An Analytical study of Consumer Awareness in respect of Their rights and Responsibilities

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Abstract
In a country like India which is blessed with demographic dividend, it becomes imperative to create active consumers so as to bring in efficiency, transparency in the market place and thereby ensure consumers’ protection against unfair trade practices. The stepping stone towards this goal is to improve consumers’ awareness about their rights and responsibilities in general. In doing so the efforts put in by government agencies, voluntary consumer organization (VCOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) etc. plays a vital role. These organizations are imparting education to consumers on various aspects of consumerism such as protection against hazardous goods and services, consumer’s interests, their well being etc. in India. The benefits of increased levels of consumer awareness include enhanced critical thinking by the consumers, improved life skills and their self confidence. The paper aims at understanding the existing state of consumer awareness about their rights and responsibilities in general.

Keywords: Consumer, awareness, rights, responsibilities, consumerism

INTRODUCTION:
Every human being on this planet, irrespective of his/her lifecycle stage is a consumer. In the contemporary market the business activity revolves around the consumers only. This approach to business got a fillip when we ushered in a global market- courtesy Liberalization, privatization and globalization. This particular development has altered the global market in such a way that it has become a market without boundaries. As a result of this the consumers are having wider options in terms of products and service to choose from at lower cost. At the same time when the numbers of seller increase the strength is diluted to act as an organized entity, which in turn makes consumers vulnerable for exploitation at the hands of manufacturers, sellers & service providers. In addition to this the misleading ads of products and services in print and electronic media, various forms of promotional contents, bait advertising etc. has increased the propensity of consumers’ exploitation.

Therefore, it has become important for the consumers to understand their rights and responsibilities as a consumer. Increased understanding of the same can play a key role in bringing in efficiency, transparency in the market place and thereby ensure consumers’ protection from deficient products.

CONSUMERS’ RIGHTS
Consumer rights enables consumers in getting social justice and a level playing ground in terms of an exchange. Following are the rights of the consumers:

1. Right to protect against unfair trade practices and harmful products
It implies that, a consumer has the right to be protect himself against the marketing of products and services, which are perilous to life and property

2. Right to be communicated
It implies that, consumer should be made aware about the quality, quantity, purity, standards and price of the products. In turn it will enable them to protect themselves from unfair trade practices.

3. Right to select
It implies that, consumer has the right to select the products and services as per his choice and wish in the market

4. Right to be heard
It implies that, the consumer has a right to be heard at appropriate forums concerning their interests when it is not given its due consideration by manufacturers, sellers etc.

5. Right to complain and get compensated
It implies that, the consumer has a right to complain about deficient products or services, seek compensation for the same and also when any of their rights are infringed upon.
6. **Right to Education**

It implies that, the consumers have a right to education in terms of knowledge related to a product or service and acquire necessary skills to make a thoughtful purchase decisions.

**CONSUMERS’ RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. **Be vigilant**

Consumers should not get swayed by deceitful product and service promotion while buying products or availing service.

2. **Check quality standards**

Consumers should check the quality standards before buying a product or service.

3. **Keeping the record of transaction**

Consumers should keep the proofs of transactions in the market such as receipt, bill, guarantee / warranty card and keep them safely.

4. **Proper usage and maintenance**

Carefully read product manual before putting it to use and maintain the same as prescribed in the manual.

5. **Act proactively in case of cheating, fraudulent transactions etc.**

Consumers should not keep silence in case of deceitful transaction and help others to act in such scenario.

**RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Contemporary market is flooded with a wide range of products and services made available by multiple vendors in the market. In a scenario like this consumers are finding it very difficult to differentiate these goods and services in terms of genuineness, quality, quantity, sustainable consumption etc. To make the matter worse consumers are bombarded with misleading advertisements, communication thereby making them vulnerable to exploitation. Therefore it is necessary for the consumers to understand their rights and responsibilities as a consumer in general. The government agencies, voluntary consumer organizations (VCOs), non – governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken number of initiatives in this context.

However the number of instances and the various kinds of customers’ exploitation has encouraged the authors to undertake a research study aimed at finding the current level of consumer awareness about their rights and responsibilities, their marketplace actions in terms of checking MRP, expiry dates of the medicines and other products having limited shelf life etc.

**Literature Review**

A research paper on Buying Practices and Consumer Awareness in Management Students (2013) sheds light on the current awareness level about consumer rights, consumer’s inertia regarding grievance redressal etc. Therefore, they need to be educated adequately so as to enable them to act proactively in the market place.

A research article titled Consumer Perceptions towards Quality marks of the Products (2013) has lamented on the variations in the levels of consumers’ awareness concerning quality marks across various educational backgrounds.

A report on the assessment of consumer awareness amongst undergraduate students (2012) has talked about the existing level of awareness about their rights and responsibilities. It is limited to certain sections of the society, though the government agencies have taken concerted and focused efforts in this context.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. To find out the awareness about consumers’ rights and responsibilities amongst the consumers in general
2. To assess the consumers’ awareness regarding information displayed on the product’s container and the packaging.
3. To find out the reasons for the consumers’ inertia in exercising their rights as a consumer.

**Scope and limitations**

The study is aimed at understanding the existing level of consumer awareness about their rights and responsibilities in general, their marketplace behaviour in terms of checking of MRP, expiry dates of medicines and other perishable products. The study is limited to Pune City Area and regular consumer education programmes are not so frequent in number. These are the limitations of the study.

**Data analysis:**

**Awareness about consumer rights and responsibilities**

Respondents were asked about the knowledge of their rights as consumers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Responses observed (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data
From the above table it is found that, 43 % male respondents and 35 % female respondents are having the knowledge of their rights as a consumer. Therefore, it can be inferred that male respondents are more aware about their rights than the female respondents.

Respondents were asked about the knowledge of their responsibilities as consumers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Responses observed (in %)</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Unaware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data

From the above table it is evident that, 44 % male respondents and 32 % female respondents know their responsibilities as consumers.

Therefore it is concluded that, male respondents are more aware about their responsibilities than the female respondents.

**Maximum retail price (MRP) of a product and the information displayed on packaging:**

The people were asked whether they check M.R.P. (maximum retail price) and information displayed on the container of a product before buying the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Responses observed (in %)</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Unaware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is found that, 42 % male respondents & 40 % female respondents are in the habit of checking the MRP (maximum retail price) and information displayed on the packaging of the product before they buy it.

Therefore, it is concluded that male respondents are slightly ahead of female respondents in checking the MRP & information on the container of the product.

**Consumers’ inertia in exercising their rights as consumers:**

In this study respondents were asked whether they have exercised their rights as a consumer and also about the reasons for not doing the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Responses observed (in %)</th>
<th>Exercised their rights as consumers</th>
<th>Did not exercise their rights as consumers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is evident that, 83 % respondents did not exercise their rights as consumer as against 17 % who have exercised the same.

The reasons for the consumers’ inertia in exercising their rights were told by the respondents are complex judicial process, paucity of time and money, possible victimization at the hands of a manufacturer or service provider etc.

Based on this information it is concluded that, in spite of the concerted efforts of the government and other agencies most of the people are not acting proactively in safeguarding their interests as consumers.

**Conclusion:**

In the contemporary market, consumer act as the deciding factor in terms of economic activities, bringing in efficiency, transparency and answerability in the market place. Considering the dynamics and complexities of global economy, it is imperative to have consumers knows their rights as well as responsibilities. Such awareness amongst them will help in protecting themselves from exploitation at the hands of manufacturers or sellers.

In order to ensure the increase in the awareness in these two areas consumer education methods and the contents therein should also be overhauled at regular intervals. The same is to be done to be relevant in the changing dynamics of the market.

Another facet of this study has lamented on the reluctance of consumers in seeking grievance redressal in case of their rights are infringed upon. The government should come up with certain initiatives that would encourage the consumers to act pro actively to seek grievance redressal in case of unfair trade practices. The government and other related agencies should take necessary steps aimed at improving the level of awareness amongst women about their rights and responsibilities as consumers.
References


