 2: CORRELATION BETWEEN GENDER AND EXTENDED UTILIZATION OF RIGHTS

Gender	Always	Frequently	Often	Rare	Never	Total
Male (x)	3	13	9	5	15	45
Female (y)	4	5	6	7	13	35
Total	7	18	15	12	28	80

Source: Survey Data

Value of Karlpearson’s coefficient of correlation = 0.64

INTERPRETATION

There is a positive correlation between gender and extend of utilization. It means that as the gender changes the magnitude of utilization of consumer rights also differs positively.

TABLE 3: CONSTRAINTS FACED BY CONSUMERS IN ENFORCING CONSUMER RIGHTS WITH DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Constraints	SSLC	+2	Degree	PG	Others	Total
Lack of knowledge	9	2	2	1	0	14
Wastage of time and money	12	4	4	2	1	23
Complicated procedure of filing complaint	6	5	9	5	1	26
Lack of legal help	2	1	4	5	0	12
Others	1	0	1	3	0	5
Total	30	12	20	16	2	80

Source: Survey Data

H0 – There is no significant difference between constraints faced while enforcing consumer rights and educational qualification of consumers.

H1 – There is significant difference between constraints faced while enforcing consumer rights and educational qualifications of consumers.

TYPE OF DATA IN ANOVA – ONE WAY CLASSIFICATION

TABLE 4

Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Square
Between Samples	SSC = 84.8	K-1 = 4	MSC = 21.8
Within Samples	SSE = 141.2	N-K = 20	MSE = 7.06
Total	SST = 226	N-1 = 24	F = 3.0028

Table Value of F at 5% level of significance = 2.18

INTERPRETATION

Calculated value is more than table value and hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore it is concluded there is significant difference between constraints faced by consumers in enforcing consumer rights and educational qualification.

CONCLUSION

Consumer right 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. With enormous population along with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and poor literacy levels, consumer rights awareness continues to remain low. Consumer education is the only way to reduce the wrongful behaviours of the manufacturers and traders. So Government and related parties takes necessary actions to educate the consumers and the basic consumer rights must be introduced at the school level itself.

In this study, we have studied the consumer right awareness level among rural people with special reference to Mampad Panchayath. The study proved that most of the consumers are aware of their rights but their awareness level is low and no knowledge about consumer rights in depth, so utilization of these rights are not possible by them. Similarly, it proved that no consumers are willing to file case in the consumer court due to complicated procedure of filing complaint and due to wastage of time and money and it is suggested to conduct consumer education and consumer awareness programs, public campaigns, consumer adalaths, introduce special courts for consumer redressal, government should take necessary actions to minimise the procedure of filing case, speed up the redressal programs and provide various support to the consumers for their redressal.

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